

# Better

## *Relationships*

*How to Have Happier  
Longer Relationships*

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How to Have Happier, Longer Relationships

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# Introduction

## Introduction

Without meaning to sound too much like a fortune cookie, it's certainly true that our relationships are what give colour and purpose to life in most cases. A moment is only ever improved by being able to share it with someone else, and most of us would rate having a range of close and deep relationships as being among the *most* important factors for creating a meaningful life.

If you've ever known what it is to be truly lonely, then you'll recognize the importance of these relationships no doubt.

And if you want more proof that relationships are really where it's all at, then try thinking back to the happiest and best memories of your life. Isn't it the case that every single one of those involves other people?

It is perhaps odd then, that relationships are something we never really learn all that much about. There is no lesson we study at school that is dedicated to relationships. And when it comes to reading self-help books or engaging in self-improvement generally, all the advice seems to be aimed squarely at building muscle, confidence or success.

Wouldn't it make more sense for us to focus on developing the skills that fill life with meaning? And with happy memories that we will cherish for the rest of our lives?

Perhaps the reason that we don't like talking about improving relationships is that we don't want to admit that we could use the help. We all like to think of ourselves as these outgoing, gregarious, confident people. Surely, learning how to make better friends is just for the socially inept?

It doesn't have to be. Of course, you don't need to struggle at something in order to realize that you could be even better. In fact, it takes a certain maturity and insight to recognize this.

You might be perfectly happy right now with a bunch of friends that you love and who you have shared many happy memories with.

Maybe you've got a romantic partner who you are very close to and maybe you get on well with all your co-workers.

But that doesn't mean things couldn't be better!

That doesn't mean that you couldn't have a wider selection of friends. It doesn't mean that you are necessarily perfectly happy with *all* those friendships. Maybe you get teased more than you'd like. Or maybe you feel as though your connections could be deeper. Maybe you don't have as much sex as you'd like. Maybe your work colleagues trample on you.

Whatever the case, relationships are incredibly complex and dynamic and the better you become at navigating them, the happier you will become and the more you will be able to achieve.

With all that in mind then, read on and in this book you'll learn to master your relationships with others. You'll discover how to build longer, lasting friendships, how to have a more romantic and more sexy love life and how to generally have better relationships across the board. You'll see that there is an art and a science to this and you will learn to master it!

# Chapter 1

## It Starts With You



### Chapter 1: It Starts with You



When talking about relationships, the tendency is to think first of other people. Your relationships are defined by your interactions with others

after all.

But this is a mistaken approach. Focusing on others first will leave you effectively neutered and far less able to build those crucial relationships.

Why? Because all relationships involve two people. And while your friends, partners and colleagues will come and go, the one constant across *all* your relationships is you.

If you don't have a good grasp on yourself and if you don't first strengthen yourself, then you won't be able to enjoy the best relationships possible – you'll always end up sabotaging yourself.

If you find yourself repeating the same arguments with people, then ask whether *you* might be the problem. Something as simple as being too clingy, being insecure, or having a short temper can all result in repeated arguments or pushing people away.

On the other hand, someone who is confident, happy with who they are and interested and interesting will end up having more positive relationships more of the time.

### *Confidence and Independence*



The happiest and most stable relationships are boomerang relationships. These are relationships between two people who will often go their separate ways, who will often do things independently and will then come back to each other with much more to share and to talk about.



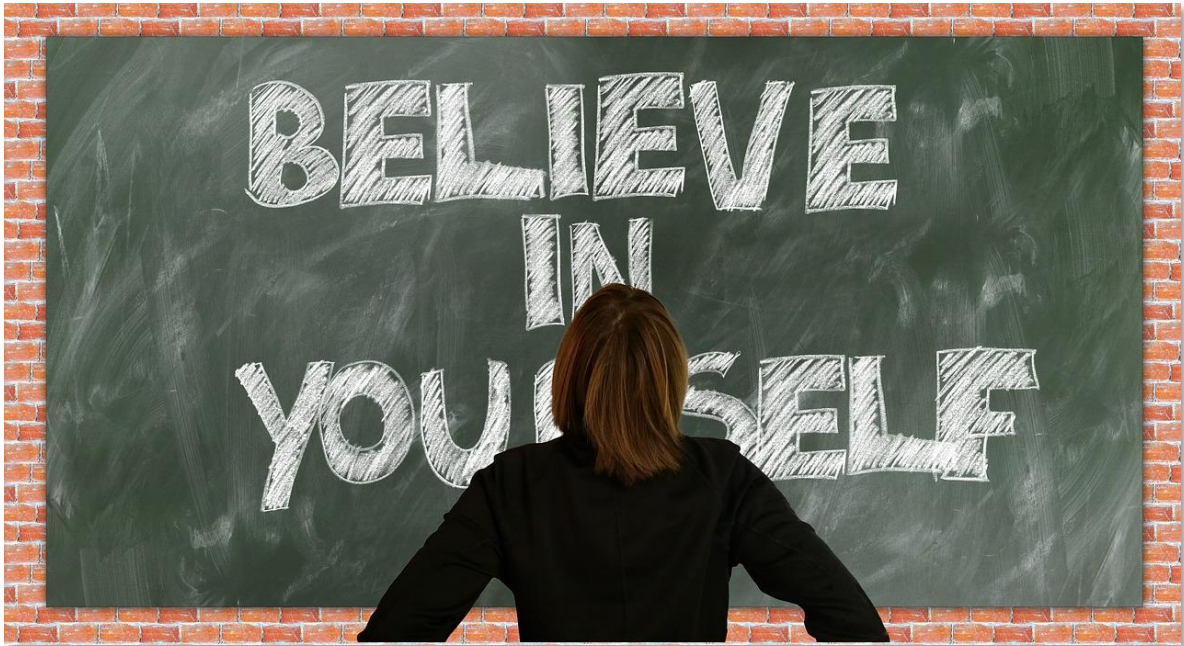
Or another way to put it is that the couples who are happy apart, will be happy together. The same goes for friendships.

On the other hand, if you are someone who needs to be around your friends or around your partner to be happy, then you will likely be seen as 'clingy'. This can lead to you stealing that person's space.

And even if they are the same way and they don't mind spending all that time with you, you will likely find that it eventually leads to you running out of things to say to each other. You can start to become somewhat tired of each other's company and end up sitting in silence.

Likewise, if you aren't confident in yourself, then this can lead to you projecting your insecurities onto others. Low self-esteem is something that is highly contagious and if you aren't happy with yourself and you don't believe in your own abilities, then you will likely end up unintentionally bringing down your friends, relatives and romantic partners.

You might, for example, tell your partner that they shouldn't try to start their own business because they won't succeed. This ultimately comes down to your own lack of self-belief – if you don't think you can do it, then chances are you won't think they can do it either!



Worse, some people don't understand why their partners are with them. They have such low esteem that they think they don't deserve love and as a result of this, they can end up feeling insecure in the relationship.

They think their partner will leave them because... well why wouldn't they? And as such they become jealous, clingy and possessive. As you can see *their* problem has become a larger problem for the relationship.

Therefore, it is such a mistake for people to jump from one romantic relationship to another one without having any time in between. This is almost certain to result in problems, as you won't have had time to define yourself properly in between.

You'll therefore risk changing too much in order to be like each of your partners, you'll risk being overly dependent on your partners

and therefore a little clingy and you might be overly passive, such that your own voice isn't heard enough.

Instead, you should spend time between relationships building your independence. And the same goes for your friendships: spend time on your own, pursue hobbies and make sure that you are as well rounded, independent and interesting as you can be.

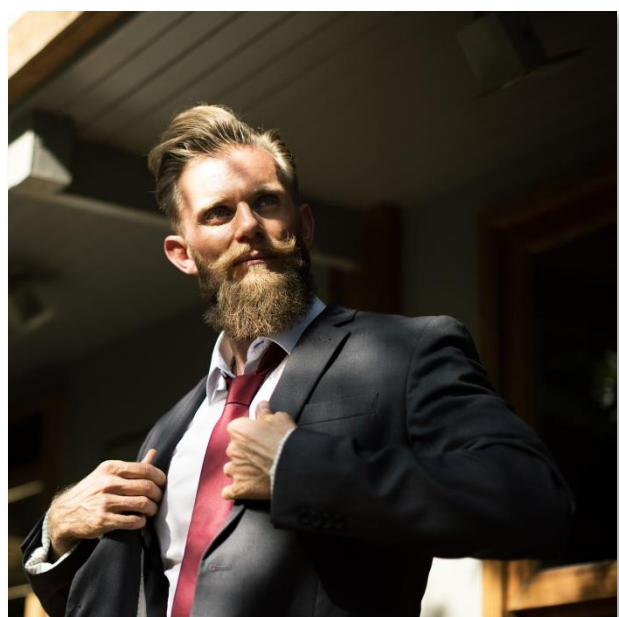
If you're one of those people who just isn't happy on their own, then know that this is something you can *unlearn*. The best way to do this is simply through practice and through perseverance.

Spend more time on your own, go travelling on your own, attend classes, develop hobbies and have 'you days' that involve being comfortable in front of the TV with a nice glass of wine or bottle of beer.

In short, spend time learning the skill of being alone and get to the point where you can quite happily spend evenings on your own without being highly stressed or upset.

