



Respect - Free!

The month of May, in the U.S., marks the annual observance of Memorial Day, a day that serves to remember and honor the brave men and women of the military who have died in service to their country. This annual tradition also serves as a catalyst for recognizing the fact that freedom always comes at a price. It should be no surprise then that the concept of “free” crossed my mind for this month’s edition of EKTIMIS.

I am yet to encounter or observe a situation in life that will not draw attention if you put up a sign that read “Free...” and is associated with receiving something. We all love to receive things that are free. If you know someone who doesn’t, have them read this article and get back to me. Place a tray of free sandwiches or cookies in a common area (in a work environment) and watch the food quickly disappear; or place a jar of “free” coins next to a candy bar vending machine and watch how swiftly many people will decide that they could use a candy break after all; or make an offer of \$25 (in cash) in return for participating in a brief survey and observe how the busiest people will suddenly have just enough time to participate! But does “free” truly imply free?

Of all things in nature nothing is truly free to us except one thing—the air that we breathe. And this is true. When a child is born, the first thing that baby takes freely and instinctively is the one thing that is truly free—air! From that moment on that child is dependent on others for practically everything else. And when one is about to die, the last thing that a person takes, freely or otherwise, is also the same thing that he or she first took at birth—air! Everything else in life comes at a price—the question is: who pays or paid for it?

When you receive something that is free, it is perceived as “free” because you did not pay for it; however, the truth is someone else already paid for it. You just happened to be a beneficiary. If you limit the context to yourself, it becomes clear why you perceive what you have received as free. If you expand the context, however, and follow the path (away from yourself) of that which you have received, then you are likely to discover the third-party of individuals who are responsible for your gift. This is indeed the case in virtually everything in life. But what has this got to do with respect? Great question! The answer is the precise reason why I took the time to explore this topic and decided to write about it.

Have you experienced a situation where someone demanded that he or she be respected? Or have you faced a situation where you expected some degree of respect from someone but did not receive it? In many of these situations respect was perceived to be warranted. In fact many studies have shown that most people not just desire respect (from others around them) but often expect it. I explored this concept quite a bit as I wrote *The Top Ten Laws of Respect*—a new book series that is due out later this year.

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The following story illustrates the essence of this article. David, a young man in his early thirties, eagerly raced through the pack of mail that he had received for the day. He had rushed home after a job interview he attended earlier that afternoon hoping that a letter he was expecting had arrived. As he sorted through the mail he quickly located the envelope, opened it, only to read the bad news. His preferred prospective employer had declined to grant him a follow-up interview. He was shocked! He had been certain all along that he had made a great impression during his first interview for a prized senior financial analyst position with the Fortune 100 Company. His ego slowly deflated as he realized his remaining options for prospective employment.

David did not expect to be unemployed this long—three months—after his previous employer laid off his whole division in an effort to reduce cost. He had somehow kept the news of his unemployment from his parents who often worried about him. At this point in time he felt he had to reach out to them, and so he made the call.

About two weeks later David received a call from the Fortune 100 Company offering him a second interview, but for a different position. He was scheduled to interview with the director of another business group for a role that paid about the same as the one he had pursued unsuccessfully, but of a lesser profile. He was not sure if he was qualified for it, but he jumped at the opportunity nonetheless. Upon arriving for the second interview, David was amazed at the way he was welcomed and treated with marked deference. He completed the interview process and was subsequently offered the position.

The day he received the official offer letter David called his mother to share the good news. His father soon joined the telephone call as his mother began her words of advice. “Remember, David, the reason you got this job is because of your aunt—my brother’s wife. Your aunt’s younger sister is an executive vice president at the company and she’s been there now for over fifteen years. She is a very well respected leader. Be sure to go see her soon after you begin. And David, please do not disappoint us; DO NOT disappoint her—she expects the best of you. Be sure to preserve her reputation.”

Later that evening as David prepared to turn in for the night he could not help but realize that he would have to earn the respect of a lot of people over the coming months and years, and that his good fortune had more to do with the effort, time, energy and commitment of someone else—that he barely knew.

Cheers and thank you – N. Taiwo