

Friends For Success

Brought to you by Patric Chan
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There's an old saying: *"Show me your friends and I'll tell you who you are."*

The meaning behind those words is powerful.

The truth is, the people you select as friends are a reflection of you, your preferences, and your values. So if 8 of your friends were to arrive at an event and all 8 were vegetarians who protested against people who wore fur, then I might assume that you're a vegetarian and an anti-fur-wearing advocate, too.

With this reasoning, we can then suggest that your friends can have an influence on how you are perceived. You need not set foot in the room, but if your friends deliver a speech or share a public comment, you can be assured that people will assume that your friend's statements and positions are your own as well.

You've probably heard that other famous phrase, "Guilty by association." The same premise applies. If you hang around someone who robs houses, even if you personally have never committed a robbery, the police or neighbors might look twice at you, just because you're friends with a small time crook.

Are these assumptions fair? Maybe not, but it does beg the question if a person doesn't share the beliefs and values of their friends, why call them friends anyway?

How do you feel about your friends and associates? Are you all just one happy family or do you have differences of opinion when it comes to core beliefs and attitudes?

Not everyone will share the same opinion on everything; that's just human nature and what makes us unique individuals.

You can certainly admire and respect those who have differing opinions from you -- no doubt there are plenty of meat-eaters who have vegetarian friends or family members and they still respect and love each other.

If you truly like your friends and associates, then you've built a solid relationship based on commonalities, experiences, and goodwill.

So ask yourself: Why do you spend time with the friends you do? What makes them so special?

Ultimately, we choose our friends because they fill a need in our lives.

Reflection Exercise:

Make a list of your friends and associates. What attracted you to these people?

What makes these people your friends?

What do you admire most about each one?

Do they have traits that you want to emulate yourself?

What would these people say about why you are their friend?

What Do You Have In Common?

It's time to reflect on your relationships and what brings you and your friends together:

- * Do they have similar business or career aspirations?
- * Do they support the same political party?
- * Do you share the same hobbies?
- * Do they have the same religious affiliation?
- * Do they have a similar sense of humor?

You're most often attracted to people who have a similar type personality. By searching out these similar type groups, you're more likely to find your "match."

Once you've determined where you share and differ on issues and perspectives, take note. Nothing could be more uncomfortable than having your friends criticize your position when you're sharing your perspective on an issue that's important to you.

Another reason to assess your common links, especially when it comes to business partners, is to determine whether or not your business is being served well. Business partners need to compliment each other's strengths and have the same business goals and vision.

Having differing opinions and values can cause the business to remain stagnant and unable to grow because of two competing plans.

Business partners who can't agree on the fundamentals cause confusion among everyone else - suppliers, staff, and customers. And once word of mouth hits, your reputation is at stake.

Finding your common goals prior to starting a business together can only benefit both partners.

How your friends present themselves to others will have a great impact on you. If they're rude, you'll be thought of as being rude or having poor taste for associating with these people.

If they present well to others, you'll be favorably looked upon as well.

Here are some questions you can ask yourself about your friends:

- * Are they respectful of other's opinions?
- * Are they articulate and convincing in their own opinions?
- * Do they speak positively about others?
- * Do they incorporate your perspective on issues?
- * Are they dismissive of other's opinions?
- * Do they have an "I'm always right" attitude?
- * Do they use curse words frequently?
- * Are they genuinely happy to meet others?

Envision yourself in various types of situations, including business and social settings. What type of person would you like to meet? While cursing at a college bar on a Friday night might be appropriate, using that same language at a business meeting will make people pause.

If there's something about your group of friends that you find consistently irritating, you have to question, "Why are they my friends to begin with?"

Remember, you choose your friends to fill a void in your own life. Generally, you should choose friends who bring something positive into your life, rather than lots of negativity.

If a friend has other qualities you admire and the friendship is worth saving, talk candidly with them. Don't attack them or place judgement for the offending behavior. Simply ask if they realize what they're doing and how it comes across to others.

- * It's often easier to hear these criticisms from a friend rather than a stranger who doesn't care about your feelings.