### *Confidence*

Likewise, you should also develop your confidence *and*



you should develop yourself as an offering. In other words, if you're going to apply for jobs, then you need to ensure that you have the best and most relevant skillset and experience. Similarly, if you're looking for relationships, then you should be in a steady job, you should be in great shape and you should be well-dressed. If you're looking for friendships, you should be rounded, interesting and fun.

All this will also help you to develop your standing in any social setting and will increase your 'rank' in the social hierarchy.

Know that this is what all relationships are ultimately founded on. Our relationships are based on our evolutionary imperatives. They come from the need to be accepted into a tribe in order to gain shelter, protection, access to resources and mates and more.

In the wild, being ostracized from a group meant being sentenced to a certain death. This is why we feel so anxious when we think we're embarrassing ourselves -the fight or flight response kicks in as though we were being stared down by a vicious predator.

Likewise, the hierarchy also plays a critical role in our social interactions. When looking for a partner or looking for friends, we are looking for people that will enhance our likelihood of survival. We are looking for partners who will provide good genetic resources and access to resources for our offspring.



And while this isn't true today in the way it was when we were still evolving, it is nevertheless still a driving force that influences us unconsciously.

If you are shy, unconfident, badly dressed and weak, then you send social signals that you are *not* advantageous to associate with. If you don't believe in yourself, then you will inadvertently send signals that others shouldn't believe in you either. And you will be shunned or at least you'll *certainly* struggle to meet members of the opposite sex.

This is why it's so important to develop yourself. It enhances every relationship both in the long term *and* in that initial, powerful signal you put out to those around you.



## Chapter 2: The Art of Small Talk



Okay, so now that you have built yourself into someone who is ready for new relationships and who is capable of being alone, it's time to start looking into developing those relationships.

And why not start at the very beginning? Let's start with the small talk.

Because this is how all new relationships start. They start with idle chat that is designed literally to satisfy the social contract and to pass the time.

It's a shame then that this is something many of us will dread to a rather massive extent!

Small talk as a tendency to feel awkward and forced. It is 'surface level' conversation by definition and often we just don't have the time or patience to want to have that kind of discussion. Either that, or we just aren't quite sure how we should be going about it.

So, to solve that, here are some important considerations to keep in mind.

### **Don't Bombard with Questions**

The strategy that many of us will use when we first engage in small talk, will be to bombard whoever we are talking to with questions. This is something we're



particularly guilty of on first

dates – which are among the most abundant and excruciating settings where small talk is unfortunately required.

We've all met people who ask us what we do for a living, ask us what our favorite band is, ask us what our favorite color is and then ask us what we studied at college.

The common advice you get in this regard is often to ask 'what do you like to do' – the idea being that this will result in a more interesting conversation than asking what someone does for a living.

Except this is still kind of forced and unnatural. And it has the potential to be very awkward if that person doesn't have a hobby or doesn't know what to say!

You don't have conversations like this with your existent friends, so why would you think this is the best way to have a conversation with a stranger who you don't know?

The better approach is to instead recognize that conversation should flow naturally and reflect whatever context you are both in at any given time. And how do you talk normally in a way that isn't forced?

Simple: you ask about their day.

Just ask 'how was your day'. And then let the conversation flow from there.

What's good about this is that it will hopefully include facts that you can extrapolate from to learn more about your conversation partner. And it will hopefully include great branching off points from which you can then further the conversation and develop it.



If they've been at work for instance, then that offers a natural opportunity for you to ask them about their job. If they got stuck in traffic this morning, then you can ask them how long their commute is and where they live. If they had a bad day at work, then that might provide an opportunity to talk about whether they like their job and if they plan to stick with it.

### ***Asking Questions and Listening***

When you try to force a conversation down set paths because you have questions you want to ask or because there are things you want to say yourself, this is often when things become awkward and forced.

Conversely, if you listen intently and respond *naturally* to what they're saying, then this will likely provide a much more natural and enjoyable flow to the conversation. Not only that, but taking a *genuine* interest in what other people are telling you is a great way to increase your likeability.

### **It's Not All on You**

Of course, this can go wrong if the other person doesn't want to play ball. There are people who will answer a question like 'how was your day' with 'rubbish'. Of course, this doesn't provide much opportunity to continue the conversation!

But this is the last important point to consider when making small talk: the responsibility is not yours alone. It is not 'all on you'. Don't feel the need to make the conversation engaging or feel that it is your fault when it isn't. It takes two to have a conversation and so if it isn't flowing, it's equally as likely to be their fault as it is to be yours.

That's fine. In that case, the conversation hasn't worked out. You shouldn't feel stressed or like a failure. Try to learn to be comfortable with silence and not let it make you feel awkward!

# Chapter 3

## How to Make More Meaningful and Lasting Friendships

### Chapter 3: How to Make More Meaningful and Lasting Friendships



The next step from 'small talk' is likely acquaintance. And from there comes 'friend'.

Friends help to give life more meaning and purpose, they ensure we're never alone, and they help us to build us up, encourage us and make us feel great about ourselves.

But many of us don't have as many of these kinds of friendships as we'd like. Many of us have lots of connections in our life but only a few true friends.

I've known people to have stag parties where only two people went. And that's not unusual!

So how do you go about making friends as an adult? It's a very difficult process but one that can certainly be learned and improved upon. Here are some strategies.

### *Creating Opportunities to Meet People*

The biggest problem when it comes to making new friends for a lot of adults, is that we don't have the opportunity to meet new people.



Many of us will already be in a career and that means we'll already know our colleagues. Either they are our friends already, or they are not.

As we get older, we generally go out less. And that means we're spending time either with our family, or our existing friends. How are we supposed to meet new people?

### ***Clubs and Classes***



Perhaps the very best way to make new friends is to go to clubs and classes. The great thing about these is that they will very often attract likeminded people. If you enjoy martial arts, then go to a martial arts class and likely you'll meet other people with a similar mindset. If you like embroidery, then an embroidery class will likely be filled with similar types.

If you don't want to start a new hobby as such, then you can get a similar amount of benefit by going to a club or a group of some sort. In fact, if you are religious then going to church can be a particularly great way to meet people and to get involved in the local community.

Many of us re shy to attend classes and events, but they can offer us a great chance to develop ourselves *and* to meet more like minded people.

## ***Friends***

One of the very best ways to make more friends is through your *other* friends. That means you should ask your existing friends if they can introduce you to some people they know. Maybe you attend their parties, maybe you go on holiday with them, or maybe you just spend some time down the pub.

This can also work *especially* well if the friend goes to a club or social group like a football team. Just explain that you don't know that many people in the area and ask politely if you can go along. If they say yes, then you'll not only be meeting like-minded people but you'll also have that 'in' and that common ground thanks to the mutual friendship.

### ***Couple Friends***

If you struggle finding friends, then another option is to look for 'couple friends'. If you're in a relationship with a romantic partner, then you might find that you're emboldened to meet new people when they are with you and that this makes it easier for you to strike up conversations at parties and the like.

Likewise, you can tell your partner that you would like more friends and ask them to introduce you to *their* friends more. I have no shortage of friends (in fact I have too many – something we'll also discuss later in this book!) but I acquired a whole lot more when I started dating my now-wife.

She was kind enough to let me come along to their social events and now I consider many of her friends to be my friends. One of her female friends has a partner who I get on with very well thanks to a shared interest in technology and he is now my friend 'in his own right'. I similarly became friends with many of her coworkers more recently.

## ***Work***

If you don't already have work friends, then you might be able to create some by changing the culture at your workplace. This is something you can do by introducing a social scene – perhaps by becoming social secretary for instance, or by suggesting team building exercises.

Being friends with your colleagues is generally good for productivity and team morale, so speak with your manager and ask them if this can be introduced.

## ***Reconnecting***

Another great way to make new friends is to reconnect with old ones. Most of us have old friends from our past who we used to be close with but who we haven't seen for a long time.

Fortunately, Facebook and social media in general makes it easier than ever before to rekindle those old friendships and in this case, you already know that you're going to get along. Another option that is similar is to reach out to extended family – such as cousins.

You can start by chatting on social media, or even playing some online games together, and then why not suggest meeting up for a drink?

## Taking it to the Next Level



Using the above advice, you can hopefully put yourself in situations where you are now meeting people.

Problem is, meeting people and making true friends are not the same thing! Perhaps the hardest

part is to take that new relationship and turn it into an *actual* friendship.

Often, this comes down to simply being willing to put yourself out on a limb. That means asking the person you're talking to if they'd like to go for coffee, or if they're like to catch up.

This is hard to do because it is admitting you want to make friends, but before you get too worried – remember that *most people* want friends. Most people will be flattered that you want to spend more time with them, so you really have very little to lose.

That said, you do want to avoid being 'creepy' and that means you need to wait until the right number of meetings before this



suggestion. You need to have ‘hit it off’ which means that you should have spoken at length at least a couple of times and picked up on the cues that the person you’re talking to is interested in perhaps getting to know you better.

There’s no concrete rule that will tell you how to do this but hopefully you can tell if the person genuinely wants to chat or if they’re just being polite!

So how do you ‘hit it off’ precisely? This is another thing that isn’t set in stone and there are a few potential definitions.

One benefit is if you both have a common interest and you can talk at length about it. If you hit on a subject matter that you both enjoy or you seem to share lots of the same opinions, then this will make it much easier to get on.

And in fact, this is one of the easiest ways to transition to spending more time together as friends: because you now have an excuse.

If that person loves action movies and you love action movies, then you can ask them if they’d be interested in seeing a new movie with you, because you currently have no one to go with.



