



Reach your potential

The Importance of Friendships

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Have you ever heard the cynical question of “who needs friends”? The simple answer is we all need friends. I am not just talking about fun friends either. We need deep friendships in order to have overall health. In the pursuit of living a well-balanced life, we try to make sure that we cover all the domains of life like physical, mental, family, work, emotional, recreational, spiritual and social. Deep, close friendships builds confidence, reduces stress, provides a sense of belonging, helps cope with life traumas and enhances our feeling of self-worth. Friendships are important.

Research indicates that Americans are friendly, but lonely. How can that be? It is because we have lots of connections and acquaintances, but not a lot of emotional connection with people where there is unconditional love acceptance, trust and deep care. The data shows that 1 person in 10 has no one that they can call a close friend. In the event of a crisis or emergency, we would all be reluctant to call an acquaintance, but we would feel the freedom to call a close friend. So yes, friendships are important.

With that said, let’s take a look at the levels of relationships. It is important to have people at each level because every level has a purpose. Here they are:

- **Strangers** – This is the lowest level of relationships. These are people whom you see at the grocery store, the mall and other public places. You know their faces but not necessarily their names. Sometimes you may even know their names and probably have said hi and even had shallow conversations. These are the people whom you might say, “I know of you”.
- **Acquaintances** – This is the next level. These individuals are more than just strangers. You probably have had some conversations with them at the soccer field as your kids are playing soccer. You have occasional contact with them and you have very general knowledge about them. Your conversations are comfortable but not very deep. The issues that you talk about may be about sports, school, your jobs and other general topics. These are the people whom you would say, “I know you”.
- **Casual Friends** – These are people who share common interests and activities with you. You get together with them more frequently than you do with acquaintances. Getting together with these friends are often planned and intentional because you share common interests like baseball, reading certain types of books, traveling, enjoying certain types of food, music and so many other things. What connects you are the common interests and the fact that you really

like each other, but there is no serious emotional connection. These are the people whom you would say, “I like you”.

- **Close Friends** – Most people never get this far. This level of friendship shares more than common interests, but similar values, ideals and worldviews. There is a mutual interest in each other as it pertains to life goals. There is an emotional connection and a sense of trust. You don’t just talk about surface issues of life but deep and even personal issues of life. There is transparency and authenticity. These are the people whom you would say, “I understand you”.
- **Intimate Friends** – This is the deepest level of friendship. If you have 1-3 friends in this category, not only are you unusual, but you are blessed. Not only is there a deep emotional connection, but there is a commitment to each other. There is a commitment to each other’s growth and development. These are the few people whom you would say, “I connect with you”.

My goal in writing this article is to encourage you to be proactive in pursuing other people. If you have casual friends, think of what you can do to elevate them to close friends. Who is an acquaintance whom you feel could be a deeper friend? Do you have a close friend who needs to become an intimate friend. Having deep and meaningful friendships require time, authenticity and trust. Often it requires a risk to open yourself up to people, but I can tell you by personal experience that the benefits are worth the risk.