The Emotional Bank Account

*Elective 1*

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| **Author(s):** | Noam Katz |
| **summary:** | As staff members, one of our primary (albeit unwritten) goals is to cultivate an atmosphere of empathy and invest in person-to-person relationships while at camp. In this elective, we will explore Jewish and universal perspectives on promoting an ethic of kindness and fostering positive relationships with all those whom we encounter.  *– Submitted by Noam Katz* |
| **Topic(s):** | Community Building, Teen Programming |
| **Learning Objective:** | Participants will learn and adopt new strategies for fostering positive relationships with their co-counselors, supervisors, and campers. |
| **Audience:** | No specific parameters. |
| **TIMING:** | 90 minutes |
| **AppendiCes:** | Appendix #1 – Megillat Esther  Appendix #2 – text resource sheet  Appendix #3 |
| **Materials Needed:** | 8 Buckets = 2 buckets x 4 teams 4 Sponges Water 4 Styrofoam cups  1 safety pin  Digital or one hard copy of Have You Filled A Bucket Today?  Flipchart & markers (3 colors)  40 withdrawal/deposit slips of paper  Pens/pencils - 1 per participant  2 Footballs or Frisbees  Projector & screen, cable for VGA or HDMI  Computer speakers  Large Bag of gummy bears (or some other shareable peanut-free treat)  Copies of Appendix #2 (text resource sheet) – 1 per participant |

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| **Set-UP DETAILS:** | Indoor AND outdoor (or gym) location required  Indoor – for projector viewing, flipchart; Outdoor/Gym – for water relay & football |

**Session Timeline & Outline:**

1. Sponge and Water Bucket relay – 10 minutes
2. Have You Filled a Bucket Today? – 10 minutes
3. The Emotional Bank Account – 15 minutes
4. Ultimate EBA Frisbee Game & Debrief – 35 minutes
5. Two Methods: Rube Goldberg & Adam Grant – 15 minutes
6. Anonymous Gratitude – 5 minutes

**Sponge and Water Bucket Relay (10 minutes)**

Divide participants into 4 teams.  
Have 1 bucket filled with water for each group and a smaller bucket that is empty.  
Place these two buckets around 15 feet apart from each other.  
Have 1 sponge per group.

**Step by Step:**

1. The goal for each group and each participant is to soak their sponge in the bucket filled with water and then run to the empty bucket across from it, and squeeze out as much water as they can from their sponge.
2. The first team to fill their “empty” bucket (or fill it to a certain line) wins.
3. Have participants walk/run backwards, crawl on elbows and knees, throw the sponge to get from one bucket to the other.
4. Repeat the relay, but replace sponges with cups, and poke a pinhole into the bottom of each cup which must be carried over participants’ heads.

**Have You Filled a Bucket Today? (10 minutes)**

Read and discuss. Relate to following quote in Appendix #2:

*“Emor m’at v’aseh harbeh, v’hevei makbil et kol ha-adam b’sever panim yafot…”*

Say little and do much, and greet everyone you encounter with a cheerful face. (Pirke Avot 1:15)

**The Emotional Bank Account - Summary (15 minutes)**

* The Emotional Bank Account is like a checking account. But, instead of having one primary checking account into which you make most of your deposits and withdrawals, you have accounts for each person with whom you have a relationship, no matter how cursory that relationship may be.
* Just walking across camp and smiling (or not smiling) at that camper who is not in your bunk is making a deposit (or withdrawal) into that newly opened account. You can never close these accounts; even if you lose touch with someone for 10 years, the next time you see them, the account still contains whatever deposits or withdrawals you have made.
* Here’s the tricky part. Usually, we can easily balance our checkbooks. We just need to make sure that our deposits and withdrawals even out. But in a relationship bank account, we need to make *many* deposits to allow for any withdrawals we make. Furthermore, our deposits tend to evaporate, while our withdrawals tend to become like concrete blocks that are hard to get rid of.
* Deposits into this bank account include things like genuine compliments, forgiveness, an unexpected phone call, or simply saying “Hi!” Below is a list of common deposits and withdrawals.

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| **Deposits** | **Withdrawals** |
| Keep Promises | Break Promises |
| *Gmilut chasadim* (acts of loving kindness) | Keeping only to yourself |
| Being loyal | *Lashon Hara* (gossip) |
| Listening intently and with empathy | Not listening / zoning out |
| Apologizing (without being prompted) | Arrogance |
| Giving constructive criticism | Harsh criticism with no/little support |

**Ultimate EBA Frisbee Game & Debrief (35 minutes)**

**Game Directions:**

Split participants into two teams.

Have each team fill out 6 deposit slips and 3 withdrawal slips, specific to camp. They should be labeled “D” or “W”, and each assessed a value.

