

## Lesson plan 57: Free!

'The best things in life are free.' 'It's better to give than to receive.' How many times have you heard old sayings like these? But do they really mean anything in our modern, globalised world? This week, we focus on three social networks which bring together old-fashioned values and modern technology to bring 'giving' into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Would you be willing to let a complete stranger stay in your house for a few days, while they find their feet in a new town? That's what millions of people all over the world are doing through online sites like this. Each member completes a profile describing themselves and giving the lowdown on any accommodation they have to offer. For cash-strapped travellers, the attraction is obvious. Why pay through the nose for impersonal hotel accommodation when you can stay with friendly locals free of charge? But what's in it for the hosts? Well, in a nutshell, interesting company and personal satisfaction. And there's no danger of travellers turning up on your doorstep completely out of the blue. Before giving any personal details, you can check out the profiles of any potential guests, including the references left by others.

OK, so you'd like to help, but draw the line at hosting strangers. How about sharing your time or expertise? After all, each one of us has unique knowledge and skills. It could be something as simple as knowing your stuff when it comes to digital cameras. Don't take this for granted – there could be someone in your town right now who'd give their right arm for your skills. But would you give your knowledge and time, free of charge, to a complete stranger? Without knowing if there's anyone who will do anything for you? That's the sixty-four thousand dollar question! For those who answer 'Yes', this site matches them up with people desperate for their services, with a minimum of red tape. All you'll get in return is the chance to feel good – a feeling, perhaps, that money can't buy.

And money can't buy anything at all on our final site; that's because every single item is offered completely free of charge. But why give stuff away when you could sell it? The fact is that not everything has much monetary value or people simply don't have the time to wait for someone to come along who's prepared to part with their hard-earned cash. This could mean that their unwanted goods are thrown away, adding to the huge amount of waste piling up every day in our cities, when they could actually be of practical use for somebody else. If that happens, it really is a classic win-win – good for the people concerned and good for the environment.

### 1 Which paragraph of the text (2–4) describes the organisations below?

- 1 The Freecycle Network \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 The Freeeconomics Community \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 CouchSurfing \_\_\_\_\_

### 2 Decide if the sentences are true (T) or false (F). Circle the correct statements and correct those that are false.

- 1 CouchSurfing profiles include information about people and homes. T / F
- 2 CouchSurfers have to help with housework in return for free accommodation. T / F
- 3 The Freeeconomics Network helps people exchange stuff they don't need. T / F
- 4 Freeeconomics matches up people who need each other's services. T / F
- 5 Freecycle only includes goods with no monetary value T / F
- 6 Freecycle has both environmental and social goals. T / F

**3** The article contains a number of common idioms. Find the idioms that match the following meanings. They are in the same order as they appear in the article.

- 1 get used to a new environment \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 provide key information \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 pay a very high price \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 what is the benefit for (somebody)? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 to summarise, in a few words \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 at your house \_\_\_\_\_
- 7 completely unexpectedly \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 decide on a personal limit \_\_\_\_\_
- 9 be an expert (in something) \_\_\_\_\_
- 10 expect (something) to be the case without questioning it \_\_\_\_\_
- 11 be willing to pay a high price \_\_\_\_\_
- 12 the most important, but difficult, question \_\_\_\_\_
- 13 rules and regulations that make life difficult \_\_\_\_\_
- 14 spend your own money \_\_\_\_\_
- 15 a situation that is positive from all points of view \_\_\_\_\_

**4** Complete these questions, using some of the idioms from exercise 3.

- 1 Have any long-lost friends or relatives turned up \_\_\_\_\_ ?
- 2 In \_\_\_\_\_ , what's the point of learning English?
- 3 Have you ever paid \_\_\_\_\_ for clothes or electrical goods?
- 4 Can you give me \_\_\_\_\_ on your school or workplace?
- 5 Did anyone help you to find \_\_\_\_\_ when you started your job or studies?
- 6 What people in your life do you most take \_\_\_\_\_ ?
- 7 Where do you draw \_\_\_\_\_ when it comes to helping others?
- 8 Have you ever received an offer of work, travel or study completely \_\_\_\_\_ ?
- 9 Who, in this class, really knows \_\_\_\_\_ when it comes to English grammar?
- 10 Are there any products or skills that you'd give \_\_\_\_\_ ?

**5** Ask your partner(s) the questions in exercise 4, adding follow-up questions where you can.

**6** Discuss these questions with your partner(s).

- What do you see as the strong or weak points of the three 'free' networks?
- Which of these would you be most and least likely to use – and why?
- What other forms of free giving are there in your community?

## Glossary

**cash-strapped** (*adjective*) - short of money

**host** (*noun*) - somebody who welcomes a guest to their home, office etc

**monetary value** (*adjective + noun*) - a value that can be expressed as an amount of money

**pile up** (*phrasal verb*) - become larger and larger because it is unused