

# The Gift Has A String

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With every privilege we are granted, there is a responsibility attached to it that we need to acknowledge and assume. Some are harder to see than others, but this does not diminish their importance. This idea has been debated by philosophers, statesmen, behavioral scientists and educators for centuries with a relatively clear consensus that both these things exist and are intricately related, but to what degree this impacts us as individuals is still not resolved in a broad sense.

There exist responsibilities that are personal, social, humanistic, national, moral, ethical, and monetary for every privilege we are granted or have earned. The acknowledgment of this idea is often ignored or dismissed and rarely receives the consideration it deserves once we understand the impact of not accepting appropriate responsibility. One area that can demonstrate this is a basic human behavior. In the behavioral activity of seeking and giving advice we can realize the privilege and inherent responsibility of a common behavior we don't always take seriously.

There are three concepts here worth spending a moment to define: privilege, responsibility and advice. I will address the participants in this behavior, the seeker and the provider and how they find each other. Then I will assume the role of seeker and apply the privileges and responsibilities directly to ourselves and the provider in the exchange of advice.

*Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary* defines privilege as: "a right or immunity granted as a peculiar benefit, advantage or favor: prerogative; esp: such a right or immunity attached specif[ically] to a position or an office."

We could look at privilege as the cake, and responsibility is that with which we can, in good conscience, savor. It would follow that the first responsibility of privilege is to acknowledge the points of accountability and assume the responsibility. When being granted a privilege, there is a responsibility to exercise it wisely. Responsibility is defined as the quality or state of being responsible a: moral, legal or mental accountability b: reliability and trustworthiness c: something for which one is responsible: burden.

With respect to responsibility in the giving or seeking of advice, there is a moral and a mental level in it, trustworthiness as a factor with accountability.

With a special right and the accountability to manage it well, let's take a look at how this applies to the definition of advice (a): recommendation regarding a decision or course of conduct: counsel <he shall have power, by and with the ~ and consent of the Senate, to make treaties — U.S. Constitution> (b): information or notice given — usually used in pl. (c): an official notice concerning a business transaction (synonyms) advice, counsel denote recommendation as to a decision or a course of conduct. Advice implies real or pretended knowledge or experience, often professional or technical, on the part of the one who advises; counsel often stresses the fruit of wisdom or deliberation and may presuppose a weightier occasion, or more authority, or more personal concern on the part of the one giving counsel.

The synonym definition of the word "counsel" is interesting "...more personal concern on the part of the one giving counsel" takes me to the participants in this activity, the seeker of advice and the provider of it. Who are they, and why are they connected to each other?

We seek advice when there is a decision to make that we do not feel capable of making alone. We look to someone who may have had prior experience in the situation and whose judgment we trust, who we feel has knowledge we do not. This can be friends, family, doctors, teachers, clergy, counselors or from books. Since books dispense advice without personal interaction, their function and accountability is limited and they won't be discussed here. Most clergy and counselors have taken oaths or vows that clearly define the responsibility within their roles to them. Doctors, though no longer required to, generally take the Hippocratic Oath, which states: "I will not divulge, as reckoning that all such should be kept secret," a phrase that defines the confidentiality of the doctor-patient relationship. Friends and family are without a predefined code of ethics or morality when it comes to seeking and dispensing advice. This is the group most in need of clarification of the privileges and responsibilities each have in the exchange.

Advice is sought from those we trust. We trust their judgment, honesty, wisdom, and ability to provide counsel regarding our life and decisions in a rational, objective way. To these individuals we grant the privilege of our trust and respect. We seek the support of those who will not use the opportunity for manipulation, to cause us harm or pain, or to further their own agenda or seek personal gain.

It is a privilege to have someone in our lives with whom we can share our difficulties, shortcomings and fears, the privilege of knowing someone who can lead us to be better, wiser and more confident than we were through their honest guidance, even if it may not all be pleasant. Descartes said, "It is just as valuable to be censured by friends as it is splendid to be praised by enemies. We desire praise from those who do not know us, but from friends we want the truth."

Since the provider of advice is determined to be trustworthy, the next step is to grant the privilege of seeing into our life, exposing ourselves in order to provide the information needed to get good advice. They, in turn, give away something of themselves in the advice they provide. This sharing of ourselves is our mutual gift. "It is when you give of yourself that you truly give," Kahlil Gibran. It is the responsibility of the seeker of counsel to provide an honest accounting of the facts, without subterfuge or distortion. This gives the provider the opportunity to give truly valuable information about how to handle the situation as gracefully as possible. Without this honesty, their advice may not be truly applicable and, therefore, a gross waste of time.

Time is the thing we all need more of and can't afford to waste. We revel in the moments when its very existence slips from our mind. Since we can't afford to waste our own, it is good human practice not to waste that of others. If we need someone to confirm or deny our own opinion, that is not advice, just confirmation. We request the privilege of having someone leave the thoughts and activities that occupy her own life and concentrate on ours.

Going over the same situation repeatedly, without acting on the advice given, and yet requesting more time again and again is frustrating to the provider and a gross waste of time. The same applies to the consistent and progressive refutation of advice given, only to come back and ask for more time and advice to handle the result of not acting on the original suggestion. We ask they be responsible for dedicating the time necessary to provide valuable advice or let us know in the beginning of discussions that this is not possible. This would allow us to cast about elsewhere for support rather than not receiving the time we need.

Please appreciate the fact there is someone to ask for advice or someone who asks advice from you. It is a high compliment to give one another, and it deserves our full appreciation.