This way, you're making a shared interest into something you can do together and you're also removing the awkwardness because there is a *purpose*. Maybe the person you're talking to loves gardening, in which case, why not invite them round to see your garden?

Often though, it will take regular interactions with someone in order to make that relationship a true friendship. This is where life can get in the way which is why it's often a good idea to suggest a *regular* meet-up.

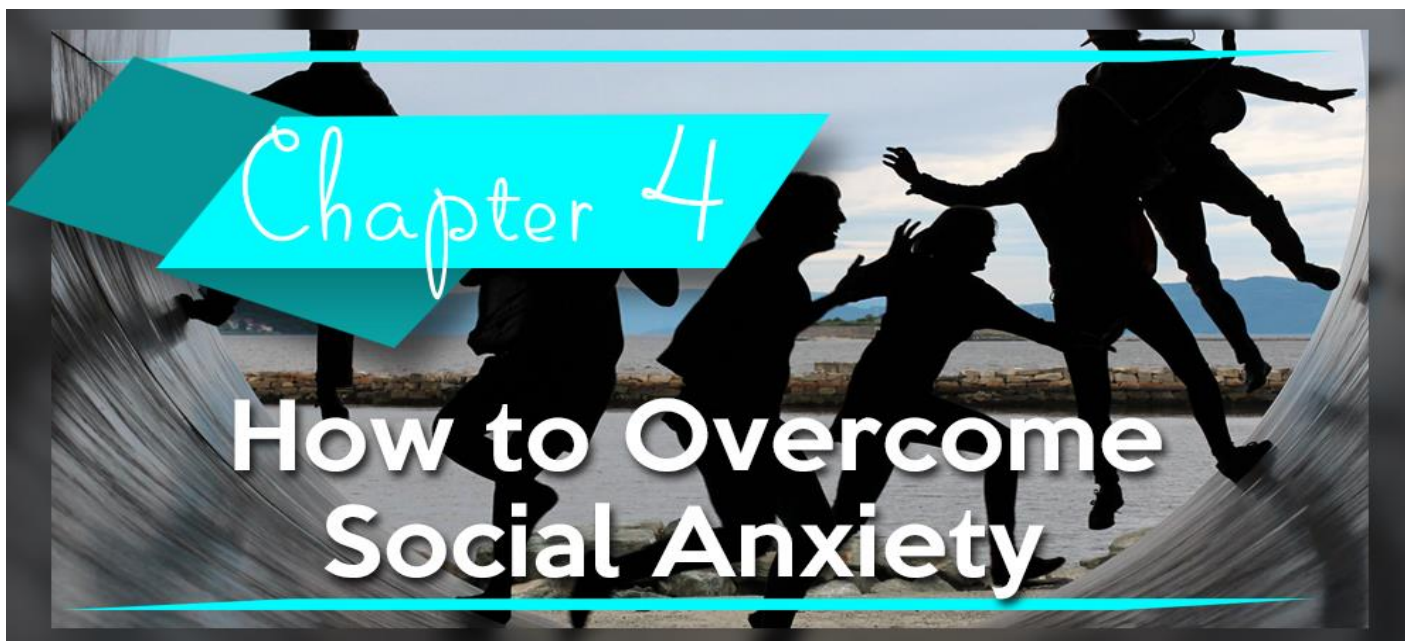
This might mean going to a class together, it might mean finding a gym buddy (you can even advertise for gym buddies!) or it might mean that you endeavor to make Wednesday nights into 'film night'. Or even the third Wednesday in every month!

Finally, another way to develop your friendship is to take the conversation topic a little deeper: to go from discussing the weather and politics (which you shouldn't be doing if you read the chapter on small-talk!) to instead talking about hopes and dreams, ambitions and relationships.

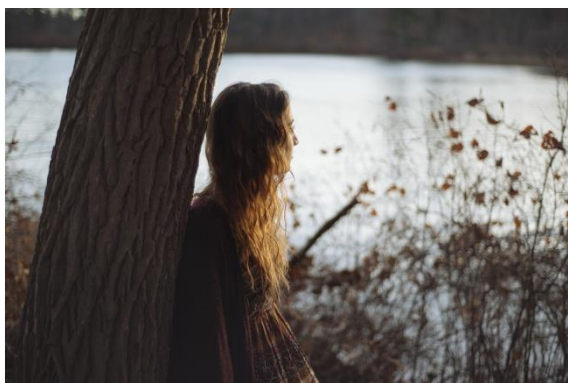
One of my best friends today is someone I met on a camping trip. We made some small talk but the way we developed a true friendship was first by my offering him one of my more unusual beers to try (which created a shared experience – apparently, he never really wanted the beer either (and I certainly didn't want to give it to him)) and by me asking him if there was a woman in his life.

Instead of doing the usual 'nah' or 'yeah', response, he told me that he had been thinking about ending it with his long-term girlfriend and we hashed it out over some my beers.

The moral here is that you can develop the conversation into something deeper by asking the right question but it's also important that you be willing to share and to open up. This is one of the most important ways to get another person to open up *back* to you as well!



## Chapter 4: *How to Overcome Social Anxiety*



If you're struggling with these ideas, then this might be because you have some social anxiety. For some of us, there are few things that sound worse than going to a class of complete strangers and introducing ourselves! Likewise, many of us will be horrified at the thought of introducing ourselves to our friends' friends.

If you are someone who feels shy like this when it comes to mingling, then you can benefit from using some CBT-style techniques to overcome that shyness.

CBT is 'cognitive behavioral therapy'. This is currently the most popular psychotherapeutic technique, meaning it is the tool that a psychologist is currently most likely to suggest helping you with overcoming shyness, phobias or all manner of other issues.

The way CBT works is to look at your underlying thought patterns and to see how these influence your emotions and your behaviors. For instance, if you fear talking to people, then chances are that you're ruminating about the worst-case scenarios.

You are telling yourself that these people don't want to talk to you, that they might ignore you which would be embarrassing, or that they might laugh at you which would be mortifying. And for these reasons, you are now petrified with fear and it should come as no surprise that you struggle to speak up without your heartrate increasing drastically.

So, you need to change that narrative! And this begins by assessing how realistic your concerns are. This is called 'thought challenging' and it means testing the validity of your concerns. For instance, you might ask yourself how likely it really is that people would laugh at you.

Most people are more polite than that and most aren't so cruel. You might also ask yourself why this would even matter: after all, you don't have to ever see them again if it doesn't go well!

So, be mindful of your own thoughts as you consider approaching someone and then remind yourself it doesn't matter, they will be kind... who cares? This will help you to relax into your social interactions.

Okay, now step two is called 'hypothesis testing' and this means you simply *test* the worries you must see if they are relevant. So instead of worrying that people will ignore you, you try speaking up and find out firsthand if they do. In other words, you are facing your fears head on!

You can even go as far as to put yourself in a context where there will be no repercussions (talking in shop that you will never need to go back to) and then be *purposefully* awkward while reminding yourself that there are no consequences.

Not only does this force you to acknowledge that no bad tends to come from being a little awkward, but it also helps you to desensitize yourself to social anxiety to some extent. You're now more used to speaking in public and less concerned about making a fool of yourself.

This is also why you need to take a 'yes man' (or woman!) approach. Don't shut yourself away and avoid the awkward social interactions you don't like. Instead, take any opportunity to meet new people,



speak up more and generally keep reminding yourself that you need to do this in order to overcome your anxieties and to make new friends.

### ***Not Trying to Impress***

Another way to make your interactions a little easier and to help them go better is to stop trying to impress. Often, we're nervous because we're so keen to impress whoever we're talking to and thus we can't stand the notion of the interaction potentially going badly.

But this is where we often end up being most awkward and coming off as desperate – which ironically will send that social indication that we're trying to impress someone who is *more important than us*.

Whenever you try to impress in an obvious way, you look needy and you appear socially unaware. Instead then, you must simply allow your strong points to come out naturally or be discovered.

If you donate to charity but you tell everyone about it, then you appear less genuine *and* more needy. But if you tell no one and it is discovered, you appear confident enough to not *need* to brag and you appear genuinely charitable, kind and generous. This is much better!

So go into every new relationship simply being yourself and you'll seem far more interesting, far more genuine and far more impressive.

# Chapter 5

## How to Meet a Romantic Partner

### Chapter 5: *How to Meet a Romantic Partner*



If you think that making friends is hard today, then just try being single in your 30s or 40s. The older you get the harder it becomes and the opportunities to meet people are slimmer

than ever before.

Not only that, but many of us have little idea of how to handle ourselves in a romantic setting, how to talk to members of the opposite sex or how to overcome the considerable anxiety that many of us feel before we start chatting to someone we find attractive.

I'm going to help you to overcome all those issues right now!

### *Online Dating*

It is only right that we start by paying lip service to online dating.

After all, this is the method that most people will use to meet people today. Seeing as we don't have all that many opportunities to meet people and seeing as we can't stomach the idea of approaching strangers in a bar... this is what we're left with!

But online dating isn't the easy fix you might think it is. The biggest problem with online dating is the amount of time and investment it takes

If you want this to go well, then you will *need* to spend time and effort developing your profile and then developing each relationship with each suitor who messages you.

This takes more time than you might expect, and it also takes energy. You'll find you become emotionally invested in a lot of these conversations. Anyone who messages you *could* be a potential date and as you chat, you're likely to hit it off and then find yourself hoping that they might be the one.