Although having open communication between friends is important, be certain that what annoys you is a valid criticism and not just your opinion. Complaining about how your friend flips her long hair is quite a bit different from discussing how cursing in front of customers hurts business.

Discuss the topic calmly and see if the annoying behavior can be curbed or eliminated.

Some troublesome traits which are valid to discuss include:

- * Gossip
- * Being fake around others
- * Poking fun about personal issues
- * Never saying “no” – just agreeing to everything

Remember that no one is perfect. Just as you might find something frustrating about a friend, others will find something annoying about you, too!

If a friend points out something about you that irritates them, welcome the chance to talk about it, ask for their advice on eliminating the behavior, and thank them for their honesty. It's much better to be upfront than letting these frustrations fester inside.

Do They Have Traits I'd Like To Have Some Day?

If this person has strong qualities you'd like to have one day, you need to socialize more with them so those qualities might be imparted to you. We can learn so much by closely watching and listening to the people we admire.

- * Think of how small children often imitate their own parents' words (both good and bad!) just from watching and listening.

There are always lessons to learn and well-respected friends or mentors will be honest with you and help you learn from their own experience.

Many small business owners seek out business coaches to advise them on ways to improve or grow their businesses. These business coaches are generally successful business owners themselves and can share the wisdom of their own experiences to the student.

Likewise, in time, the student just might become a mentor to someone else who is new to the business world.

You can learn certain qualities by following another's example. For instance, if you're deathly afraid of speaking in groups, bring along an outgoing friend to a networking meeting and watch how this friend handles himself.

- * Before and after the meeting, ask your friend for some feedback on how to be more outgoing or present yourself professionally, yet comfortably.

It can be quite nerve wracking to try something new or be out of your comfort zone, but the more you practice this new trait, the more comfortable you'll become in similar situations.

Reflection Exercise:

Examine your own strengths and weaknesses honestly. What are your best qualities? What do you struggle with in social or business situations?

Find a friend or mentor who can coach you to be better equipped in difficult situations.

Roll play with a trusted friend or mentor. The more you practice, the more you'll be at ease.

Face your fears by putting yourself in the situations you find most uncomfortable.

Congratulate yourself for facing one of your fears! It may not have gone as smoothly as you might have liked, but you tried something new. It can only get better from here!

Who is benefitting from this relationship?

An important question to ask yourself is, "Who is benefitting from our friendship?" Good, solid relationships are always two-way streets, with both people giving and taking.

There will be times when you need your friend more than ever, or vice versa, and that's okay! It's not that it has to be completely even every time you interact with the friend, but rather overall, there should be equality in the relationship.

People who don't work at strengthening the relationship can weaken it.

Needy people who find it difficult to think for themselves can place a drain on a friendship very quickly. If you see the caller id and dread picking up the phone because you know you'll hear stories of woe, question if this is a healthy relationship that you want to salvage.

Likewise, question those people who don't make any effort at staying in contact and who seem to disappear off the face of the earth.

If you're always the one calling them or you feel like you're not getting the whole truth when you speak to each other, think about what benefit this friendship is serving you. Relationships naturally change over time; decide if this one is worth saving.

Presumably if you're friends with someone, you both have entered into the friendship freely and you enjoy each other's company. It's a bit different in a business environment where you probably didn't have any say in who's hired to work with you.

Most people who work together are able to develop a respectful work relationship, but you'll still find those who like to spark drama. You might discover a worker who slacks off and expects others to do his job for him. Or another who wants to take credit for other people's work.

When faced with these situations, think about ways to salvage your work relationship so you're not being taken advantage of and limit your contact with this person.

Conclusion...

Who you determine as your core group of friends is an important decision to make, because who you associate with reflects directly on you.

Unlike family, friends can be chosen. Sometimes we're too nice to end a friendship when the trust or admiration is lost. Yet other times we can see the unique qualities that attracted us to this person in the first place and decide to save the friendship or to re-establish the boundaries.

Your image is your brand and identity. How others see you professionally and personally is influenced by the friends you keep.

Choose carefully the people you call your friends – they could be with you a while.

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