

# Giving opportunities, not just taking them

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## **Provide an Opportunity**

I wish that whenever I needed something, it would drop out of the sky and plop onto my lap. (*Is that too much to ask?*)

In thinking about the reality of this, I am struck by two ideas:

1. Set goals, work hard and achieve – my dad made sure to cover this as I painted barns with him to pay for college, and it is how I have grown as a non-profit professional and writer;
2. No matter how hard I try, some things remain out of reach.

In the case of this second idea, I need something beyond the skills, resources or education I have; I need an opportunity.

## **Abbreviated History of Opportunity**

All right, so I can't tell you exactly how opportunity came to exist. But while I scanned my memory for an example to use, it occurred to me that our communities are built upon opportunities. Someone needs something they don't have; someone else has it and provides it.

How does this apply to opportunity? Opportunity means, “a good position, chance, or prospect, as for advancement or success.” In short, opportunity helps us move forward when we need to move forward. This is done by one person presenting an opportunity to another.

## **The Switch**

Because of opportunities presented to me, I have traveled the world, published two books, established an outstanding network of friends and colleagues, and found a job at Community! Youth Concepts (CYC) – a Des Moines-based non-profit organization.

At CYC, I coordinate youth programs that engage youth in volunteer service. Each time I am with a group of youth, developing projects that will get them giving back to the community, I am reminded of how I used to look at adults in the community.

Except now I’m the adult.

And I realize: As we grow older, we become responsible for not only taking opportunities *but also* for presenting opportunities. I call this point The Switch.

## **It Builds Character (2.0)**

Character development looks different as we grow older and progress professionally. It is no longer just about doing things for ourselves to learn – raking the lawn or staying in the game when we’re losing. It is also about providing our skills, resources and knowledge for others in need.

Much like my mother used to instruct – *Leave the place cleaner than you found it* – I have found a similar purpose in my professional life: *Provide more opportunities than I am given*. So I have made this my goal. I don’t want to aim for a balance in giving and taking. I want to give more.

And no, the opportunity to provide for those in need will not

simply fall out of the sky. Though when I see someone reaching out for an opportunity, I can make sure I respond and provide what I can.