You can send a whole lot of messages and really think it's going to go well, only to then *actually* meet in person and find you don't really find them attractive, or you don't click.

This is almost like a breakup because you're ending a relationship with someone you've been talking to for a long time!

It's a hard thing to go through, but you can overcome it by making sure that you offer to meet the person you're talking to *early* in every case. As soon as the opportunity comes, go ahead and ask them out on a date. This is like the 'fail fast' approach to business, in that you will very quickly find out if you like each other, without wasting any time unnecessarily!

### *How to Meet People in the Wild*



But the best way to meet potential partners is still the old fashioned way: in person.

A club is *not* a good place to meet someone. Grinding up against a drunk stranger is fun, but the likelihood that you'll find them attractive, witty and fascinating the next day when you're sober is slim.

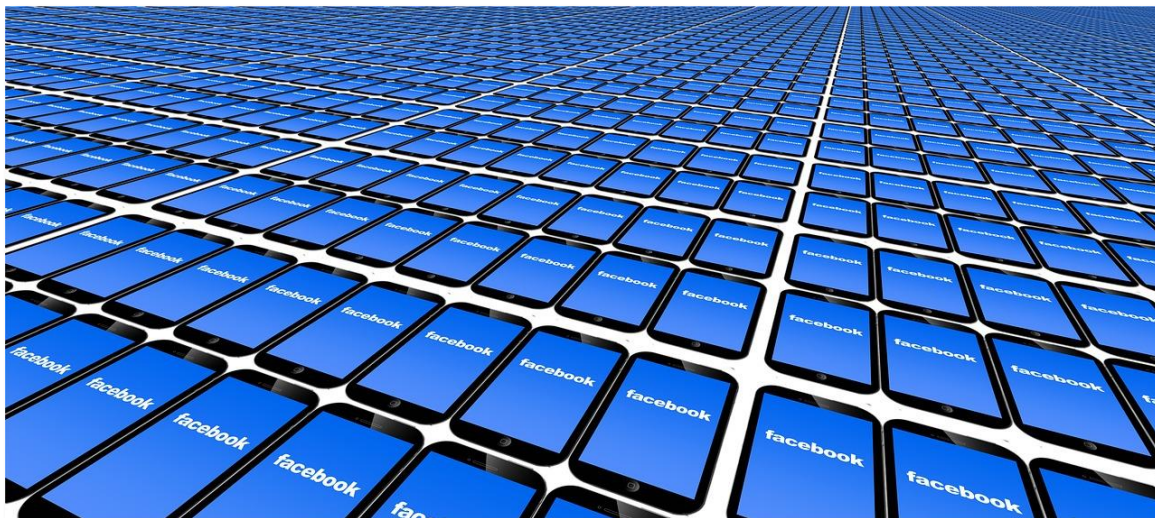
Bars are a much better bet, and especially bars that are aimed at your age range, that are a little quieter and where the vibe is a little classier. If it's a single's bar, then even better: but it doesn't have to be!

Again, friends of friends are also a great way to meet people. This is a fantastic option because you have common ground, you have a mutual point of interest to talk about, and you have an easy introduction to be made. Go to parties of your friends and generally be open to opportunities to mingle.

And clubs, classes and work dos are once again great places to meet people.



## *The Power of Facebook*



But don't assume you'll always need to choose between meeting people in person and trying online dating. There is a happy kind of middle ground and thy name is Facebook.

Facebook is perfect because it is built on real world connections but still gives us the distance that comes from being online. It's a brilliant tool for meeting romantic partners and in fact, it's how I met my wife (and several dates beforehand!).

I knew my wife through a friend. I liked the friend, and so I trusted her judgement. I then added her on Facebook after meeting her in person briefly and was able to check out her profile... where I saw that she shared the same favorite band as me!

This opened the opportunity to make some conversation. I messaged her and asked about the band and she responded. I made sure that



all my messages had questions in, which meant she always had the option to message back. All her messages had questions in too!

This alone was enough to suggest that she was interested but I never had to put myself out there to find out. I then invited her round to watch a movie that we both realized we liked and that gave me the chance to get to know her better. Then, when I met her in a bar with her friend, the little bit of courage provided by the alcohol was perfect for making my move.

Facebook allows you the opportunity to talk to people who you know directly or indirectly and to develop your relationships in a detached way. This is perfect for scoping out if someone might be interested and for getting to the point where it's much easier to start a relationship!

### *Becoming the Life and Soul of the Party*

When you look at it this way, you realize there are more opportunities than many of us would be likely to realize at first. The problem is that



we don't act in a way that makes it easy for us to take full advantage of those opportunities and to meet those people.

In other words, we stand in the corner at the bar talking to our friends and hope someone approaches us. Or we go to work dos and we talk to members of our own team.

The key is to learn how to take advantage of the situations that do arise, and this comes down to knowing how to become the life and soul of the party, how to make yourself more attractive and to become more confident and dynamic.

This is another reason it is so important to focus on improving yourself as we described in chapter one. Building confidence is crucial because – as you'll recall – this sends the social signal that you are a good catch and good genetic material. This makes you a more interesting romantic partner on an unconscious level and that makes you *much* more attractive.

When you walk up to someone you fancy and look nervous, it suggests that they are out of your league – or at least that you think so. And if you think so, they will think so. Likewise, if you look at someone from across the bar, it makes that person feel as though you're not worth their time and that you're just kind of seedy...

But if you go up to talk to someone in a way that is completely confident and brazen, it suggests that you aren't scared of them. That suggests that you aren't desperate to impress them and this in turn makes you seem like someone who is more of a catch than they

are. They then become desperate to impress *you*. The old switcheroo!

Confidence suggests that you have a reason to be confident, and this makes you instantly attractive on that unconscious, evolutionary level.

### *How to Get Out of the Friendzone*



This truth has led many men – and many women – to mistakenly think that they have to be cruel to be attractive.

How often do you hear that a woman has ignored her

kind best friend who has secretly loved her, only for her to then go after the aloof jerk who messes her around?

How often have you seen the bookish girl get ignored for the cheerleader who is bitchy to all her friends?

Nice guys and gals finish last, eh?

Wrong.

The problem isn't that you're nice. The problem is that you're coming across as wet. If you're that loyal best friend who always tell someone they're beautiful or handsome, who is always there for

them, and who always says the right thing... well then, you're not exactly playing hard to get.

And this isn't nice anyway is it? It's you trying to get into their pants or get them to date you. You are being nice, but you have an ulterior motive. And on some level, they know that.

So why don't they fancy you again?

Meanwhile, those people who are bitchy or who are aloof, they come across as much more confident. These people *genuinely* don't care what other people think and this makes them attractive because they aren't throwing themselves at that person.

It just so happens that the person who doesn't care what anyone thinks *also* often doesn't care if they hurt people. They also often happen to be a bit of a jerk.

But these aren't two opposites of the same spectrum. You can be nice *and* confident. You can be nice without being wet. You can be cool without being a jerk.

Because what's *much* more attractive is someone who isn't afraid to tease them, who isn't afraid to have a little fun and who is independent and their own person. Someone who is also highly outgoing and able to meet their friends. And someone who is *also* a nice guy or gal.

You can walk into a bar and try to be aloof and indifferent. That might make you come off as somewhat cool and sexy.

But FAR sexier is someone who walks confidently up to a group of girls and introduces themselves to the *whole group*. Who tells jokes that gets everyone laughing and who buys a round of drinks for everyone.

Likewise, guys love it when a group of girls introduces themselves, starts teasing them or suggesting games and strikes up conversation.

I remember on a night out in Salut, Spain, my friends and I were alone drinking in a bar when a group of girls came over and sat on our table with us. That alone was a sexy



move because it was confident. They then asked us our names and introduced themselves before asking if we'd like to play their game – which involves lying in a line on the floor and catching each other as we threw ourselves into each other. It was a ton of fun.

And a lot of the guys on that night ended up going home with some of those girls. They were just so fun and outgoing and they were *nice*

*with it*. They could easily have sat on a table in the corner and ignored us. But instead, we had a great night together.

Stop approaching situations trying to make romance happen and instead approach situations looking for fun and an opportunity to practice being outgoing, chatty and interesting. That's how you'll make friends *and* romantic partners.

### **What if You're Already Stuck?**

Already in the friend zone? Then read the next chapters on how you define the parameters of a relationship and then change them – this will help a great deal. I'll draw your attention to the part about redefining relationships by waiting for natural paradigm shifts.



The background image shows a man with short brown hair, wearing a red, blue, and white plaid shirt, hugging a woman with long brown hair from behind. They are standing against a light, cloudy sky. The image is framed by a dark grey border. There are orange geometric shapes: a large triangle on the left and a horizontal bar across the top. The text 'Chapter 6' is written in a white, cursive font on the orange bar.

## Chapter 6

# New Relationships

## Chapter 6: *New Relationships*



When you start a new relationship, it is incredibly important to think about the way you interact with that person and the way that you

behave. This is a crucial period in any relationship because it is the time during which you will set the blueprint for what is to follow. This is when you will develop the habits and the traditions that become a part of your relationship for the long term.

This is true of a romantic relationship, but it is also certainly true of any other long-term relationship, whether that's a friendship or a working relationship.

So, what do I mean?

Well, let's take this example.

Your partner usually walks into work which is 10 minutes away. Then, when you move in together, it starts raining one day in the first week, so you give them a lift in the car before you go to work yourself.