* Deposit slips: +10, +20, +30, +40, +50, +60
* Withdrawal slips: -20, -40, -60

Flip a coin. Starting team begins on their own “20-yard line”. Each team picks up a slip from the other team’s deck, reads it aloud, and advances or retracts that amount of yardage. First play can NOT be a Withdrawal. Play with a Frisbee or football, with taped hash marks on the floor.

After each slip is read aloud, facilitator writes it in large print on a “Deposits and Withdrawals” chart (see below).

Winning team gets an edible prize (enough to share w/both teams, if *they* think to do it.)

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| **Deposits** | **Withdrawals** |
| Listening to a camper’s feelings about friends /activities at camp | Ditching a camper to hang out with other staff |
| Taking the time to plan a memorable bunk activity or unit program | Exerting little effort and ‘recycling’ a half-hearted idea for bunk or unit program |
| Sitting an extra *shmirah* for your co-counselor | Complaining about your co-counselor’s effort or way of handling the campers |
| Spending time with each and every camper / not playing favorites | Avoiding/ignoring campers with whom you do not feel that instant connection |
| Asking your supervisor for feedback (initiating the conversation) | Getting defensive, angry or belligerent when your supervisor gives you difficult feedback |

**Debrief:**

* Which of these Deposits have you most often made while at camp?
* Which of these Withdrawals have you made, or are likely to make this summer?
* Don’t just consider the action, but the individuals themselves. Can you identify one relationship into which you have been making many deposits, and another from which you have made numerous withdrawals (camp or outside)?
* Brainstorm some ways you can motivate yourself to put more deposits into the account that is lacking.
* What were some Deposits or Withdrawals you could have made during this very program?
* (Did they share the edible prize? Respecting/interrupting someone else’s turn; validating/criticizing someone’s idea)

**Two Ways to Activate: Rube Goldberg & Adam Grant (15 minutes)**

How do we activate a culture of kindness? Screen and offer two different approaches to building kindness at camp:

***Method #1:* Rube Goldberg Machine:**

* Pay it forward/Domino effect
* Video clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJeWFoKZ63U>
* Jewish text – “*Mitzvah goreret mitzvah” –* One mitzvah leads to another mitzvah (Pirkei Avot 4:2)
* Bunk bonding: create a living “Rube Goldberg”-style video or slideshow

***Method #2:* “Give and Take” by Adam Grant:**

* Givers, Takers & Matchers
* 5-minute favor
* Video clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyXRYgjQXX0>
* Jewish text – “*Loveh rasha, v’lo y’shalem. V’tzadik chonen v’noten” –* The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous one gives graciously. (Psalm 37:21)
* Bunk bonding – tzedek box (e.g., shoebox) with Give and Take slots. Counselors and campers can nominate others for “give” and self-nominate for “take” donations.

**Anonymous Gratitude (5 minutes)**

The group stands in a circle, shoulder to shoulder. Participants may offer “anonymous gratitude” by starting sentences: “Thank you for…”

They are not to address a specific individual(s) by name. Rather, they address every appreciation to “you,” so that it’s unclear to whom or to how many it is directed.

**Appendix 1: MEGILLAT ESTHER[[1]](#footnote-1)**

The story of Esther can be related to the Relationship Bank Account. Queen Esther understood this system of “relational give-and-take.” She knew that in order to make the biggest withdrawal of her life, she would need to make some pretty hefty deposits ahead of time.

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| **Deposits** | **Withdrawals** |
| When she first went to see the king, all she asks for is what the king’s eunuch advised; she could have taken anything that she wanted! She impresses King Ahashuerus so much that he makes her queen the first time he sees her. | Asking the king to save the Jews and reverse his royal decree. |
| Esther does not reveal her heritage upon becoming queen, respecting the wishes of Mordechai. |  |
| When Mordechai reports to Esther that two traitors are plotting to kill the king, she passes this information on to the king in Mordechai’s name. |  |
| Esther risks her life to invite the king and Haman to a feast. |  |
| When asked at the feast what she wishes, she simply invites them to yet another feast and promises to then do the king’s bidding. |  |

* **Ask the participants to brainstorm a list of deposits and withdrawals they think Esther made.**
* **Why was it important for Esther to make deposits before the big withdrawal?** *(It let the King know that she wasn’t only looking out for her own wealth and status; she gained his trust and proved her royalty; she gained the respect of those around her.)*
* **How might the story have been different without her deposits?**

*(Perhaps Haman would have gotten his wish and the Jews would have been slaughtered; perhaps the king wouldn’t have allowed her to invite them to a banquet; perhaps the king wouldn’t have listened to her.)*

* **What does this story teach us about the importance of the relationship bank account?** *(Deposits make our withdrawals more manageable – Esther was able to make the withdrawal without the King being concerned about an “overdraft.”)*

1. This Jewish textual example of the Emotional Bank Account is based on the curriculum guide, “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Camp Counselors” by Rabbi Erin Mason, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)