



Making Deposits

IN OUR RELATIONSHIP BANK ACCOUNTS

By K. Meagan Ledendecker

An accidental bump as someone walks by. A look from across the room. A forgotten request.

No big deal, right?

That is, unless we are feeling particularly annoyed or frustrated by something that happened previously. Then we mutter about how we can't believe so-and-so did that again, or how could they look at us like that, or how dare they, and on and on. Our response tells a lot about how we are feeling about the other person involved.

Often when I find myself facilitating a conversation between two young people, especially one in which there seems to be a long progression of misunderstandings and misinterpretations, I bring up the idea of a relationship bank account.

Sean Covey introduces the relationship bank account (RBA) in his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens*. The essence of RBA is that we have different connections with the people in our lives. And between each of us we have an unseen measure of how we are connecting. We can visualize that measure as a bank account. Just like with a bank account, we can make deposits or withdrawals.

When I greet a coworker in the morning with a smile and a compliment, I'm making a deposit. Over time, with lots of deposits, a large cushion of goodwill is created in our relationship bank account. When a large cushion is there, my coworker is likely to be understanding when one morning I have a scowl on my face and barely mumble, "morning." She might wonder if I'm okay and want to do something to help me feel better.

But let's imagine, that instead of making regular deposits into our relationship bank account, I've either not taken the time for a kind greeting, or perhaps have been complaining about something

she's done. These little acts end up draining our relationship bank account, like little withdrawals, until there is little to no cushion of goodwill between us. If that's the case, when I scowl and mumble, "morning," she reacts with anger and frustration, fed up with my attitude and ready to retaliate.

In simple terms, our relationship bank account is like a cup that gets filled or emptied.

I sometimes draw a cup when working with young people and we graphically fill up the cup as we imagine different acts of goodwill or empty it with little thoughtless or unkind acts. We brainstorm different kinds of deposits we can make, different ways to fill the cup between us.

When we think about the little acts of kindness between us as being a way to build up our relationship bank account, sometimes we are more able to shift gears in how we relate.

Ultimately, we can become more mindful of the actions between us. We can be careful not to bump into each other. We can look across the room with warmth. We can acknowledge a mistake and work to make amends.

When we make deposits, we connect and cultivate goodwill. This season, let's mindfully make more deposits.

~ K. Meagan Ledendecker regularly takes stock of her relationship bank accounts both with her three children and with her husband, as well as with the many children and families involved with The Montessori School of the Berkshires. www.berkshirerontessori.org