This might seem like a harmless thing to do, but it's very important to make sure that you consider carefully whether this is something

you want to do. Because really, you shouldn't do it once, unless you are willing to do it *every time*.

Because what happens the next time it is raining? Having given your partner a lift once before in precisely the same circumstances, you've now set a precedent. From their perspective, there is no reason that you can't also do the same thing the next time it rains! What reason do you have other than 'I don't want to do this all the time'?

And eventually, you're bound to give them a lift in one time when they're tired, or when they've overslept. Before you know it, you're now *always* giving them lifts. You have now created a blueprint for what your relationship is like and this will be incredibly difficult to ever break out of.

For another example, I think of myself and my friend. I got into a new relationship and we set the precedent that we would essentially spend every evening together.

One time when I started reading, she told me that this wasn't very nice and implied heavily that it would be nice if we did something together instead – even if that 'something' involved watching the TV and not talking to each other!

On the other hand, my friend was on her first holiday with her partner and while they were waiting in the lounge before their flight, he started reading. She brought this up on the plane, pointing out

that it wasn't very nice of him to ignore her in the waiting area and that she wasn't sure if she had done something wrong.

He told her to grow up! He pointed out that they couldn't spend every waking moment together and that he needed his space. She was upset at first, but eventually she made the decision to come to terms with it and the two of them now happily spend time together reading and not necessarily talking.

I am not saying that either one of these approaches is correct. I am simply saying that it is something to keep in mind at the start of any new relationship. You will form habits during this initial phase and after that point, it will be very hard for you to change the dynamics of your relationship.



Don't be afraid to make a stand and make sure that you know what you want your relationship to look like when you go into it. This might mean rubbing them up the wrong way, or it might mean that you have to be firm or even seemingly 'harsh'. But ultimately, this

will prevent you from finding yourself in a relationship where you're unhappy or where you're seething quietly with resentment.

# Chapter 7

## The Importance of Acting Out of Character and Drawing Lines in the Sand

### *Chapter 7: The Importance of Acting Out of Character and Drawing Lines in the Sand*



This is not just true for romantic relationships but for every relationship in your life. And not only that, but it won't always necessarily be 'obvious' when

you are creating these new dynamics and habits.



For instance, these little moments that go on to define your relationship might simply be verbal or they might be subtly communicated through body language.

For instance, if you allow a friend to decide what you're going to do for the day on a few occasions without standing up for yourself early on, then you will make it much harder at that later date to break out of that routine and to become the 'leader' of that group.

Similarly, if you allow your friends to tease you and you don't stand up for yourself, then this will form the dynamic. This early interaction will set the basis for all of those to come subsequently.

### ***Acting Out of Character***

Part of the problem is that once this dynamic is set, once that expectation is created, then you'll find that people react badly when you *stop* acting in that predefined way.

This is because we like consistency in our relationships. It is always considered a positive thing to act in a certain, predictable way.

People like to 'know where they stand', meaning that they know how you are likely to react to any given scenario or any given interaction.

When you break out of this predefined pattern, you can end up breaking that continuity and becoming unpredictable. In turn, this makes you seem unstable or explosive and people may feel as though they need to walk on eggshells around you.

And we don't like doing it ourselves either! We like to think of ourselves as having a set personality that can accurately be used to describe our behavior. We love it when people say things like 'that's typical John!' because it shows that they know us and it suggests that we are dependable and steady.

But the unfortunate thing is that this can very often end up causing us to enjoy our relationships *less*. Why? Because now we are effectively 'trapped'. We are expected to behave in the way that we have 'always' behaved and if we do anything else, we feel we are letting ourselves and others down.

Thus our freedom is gone.

If you're the 'easy going' one of the group, then you might feel as though you can never speak up and say that you don't like the plan. If you're the one who 'can take it', then you won't want to speak up and say that, all that teasing is really upsetting you.

But this is how problems in relationships form. Because by sticking to an *idea* of who you are supposed to be, you're no longer sticking to the *reality* of who you are. And if you aren't being yourself, then your relationship is founded on a lie.

Therefore it is so important that you be yourself in a relationship. That means being



honest *even when* that honesty is expressed in this much less obvious way. You need to be honest in your actions as well as your words, because that's how you can build a meaningful relationship.

Don't be afraid to do something 'out of character'. People grow and change and they respond to the situations they find themselves in and the people they are talking to. These are good things, so don't fight it – embrace it!

### ***Seizing Your Moment***

If you aren't someone who likes confrontation, or changing the dynamic (which is ultimately what all confrontation will boil down to in your relationships), then you may not want to tell someone you're not happy with them, or engage in that activity that will be seen as out-of-character.

So, what do you do?

Well one option is to take the opportunity to redefine your relationship as it naturally grows.

Because in any relationship, there will be points where things change. It might be that one of you gets a new job. It might be that you move, or it might be that you get a dog or a cat.

Whatever the case, these paradigm shifts will alter the nature of your relationship and that in turn will create an opportunity for you to redefine some boundaries.

For instance, I have been struggling to meet up with a friend lately. We used to meet up every other week but it has become too time consuming for me since my personal business has grown. Rather than telling him I don't want to meet, rather than simply not turning up, the best option is to explain that as I now have new commitments, I can no longer stick to the old schedule and we need to introduce a new one.

This is also how you escape being friend-zoned. This is how you change the dynamics of your relationship – by changing the setting or by changing something about your relationship. If they can currently rely on seeing you every week, then make it so they can't for a bit. Even change up your look. Change begets change. This is how you redefine your relationships and this time, you can be their architect.

# Chapter 8

## How to Develop Deeper Relationships

### Chapter 8: *How to Develop Deeper Relationships*

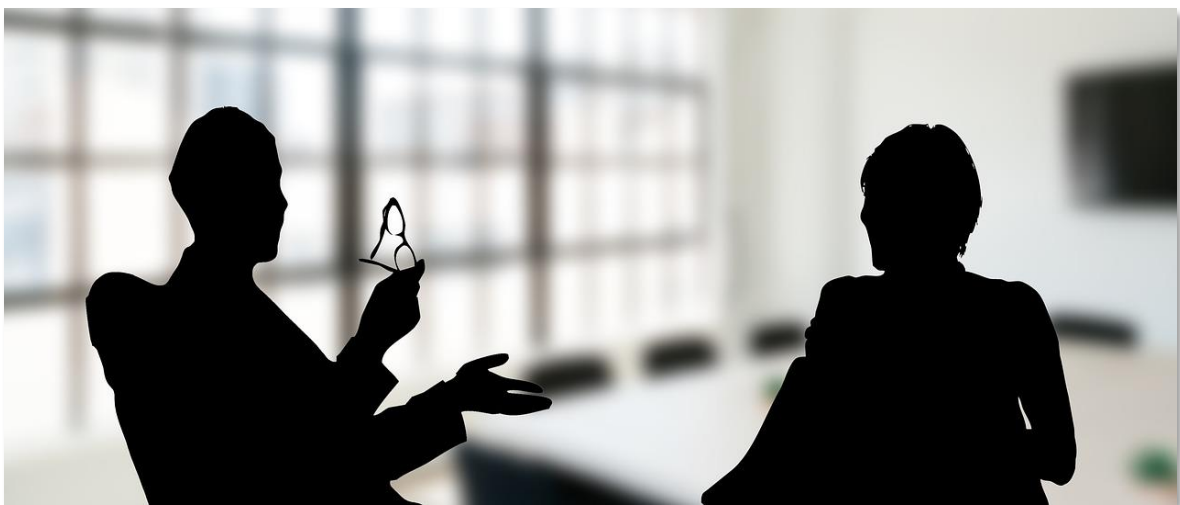


Hopefully by now, you are starting to understand how you can build more friendships and relationships. Hopefully you have seen where some of your previous relationships might have

gone wrong and you are developing yourself into a more confident, independent, interesting and assertive individual so that you can create more of those connections.

But making connections is only part of the story. What's arguably *more* important is making sure that those connections are deep and meaningful. In other words, how do you go from having lots of friends who you don't have a deep connection with, to being someone who has a lot of *true* friendships and who really feels deeply connected to the people in their lives? That's what we're going to find out here.

### *One-to-One Time*



One of the most important ways to take a friendship and to develop it further is to make sure that you are getting one to one time. Too many of us spend time with our friends in large groups but never actually spend any time *alone* with those people. This in turn can prevent us from creating real connections.

Real connections are formed when we open up to someone and allow our emotions to be expressed. What's more, is that those real connections are formed when we find common ground.

Have you ever shared something that's a little embarrassing or unusual with someone, only for them to say 'me too'? It's highly vindicating and builds a deeper connection.

Likewise, when someone opens up about their hopes and dreams, about the problems they're having in their relationships, or about the fears they have... these things help you to know more about them.

Now each time that you see that person act in future, you will do so through the *lens* of that new knowledge. You now have a much better of who they are and of what makes them tick.

These are the moments that form those deep connections and those bonds, but they're only possible when you speak to someone one-to-one and have a chance to open up: we don't like to share intimate details of our lives in large groups!

This should be *given* for romantic relationships. You should of course feel that you know what makes your partner tick and what their deep-seated fears and passions are. But that isn't to say that everyone gets this down perfectly.



Many of us never have the conversations we need to have with our partners and will only ever talk about surface-level things.

So, try and get a little deeper. Try to ask more probing questions.

