

How to Be a Mensch (by Guy Kawasaki)

I have a theory (as opposed to a dream) that Heaven is a three-class Boeing 777. You can sit in a narrow seat that doesn't recline and eat chicken-like substances next to a screaming baby in coach class. Or, you can sit in a slightly wider seat that reclines slightly more and eat a beef-like substance in business class.

But The Goal is to spend eternity in first class—specifically Singapore Airlines first class. Here your seat reclines to a completely flat position, and there's a power outlet, personal video player, wireless access to the Internet, and noise-cancelling headphones. There are also chefs, not microwave ovens.

You cannot buy your way into first class; nor can you use frequent flyer miles. The only way to earn an upgrade is to be a mensch. Leo Rosten, the Yiddish maven and author of [The Joys of Yiddish](#), defines mensch this way:

Someone to admire and emulate, someone of noble character. The key to being “a real mensch” is nothing less than character, rectitude, dignity, a sense of what is right, responsible, decorous.

Here is my humble attempt to help you achieve menschdom.

1. **Help people who cannot help you.** A mensch helps people who cannot ever return the favor. He doesn't care if the recipient is rich, famous, or powerful. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't help rich, famous, or powerful people (indeed, they may need the most help), but you shouldn't help only rich, famous, and powerful people.
2. **Help without the expectation of return.** A mensch helps people without the expectation of return—at least in this life. What's the payoff? Not that there has to be a payoff, but the payoff is the pure satisfaction of helping others. Nothing more, nothing less.
3. **Help many people.** Menschdom is a numbers game: you should help many people, so you don't hide your generosity under a bushel. (Of course, not even a mensch can help everyone. To try to do so would mean failing to help anyone.)
4. **Do the right thing the right way.** A mensch always does the right thing the right way. She would never cop an attitude like, “We're not as bad as Enron.” There is a bright, clear line between right and wrong, and a mensch never crosses that line.
5. **Pay back society.** A mensch realizes that he's blessed. For example, entrepreneurs are blessed with vision and passion plus the ability to recruit, raise money, and change the world. These blessings come with the obligation to pay back society. The baseline is that we owe something to society—we're not a doing a *favor* by paying back society.