

Reviving Old Friendships

One way to increase your social network is to rebuild friendships from the past. Do you have any friendships that have lapsed? List here any old friends you haven't seen for a while.

These are people who used to be in your social network but have become a less important part of it recently. Perhaps you could bring them back in.

There are good reasons to do this. Imagine that you were to go out on the street and randomly select 100 people to interview. Your mission, at the end of the day, would be to say how many of these people seemed like great friendship candidates: you enjoyed their company, you had a lot in common, they seemed to like you, and you liked them. What's your guess? How many of the 100 would you like to draw into your social network?

Some people say none, some say 1%, some 5%, some 10%. Not a lot. And do you mean that all the others are evil, unlikable, dull people? No. It's just that you wouldn't have much in common with them, so there wouldn't be much of a basis for a long-lasting friendship.

What's the point? The people who have been in your inner circles and drifted away are *pre-screened*. They are in that 1% or 5% or 10%. These people are rare. Don't let them get away too easily. You have at least four reasons to keep them:

1. **Compatibility.** Your personal styles mesh to at least some degree (probably not perfectly, but we're giving up on perfection, remember?).
2. **Intimacy.** It takes a while to get to know new people. The intimacy with old friends is already there.
3. **History.** You have a shared past with old friends that gives you a basis for conversation and understanding.
4. **Common interests.** You probably shared interests in certain activities before – perhaps you can pursue them together again.

Maybe something holds you back. There are barriers to reconnecting with old friends who have drifted out of your life. Many of these barriers can be overcome. Consider (and place a checkmark beside any that apply in your own case):

- _____ **Distance.** Perhaps your friend has moved away, or perhaps you were the one who moved. Letters, phone calls, and email can still be rewarding ways of interacting with these individuals, and you can make a point of visiting if and when you're in the same community. It's a poor idea to have everyone in your social network live far away. But it's just fine to have *some* of them at a distance, and to keep in touch.
- _____ **Disagreements.** Some relationships end due to arguments. If this is true for you, think about what the friendship meant to you when it was going well. Then compare this with how important the issue was. You may discover that the disagreement wasn't worth losing the relationship over. Old disagreements, even major ones, can lose their heat over time.
- _____ **Insecurity.** Reconnecting with old friends can raise a lot of doubts about yourself. Do they like you? Did they ever like you? Did they drift away because they weren't interested? Will you be imposing yourself on them? The only way you will really know the answer is by contacting them to see. What's the worst thing that could happen? You lose the relationship. What happens if you don't call? You lose the relationship. Maybe it's worth the gamble, and the price of staring down your own feelings of inadequacy.
- _____ **Abandonment.** Some friends drift away when you go through a difficult time in your life. It can be tempting to assume that they are inconsiderate, or don't care. But often this drifting happens because the person having the problem stopped accepting invitations or returning phone calls. The friend can mistakenly assume that *you* don't care about *them*, and give up on the friendship. There's only one way to know whether this has happened: talk to them and see. Many people are surprised when they find out why the other person *really* stopped calling. *"Abandoned you? I thought you abandoned me!"*
- _____ **Insensitivity.** It can be tempting to let go of people who show insensitivity toward a major crisis in your life (such as depression). Unfortunately, this may account for almost everyone you know! It can help to try a bit of education with them using books and pamphlets. Eventually, though, it is usually worthwhile to keep them in your life and accept that they will never completely understand the issue. How well would *you* have understood depression if you hadn't been through it?

It takes courage to call up an old friend but it is usually worth the effort. Take a glance back at your list of friends you haven't seen in a while. Are there one or two people you would like to contact? Who are they?