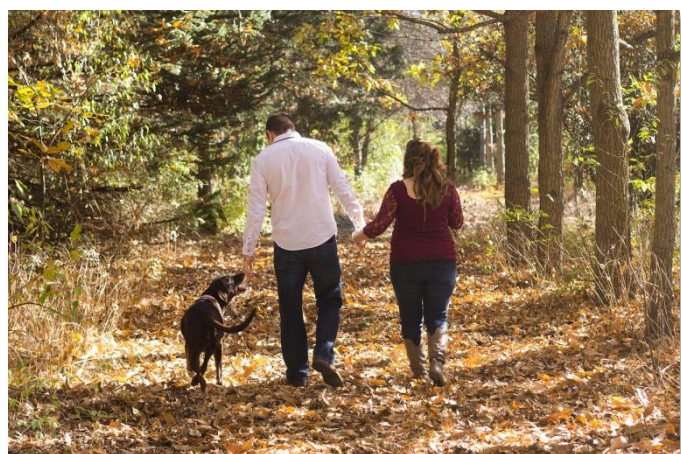
And importantly, be willing to share your *own* deeper side so that they feel they can let theirs show too.

(P.S. When it comes to making deeper connections with friends and partners, a night out drinking together can often be enough to loosen tongues and get you chatting!)

Oh, and for bonus points, if you want to show your friends that you really care, do something that shows how well you know them and understand them. I always wanted to be an action hero when I was younger, and when a friend texted me one evening to tell me that '*Jackie Chan: My Stunts*' was on, it really meant a lot to me!

### *Familiarity*

Another important way to build a deeper and more meaningful relationship with someone is to ensure that there is more familiarity between the two of you. That means you



should feel as though you *really* know this person and they you. That doesn't mean just the deep-seated fears and desires we just talked about, it also means everyday things: it means knowing your friends' habits and strange tendencies.

My friend knows that I always go to the toilet every time before I eat. She also knows that I will often sit with three drinks in front of me (one water, one juice and one tea). I know that she takes an age to order anything on the menu, and so we better arrive early when we meet for dinner!

Why do we know each other so well? Simple: because we lived together at University. Living with someone is one of the very best ways to get to know them in a very true sense.

You know their habits and quirks and of course they can't hide behind a mask all the time, so they're going to have to be at least somewhat authentic about who they are.

When I was in a long-distance relationship with my now-wife (after we left Uni), I knew that it was going to be hard to stay in touch. And I knew that we needed to maintain that regularity and frequency of contact in order to really feel that we knew each other. For that reason, we talked on MSN every single night (I'm showing my age here).

You don't necessarily need to talk to your friend every night or every day, but you *do* need to make sure that you touch base frequently – even if it's just via WhatsApp. The point is that talking every month or every three months means that you're going to be 'catching up' every time you chat.

That means you aren't just shooting the breeze or having a laugh together, you're ticking off points on an itinerary. And no doubt you'll miss important things happening in each other's lives.

My best mate lives a two-hour drive from me, but we're just as close today as we ever were. Why? Because we call each other once a fortnight and we message each other probably every day. That might mean just sharing a joke or a meme or asking what the other one is getting up to. Sometimes we play a game where we send rhyming words for hours on end.

These things allow us to maintain closeness, even over distance.

If you live near to someone but feel that you don't see each other enough, then why not use the advice shared earlier: arrange a time to meet once a week or go to a class or club together once a week. That regularity and consistency will be enough to allow you both to feel as though you really know each other.

## Making Memories



One more crucial thing to ensure you're doing, is making memories.

When you meet up with someone infrequently out of that sense of 'duty', you might find that you end up

catching up on what has happened to each of you over the last few months. But you might alternatively find that you spend the time reminiscing.

There's nothing wrong with reminiscing. Having friendships that go back years and years is a great thing and that shared history will only bring you closer.

The problem? If you're only ever reminiscing, then you aren't creating *new* memories. For your relationships to feel as though it's growing and not stagnating, then you need to make sure you do interesting and fun things together.

This gets harder as you get older and move away from friends. When you were young, you likely shared nights out, holidays, dating stories and more. But now you both have responsibilities; you have commitments and you can't afford to go out drinking every Saturday.

When you do meet, it's in coffee shops for an hour to discuss the good old days.

Make sure you don't let this happen to you by looking out for new and interesting things to do together. This might mean that you book yourselves into some kind of new class, it might mean that you visit one of those restaurants where you only eat in the dark, or it might mean that you head off on a holiday together. You could even work on a project together, be that a book, a film or an app!

Whatever the case, making *new* memories is how you grow your relationship. And this is even more important for married couples.

# Chapter 9

## Controlling Your Emotional Responses

### Chapter 9: *Controlling Your Emotional Responses*



While all this advice can ensure that your relationships are growing steadily and that you have a good number of people in

your life who you really care about, it can still be hard to maintain those relationships and to avoid them going wrong.

One of the reasons that a relationship is most likely to go wrong is because of an argument. We've already addressed how sometimes you need to shift the dynamic of a relationship, and we've looked at how you do this: you wait for a paradigm shift and you define the new ground rules. You explain what you want in a clear and concise manner and you keep emotion out of it.

But sometimes, emotion creeps in.

And this is especially true in marriages where you speak to each other every day. You see that other person when they wake up after a bad night's sleep, when they get home after a hard day at work... you get the point!

Of course, sometimes you are going to argue.

You might think that the solution is to try and stop them from being so unreasonable or to stop them from being so emotional. But this is completely the wrong way to think about it. Instead, you should be thinking about how you respond to that argument and how you control your own responses.

Where does emotion come from? Ultimately, it comes from physiology. When you're stressed or angry it is 90% of the time because you are tired, because you're hungry or because you feel threatened.

This *warps* your thinking and it makes everything seem worse. And there is simply no benefit to exploding at this point. If someone goads you or attacks you, then it is for you to decide if you need to speak to them about it, or to change the dynamic of your relationship.

But there is no benefit to exploding back and saying cruel things in the heat of the moment you will regret later on.





# Conclutions

## *Conclusion*

Every relationship is different. Every interaction is unique. And context, setting and culture all have a big role to play in the way that your relationships are formed.

But hopefully this book has taught you some important skills and helped you to reassess your approach when it comes to making new friendships and romantic partnerships, growing them and managing them.

The key is to look at yourself and to be a more confident, secure and successful person *first* before you reach out to create new relationships. From there, you can be more magnetic by being friendly and confident at the same time. By being outgoing and by

drinking in life by going on holidays, learning new skills and saying 'yes' that little bit more.

The relationships you create you'll then need to consider carefully the dynamics early on and always remember to assess them as they grow. Always ask: am I happy with how this relationship is growing?

Spend time one-to-one, see each other regularly, be sympathetic of their emotions, be mindful of your own and create new memories that you can share together.

## ***Professional Relationships***

Professional success is important to everyone, but still, success in business and in life means different things to different people--as well it should.

But one fact is universal: Real success, the kind that exists on multiple levels, is impossible without building great relationships. Real success is impossible unless you treat other people with kindness, regard, and respect.

After all, you can be a rich jerk... but you will also be a lonely jerk.

That's why people who build extraordinary business relationships:

1. Take the hit.

A customer gets mad. A vendor complains about poor service. A mutual friend feels slighted.

Sometimes, whatever the issue and regardless of who is actually at fault, some people step in and take the hit. They're willing to accept the criticism or abuse because they know they can handle it--and they know that maybe, just maybe, the other person can't.

Few acts are more selfless than taking the undeserved hit. And few acts better cement a relationship.

## 2. Step in without being asked.

It's easy to help when you're asked. Most people will.

Very few people offer help before they have been asked, even though most of the time that is when a little help will make the greatest impact.

People who build extraordinary relationships pay close attention so they can tell when others are struggling. Then they offer to help, but not in a general, "Is there something I can do to help you?" way.

Instead they come up with specific ways they can help. That way they can push past the reflexive, "No, I'm okay..." objections. And they can roll up their sleeves and make a difference in another person's life.

Not because they want to build a better relationship, although that is certainly the result, but simply because they care.

3. Answer the question that is not asked.

Where relationships are concerned, face value is usually without value. Often people will ask a different question than the one they really want answered.

A colleague might ask you whether he should teach a class at a local college; what he really wants to talk about is how to take his life in a different direction.

A partner might ask how you felt about the idea he presented during the last board meeting; what he really wants to talk about is his diminished role in the running of the company.

An employee might ask how you built a successful business; instead of kissing up he might be looking for some advice--and encouragement--to help him follow his own dreams.

Behind many simple questions is often a larger question that goes unasked. People who build great relationships think about what lies underneath so they can answer that question, too.

#### 4. Know when to dial it back.

Outgoing and charismatic people are usually a lot of fun... until they aren't. When a major challenge pops up or a situation gets stressful, still, some people can't stop "expressing their individuality." (Admit it: You know at least one person so in love with his personality he can never dial it back.)

People who build great relationships know when to have fun and when to be serious, when to be over the top and when to be invisible, and when to take charge and when to follow.

Great relationships are multifaceted and therefore require multifaceted people willing to adapt to the situation--and to the people in that situation.

5. Prove they think of others.

People who build great relationships don't just think about other people. They act on those thoughts.

One easy way is to give unexpected praise. Everyone loves unexpected praise--it's like getting flowers not because it's Valentine's Day, but "just because." Praise helps others feel better about themselves and lets them know you're thinking about them (which, if you think about it, is flattering in itself.)



