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To Dip or Not To Dip?
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Think about the last interaction you had with a person. That may have been a few minutes ago, or a few hours ago. It may have been with a spouse, friend, child, co-worker or customer. It may have been at work, shopping, dealing with a government agency, or at home. Consider for a moment how the interaction made you feel. Were you happy, frustrated, angry, offended? Did that person “dip from your bucket,” meaning that they left you feeling negative, or “fill your bucket,” making you feel positive? How do you think the other person felt about you?

The concept of “filling your bucket” is explored by Tom Rath and Donald O. Clifton, Ph.D., in their book “How Full is Your Bucket?” They claim that each of us has an invisible bucket which is constantly emptied or filled by others when we interact with them. When the bucket is full we feel good, when it is empty we feel bad. When we fill others’ buckets, we also fill our own because it makes us feel good to make others feel good. But beware: we also have an individual dipper that we can use to empty others’ buckets.

I have a good friend that is one of those people that everyone wants to be with, and to be like. From the very first time I met her, she exuded love and appreciation for me. She is like this with everyone and she makes everyone feel good. Because of that, people are drawn to her. She always looks for the positive, and then she tells people about the positive things she has observed. She’ll give honest feedback too, but she always gives it in a positive way. People respect and admire her, and she fills others’ buckets while filling hers at the same time. It is a way of life for her; she doesn’t think twice about it. When I am with her I feel energized and uplifted.

I also have friends who do the opposite; they sap my energy and make me feel bad about myself. These are the people that whine about everything and are aggressive, or worse, passive aggressive. They pick fault with others most of the time. They constantly dip from my bucket. I’d rather not spend time with them, if I can avoid it.

Are there people at work and in your life who could benefit from some bucket-filling? Some of the things you can do to fill your bucket are very simple, according to Rath and Clifton.

- **Prevent bucket-dipping.** Relationship experts say that successful relationships have a ratio of five positive interactions to one negative. Go below this ratio and problems ensue. Try to minimize negative interactions and bucket-dipping.

- **Shine a light on what is right.** Instead of focusing on things that people do wrong, focus on what they do right.

- **Make best friends.** Research shows that people who are friends at work, or at least who trust and respect each other, are safer and more productive.

- **Give unexpectedly.** Be spontaneous in your bucket filling. Don’t formalize or make it routine. Do it as you see things happening.

- **Reverse the golden rule.** Most of us know the golden rule: treat others as you would like to be treated. The reversal is to treat others as they would like to be treated.

We each have a simple choice: to fill others’ buckets or to empty them. Which option you choose will have a profound influence on your life and relationships.