Take a little time every day to do something nice for someone you know, not because you're expected to but simply because you can. When you do, your relationships improve dramatically.

## 6. Realize when they have acted poorly.

Most people apologize when their actions or words are called into question.

Very few people apologize before they are asked to--or even before anyone notices they should.

Responsibility is a key building block of a great relationship. People who take the blame, who say they are sorry and explain why they are sorry, who don't try to push any of the blame back on the other person--those are people everyone wants in their lives, because they instantly turn a mistake into a bump in the road rather than a permanent roadblock.

## 7. Give consistently, receive occasionally.

A great relationship is mutually beneficial. In business terms that means connecting with people who can be mentors, who can share information, who can help create other connections; in short, that means going into a relationship wanting something.

The person who builds great relationships doesn't think about what she wants; she starts by thinking about what she can give. She sees giving as the best way to establish a real relationship and a lasting connection. She approaches building relationships as if it's all about the other person and not about her, and in the process builds relationships with people who follow the same approach.

In time they make real connections.

And in time they make real friends.

8. Value the message by always valuing the messenger.

When someone speaks from a position of position of power or authority or fame it's tempting to place greater emphasis on their input, advice, and ideas.

We listen to Tony Hsieh. We listen to Norm Brodsky. We listen to Seth Godin.

The guy who mows our lawn? Maybe we don't listen to him so much.

That's unfortunate. Smart people strip away the framing that comes with the source--whether positive or negative--and consider the information, advice, or idea based solely on its merits.

People who build great relationships never automatically discount the message simply because they discount the messenger. They know good advice is good advice, regardless of where it comes from.

And they know good people are good people, regardless of their perceived "status."

9. Start small... and are happy to stay small.

I sometimes wear a Reading Football Club sweatshirt. The checkout clerk at the grocery store noticed it one day and said, "Oh, you're a Reading supporter? My team is Manchester United."

Normally, since I'm pretty shy, I would have just nodded and said something innocuous, but for some reason I said, "You think Man U can beat Real Madrid next week?"

He gave me a huge smile and said, "Oh yeah. We'll crush them!" (Too bad he was wrong.)

Now whenever I see him he waves, often from across the store. I almost always walk over, say hi, and talk briefly about soccer.

That's as far as our relationship is likely to go and that's okay. For a couple of minutes we transcend the customer/employee relationship and become two people brightening each other's day.

And that's enough, because every relationship, however minor and possibly fleeting, has value.

People who build great relationships treat every one of their relationships that way. (That's a lesson I need to take to heart more often.)



## BONUS CHAPTERS

## WHAT IS RELATIONSHIP BUILDING ALL ABOUT?

Relationships are the building blocks for all community organizing activities. Whether you want to organize a volleyball game or get rid of unfair housing practices in your town, you will need lots of good relationships. Why? Because the relationships we have with our coworkers, the communities we serve, and even our adversaries are the means for achieving our goals. People don't work in isolation: we need to be working together! It is our relationships all added together that are the foundation of an organized effort for change. We need lots of people to contribute their ideas, take a stand, and get the work done.

It is also the people who motivate us to reach our goals. As community builders, we care deeply about people and caring is part of our work. It is our caring for others that motivates us to work as hard as we do. It is often the health and happiness of our children, neighbors, and coworkers that we hold fixed in our minds as we push ourselves to overcome obstacles and take on challenges that can feel overwhelming.



If you are the official leader, or an active citizen without an official title, you will be most effective if you establish many strong relationships around yourself in the community.

In this section, we will talk about building and sustaining relationships and give you some practical tips and general guidelines.

And remember ordinary people learn the skills of establishing and maintaining relationships all the time. You don't need to be particularly charming, witty, or talented. However, if you are charming, witty, or talented, these guidelines may help you, too!

## WHY DO WE NEED TO BUILD AND SUSTAIN RELATIONSHIPS?

Let's look at this example:

### Organizing a block party

Suppose you want to organize a block party. What kind of relationships do you need to make it happen?

Who will help you plan the block party?

You don't want to do all the planning and legwork by yourself, do you? It would be much more fun, not to mention easier, to work with a few neighbors to make this block party happen.

How do you get local approval and cooperation?

In many towns, you need the city council or government groups to approve block party permits. Having a friend or two in local government might help you figure out how to work your way through the bureaucratic hoops to get your permit. If you don't know anyone, you can build some relationships along the way.

Who else might lend a hand?

If you already have a relationship with your corner grocery store owner, she might donate some watermelon or drinks for the block party. If you know your neighborhood firefighters, they may be

willing to bring over a fire engine for the children to climb on. Do you have a friend who is a clown?

Who will come to the block party?

Last, but not least, in order to have a successful block party, you want as many people from your block to come as you can get. If your neighbors know you or anyone else on the planning committee, they will be much more willing to overcome their shyness and show up.

Overall, the more people you know, the easier it will be to organize a block party and the more fun it will be for everyone.

#### FUNDAMENTAL REASONS TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS:

Community building occurs one-to-one. You need to build relationships with people one-to-one if you want them to become involved in your group or organization. Some people become involved in organizations because they believe in the cause.

However, many people become involved in a community group or organization, just because they have a relationship with another person who is already involved.

We need relationships in order to win allies to our cause. In order to get support from people outside our organizations, we need to build relationships in which people know and trust us.

Our relationships give meaning and richness to our work and to our lives. We all need a community of people to share the joys and the struggles of organizing and making community change. A little bit of camaraderie goes a long way.

## WHAT KINDS OF RELATIONSHIPS ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

Every relationship is different, but they all matter. If you smile and say hello to the school crossing guard on your way to work every day, you have formed a relationship. That crossing guard may be the one who will be watching out for your kids or grandchildren when they are old enough to walk to school by themselves. The guard will remember you and your warm smile when escorting your child across the street. And maybe the crossing guard will be the one you eventually recruit to head up the citizens' traffic safety committee.

Your relationship with the crossing guard may be quite different from the relationships you have with people involved in your neighborhood park-cleaning committee. The relationships you have with the mayor's aide, with your staff, with members of your board of directors, and with your spouse will all be different but they all play an important role in community organizing.

The more relationships you have, the better. You never know when they will come in handy. A local gang member might be just the person you need to help you organize a group to build a new playground in your neighborhood. Whether they are government officials, schoolteachers, business people, elders, gardeners, children, people with disabilities, homeless people or whoever else--building friendships will pay off in ways you may never have anticipated.

## YOU ARE AT THE CENTER

Imagine a wheel in which you are at the hub or center and each spoke represents a relationship with another person. Does that sound egotistical? It doesn't need to be. It takes a lot of spokes to hold the wheel together and the wheel is what helps move the

initiative along. There is enough room in the group for everyone to create their own wheel of strong relationships.

The point is that you must take the time to set up and sustain relationships. If you wait for others to establish relationships with you first, you may spend a lot of time waiting.

One reminder: It doesn't make sense to form relationships just to get people to do work for you. That won't work because people will feel used. Community builders approach relationships with integrity. We form relationships because we genuinely like someone, because we have something to offer that person, or because we share some common goal.

## WHEN DO YOU BUILD AND SUSTAIN RELATIONSHIPS?

You do it all the time. If you take an extra five minutes to ask the person who is stuffing envelopes how they think the baseball team is doing this year, you will have built a stronger relationship.

Some relationships require more time than others. You may want to meet for lunch once a month with all the other directors of youth organizations in your town. You may need to meet twice this week with a staff member who has some built up resentment about the job. You may want to call your school committee representative every now and then to check in about issues of common concern.

As community organizers with few resources, we are often under enormous pressures that distract us from paying attention to relationships. We feel the urgency of achieving important goals. We mistakenly feel that spending time on relationships is the fluffy stuff that makes a person feel good, but doesn't get the job done. Often, however, relationships are the key to solving a problem or getting the job done. Building and sustaining many solid, strong relationships is central to our work as community leaders.

## RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE GROUNDWORK

Often building relationships is the groundwork that must be laid before anything else gets done on a project. The bigger the project, the more relationships you will usually need as a foundation.



For example, if you are organizing a coalition of community groups that will work to create a multicultural arts center, it would be a good idea to get to know people in each organization before trying to get them together to work on the project.

Ask yourself: "Would you be more persuaded by someone you know, or by a complete stranger?" Then be guided by your own answer.

When you plan a project, you need to include the time it takes to build relationships into your plan. People need time to build trust. Whenever people work together, they need to have trusting relationships. When trust is missing, people usually have a difficult time functioning cooperatively. They worry about risking too much. Disagreements seem to erupt over no important reason. Investing time, resources, and one's organizational reputation can be risky. At the least people want some return for their investment. They have to feel like you know them as a person, understand their interests, and will not let them down.

Back to the multicultural arts center example--if creating one will involve several community groups, and if you don't know them well (and they don't know each other), start working together on a

smaller project first. For example, you can jointly sponsor an evening of cultural sharing. If the evening is successful, you will have gained some shared trust and confidence on which to build. You can plan several similar events that will build trust over a period of time.

If things are not going well, back up and try an easier challenge. If you begin to hold discussions on the multicultural arts center and people show signs of apprehension rather than excitement, slow down the process. Take on an easier challenge until strong relationships are better established.

## ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIPS BEFORE YOU NEED THEM

It's always better to build relationships before you need them or before a conflict arises. If you already have a good relationship with the grocery store owner in your neighborhood, you will be in a better position to help solve a dicey conflict between him and some neighborhood teens. If you have already established a relationship with your school committee representative, she might be more willing to respond to your opinions about special education funding.

## ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS IN A CRISIS

It is not impossible to establish relationships during a crisis, and often a crisis can bring people together. While it may seem unusual, make the most of your organization's crises. Call for help and people will rise to the call. You can build relationships when you are in need, because people often want to help.

## HOW DO YOU BUILD RELATIONSHIPS? AN 11-STEP PROGRAM

Here are some tips for getting your relationships off the ground. Some of these ideas we learned in the first grade but, as adults, we sometimes forget.

Build relationships one at a time. Fortunately, or unfortunately, there are no short cuts. Sending out a newsletter helps you keep in touch with lots of folks, but it's no substitute for getting to know a real person.

Be friendly and make a connection. This may seem self-evident, but a friendly word or smile can make someone's day. Try to find something in common: all of us want to have close connections with our fellow humans.

Ask people questions. People love to talk about themselves and about what they think. If you ask people about themselves and then take the time to listen attentively, they can become your fast friend.

Tell people about yourself. People won't trust you unless you are willing to trust them. Tell them what you genuinely care about and what you think.

Go places and do things. When asked why he robbed banks, the robber replied, "Because that's where the money is." If you want to make friends, you have to go where the people are: picnics, conferences, events, fundraisers, parties, playgrounds, bowling alleys, little league games, bake sales, etc..

Accept people the way they are. You don't have to agree with them all the time in order to form a relationship with them. No one likes to be judged.

Assume other people want to form relationships, too. Underneath the crabbiest looking person is often a lonely soul hoping someone will make a crack in their shell.

Overcome your fear of rejection. Most of us suffer from a fear of rejection, and there's only one thing to do about that: get over it. If you want to form relationships, plan on being rejected some of the time. You will be richly rewarded the rest of the time with the new relationships you have made.

Be persistent. People are often shy and suspicious. It takes a while to win trust. You can almost always form a relationship if you stick with it.

Invite people to get involved. People want to become part of something bigger than themselves. Many people are looking for an opportunity to meet other people who share common goals. At the worst, people will be flattered that you invited them to join.

Enjoy people. If you genuinely enjoy people, others will be attracted to your attitude. People will more likely want to be around you.

## HOW DO YOU BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS THAN YOUR OWN?

Here are some common-sense guidelines:

Learn about the person's culture. Any effort will go a long way in showing that you care enough to find out about the reality of another person's life.

Put yourself at the center of another person's culture. Especially if you are getting to know someone who is not a part of majority culture, try going to their cultural events where you are the minority. If you are willing to take risks and put yourself in a situation in which you might feel uncomfortable, people will be more inclined to want to get to know you.

Take a stand against the person's oppression. Actions speak louder than words. People who experience oppression need allies to speak out against injustice. Strong relationships are forged when people act courageously on behalf of each other.

It's okay to make mistakes. You may have to make mistakes as you build relationships with people who have different cultural backgrounds than your own, but people are generally forgiving,

especially if your intentions are good. Remember, hang in there even if you feel rejected.

## HOW DO YOU BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE WHO HOLD POSITIONS OF POLITICAL POWER?

Here are some guidelines for forming relationships with elected officials, business leaders, and heads of large organizations.

Don't be intimidated. People who hold titles or positions of political power are humans, too. They like to form relationships just like everyone else does.

Listen and withhold judgment. People with titles rarely get a chance to be listened to. They rarely get a chance to think through an issue without someone pressuring them to vote one way or another. One way to befriend such a person is to take the time to listen to them. See what you can offer them, not just in a political context but as a sympathetic human being.

## HOW DO YOU SUSTAIN RELATIONSHIPS?

Okay, now you've built some relationships. Relationships, like any other living thing, need care to keep them alive and healthy. So what do you do with them to keep them going?

Pay attention to people. Check in with people when you need to. This may take only a few minutes a week, but those few minutes can make the difference in helping your friend or co-worker remember the importance of the work you are doing together.

Communicate openly. People need to communicate. It's a good idea to set aside some time just to talk about the way things are going. When people don't have a chance to talk about important issues, misunderstandings can occur, and tensions often build up. Communication is a discipline that must be practiced regularly; it's like taking vitamins or doing push-ups.

Appreciate each other. Everyone needs to be appreciated in order to keep relationships going. If you notice that someone did a stellar job of collecting the necessary data for the committee, say so. If you enjoy working with someone, let them know. We are all human beings and appreciation helps us thrive.



Extend yourself. Go a little out of your way, at least occasionally. If your co-worker needs to spend some extra time with his daughter, you might tell him go home early and you'll finish up the grant proposal.

Volunteer to do some work for their organization (if they are not already in yours). If you lend them a hand, they are likely to think well of you and give something back in return.

Challenge each other to do better. We all need a buddy to help us stretch ourselves beyond what we think we can do. We can also build stronger relationships by challenging our work partners to take on bigger challenges.

Back each other when things get tough. Loyalty is essential to keeping relationships healthy. We may not agree with a co-worker or friend, but we can stand by him or her when they are in a jam.

## WHEN RELATIONSHIPS GET MESSY

Many relationships get messy sooner or later and that's not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, sometimes people need a good fight or a clearing of the air in order to get a relationship back on track. A conflict doesn't mean the relationship has to come to an end.

Remember: we often fight with the people we care about the most and with whom we share our greatest hopes.

Here are some ideas that might come in handy when things get hard:

Take time to listen to each other. This is not always easy. Each person should take time some time to listen without interrupting, while the other person talks.

Put yourself in the other person's shoes. Everyone in a conflict has distinctly different views of a situation. In the thick of a fight, people are usually convinced they are absolutely right. Try to see why the other person sees things the way they do. Just your attempt to do so will help the other person see that you are trying.

Look at what is true about what the other person is saying. See if you can correct the situation. If you need to apologize, go ahead. It may feel horrible, but an apology can often help a relationship get back on the right track.

Separate emotions from reality. Everyone has emotions that surface intermittently. People often say things they don't mean when they are in the middle of an emotional upset. Allow time and space for people to feel their emotions before you try to work things out.

Continue to appreciate and respect each other. Even though it may be difficult, focus on the positive aspects of the relationship. If you model appreciation, the other person will often follow.

Speak from your heart. As you try to unravel the difficulty, keep focused on what you and the other person care about most: the goals of the project, each other, the community, etc.

Don't give up your principles. Don't sacrifice what you believe in just to make a relationship work. If you give up on your principles, you won't be effective, and the relationship won't work anyway.

Hang in there when things get hard. You can take some breathing room but try not to give up on the relationship altogether. When things are the toughest, there are important lessons to be learned. It's best to keep a relationship that you've invested your time and caring into?

You can act independently to improve any relationship. Even if the other person or group of people is acting rotten, you can act in a way that is positive, respectful, constructive, and thoughtful. This may surprise people, and they may follow your lead.

Is all this easier said than done? Yes. Managing relationships may be hard, but it is not impossible. Think of yourself as an explorer, charting your course through the mysterious and murky waters of relationships. Treasure lies ahead!

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADVERSARIES

Yes, you can even have relationships with the people who disagree with you and who may even be working against you and the goals of your organization. You can use the same guidelines listed in the "When relationships get messy" section above, with these additions:

You can disagree and still build relationships with individuals who are working against your goals. If you do so, members of the other camp will begin to see you as human rather than viewing you as the enemy. In turn you will get a picture of their humanity as well. You might try inviting someone from the "other" camp to lunch and find out what you have in common.

You can set up a dialogue group to hear why adversaries view the issues the way they do. You can hire a neutral facilitator to come in and lead a discussion about the areas of disagreement. With a skilled facilitator, people may start to understand the values and caring that others bring to their opinions and find areas of common interest.

## IN SUMMARY

Building and sustaining relationships are at the heart of organizing communities. The strength of community lies in the strength of the connections that we have with each other. With strong connections, people have the power to make real change. Building these connections takes time; but it is worth it.

Relationships are often the source of our greatest joys and greatest challenges. Understanding relationships is no simple task. People are so unique and complex that there is no easy formula.

Central to almost every religion is the idea that we should treat our neighbors the way we would like to be treated. If you keep that in mind, you will most likely succeed in building relationships that you can depend on.

Whether you are a "leader" or a follower, you have the ability to build a community of friends, colleagues, associates, allies, partners, and buddies around you. Together, there is no telling what you can do.

"Teamwork is connected independence".--

David Cottrell

"Even the Lone Ranger didn't do it alone."--

Harvey MacKay

"Personal relationships are the fertile soil from which all advancement, all success, all achievement in real life grows."--Ben Stein



"When nobody around you seems to measure up, it's time to check your yardstick."--Bill Lemley

"You will become like the five people you associate with the most. This can be either a blessing or a curse."--Billy Cox

It is surprising how much you can accomplish  
if you don't care who gets the credit."--

Abraham Lincoln

"One of the secrets of a long and fruitful life is to forgive everybody everything every night before going to bed."--Bernard Baruch

"The golden rule is of no use whatsoever  
unless you realize that it is your move."--  
Frank Crane

"Nice guys may appear to finish last, but usually they are running in a different race."--

Ken Blanchard

"There is no exercise better for the heart than reaching down and lifting people up."--John  
Andres Holmes

"I believe that you can get everything in life you want if you will just help enough other people get what they want."--Zig Ziglar



The Beginning.....