



Facets of Friendship (May/June 2009)

Preamble & Request

Having had "guest" writers on this page so far this year, I feel it is my turn to write to you again. I do struggle a little with what to share. There is always plenty spinning in my head, it's just that as I believe in writing from experience, I need to check out which perspectives I am prepared to share with the world. OK - how about we agree that this time you will also send ME at note, that shares some of *your* thinking on this topic? That way it's more of a two-way share. A deal? Great! I'm looking forward to my inbox filling with messages (..and don't think "I won't bother ... I'll let others do it." If everyone takes that approach, then guess how many emails I'll get - yep - none!) So ...preamble now over, let's move on to your message for May/June.

The Radar Screen

Friendships are interesting things, and provide me with much learning, on top of all the fun, support, alternative perspectives, and wonderful opportunities to be part of the lives of others. I found myself reflecting this week on just how



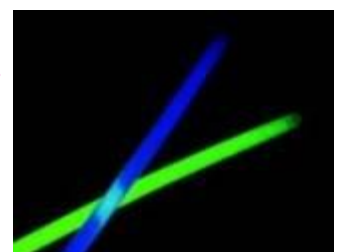
fortunate I am to have so many great people in my life...and they keep arriving ..it's amazing! Being predominantly introverted in my personality type, the amount of friendships I give time and energy to is surprisingly high. However it is less surprising perhaps to know that I mostly spend time with my friends on a one to one basis, rather than in groups. This allows for two things:

1. I have a very wide range of friends, who don't need to get along with each other
2. We have *meaningful* conversations about what is going on in our lives, because they are private, trusting conversations.

I find I am mostly very open, letting people be who they are, very tolerant, live and let live, accepting of differences, diversity of styles and approaches. I also notice that I can have high expectations of my friends, especially those closest to me. Sometimes these expectations are unexpressed, and I would probably be happier at times if I were always to exercise unconditional friendship. I am working on that. A few years ago a friend was telling me about a pal of hers being really horrible to her on quite a lot of occasions. I asked why she still made time for that person in her life. She hadn't actually considered that sometimes you need to move on from a friendship; to let go. So she was tolerating years of bad behaviour towards her. We both scribbled down a "radar screen" of our friendships in that moment. Who was "close in" - our best friend? Who was in the next hoop, and the one after that? We drew all our circles of friendship and it was quite revealing. How much did we care about who was where on our current radar screen? Which friends did most of the initiating with us? Which friends did we do most of the initiating with? Which relationships felt most equal? Which relationships drained us? Which relationships energised us? We came to the conclusion that it is OK to let certain friendships phase off the radar screen; some friendships aren't meant to be forever. We also decided to be more proactive in giving life to friendships we *do* really care about, and may not have been *behaving* like we do.

Chemistry

For much of my life my friendships have been same-sex ones, i.e. with women. I didn't have any male friends when growing up. I'm not quite sure why this is, though having buried my nose in romantic novels from the age of 11, maybe guys were potential romance material only. I was certainly too shy to approach any! As the years progressed, I had male colleagues at



work - people I liked and connected with on a work basis, but no close friends who were males, baring my husband, which of course, is a different relationship. Since I working as a coach, I feel completely different about having friendships with males. The coaching relationship creates such a powerful level of openness that it has helped me learn about so many different issues and perspectives. I've learnt that, mostly, we're not so different really...even males and females! The spin-off gift that coaching has brought me is that I now have great male friends, as well as female friends. And when I say that, I want to be clear that these friends are not my coaching clients (that wouldn't work within the ethics of the coaching relationship), but rather that understanding males I have coached has helped me connect with and build friendships with other guys. Sometimes, when there is a "chemistry" there, things can become tricky and confusing with friendships. Having had access to hundreds of relationship stories over the years, it seems that the options in these circumstances are:

1. run away from it (exit one potentially great friendship)
2. play it out (exit your integrity, if you are already in a committed relationship, and maybe the demise of your committed relationship)

.....and the last option, in my experience, far less used is

3. manage yourself within it, so you can keep the friendship and your integrity/authenticity ... but how? Reflecting on conversations with coaching clients and friends, I find most people go for options 1 or 2. I guess the statistics on divorce these days would indicate that option two is really the most popular choice! But how many "sliding door" moments happen every day, where people walk away from a potential relationship that would change their life? There are no statistics available on that one. *Christina Baldwin*, in her book *"Life's Companion - Journal Writing as a Spiritual Quest"* suggests that sexual energy and spiritual energy often get confused due to our cultural training, and that we can shift our energy to different parts of our body, thereby taking responsibility for the interactions we have with others. She suggests that we need to take mutual responsibility for maintaining personal boundaries and developing an ethics of energy. Christina lists her own five commitments on what she intends to bring to new relationships on page 317 of her book. If you would like to hear about the 10 boundaries/commitments I have created in order to enjoy "safely connected" relationships with the opposite sex, drop me an email alison@gaincoaching.com We have a right to make our own definitions and have our own expectations of any relationship. So does the other person. Sometimes we don't know what we want, and neither do they. But the sooner we can together define the relationship, the sooner we can each decide an appropriate course of conduct for ourselves. Honesty and directness are always the best policy.

Let it Flow

So how are YOUR friendships shaping up? Who is on your radar screen, and what do you notice about how your friendships are evolving?

In her book *"The Language of Letting Go"* *Melody Beattie* shares many helpful reflections on friendships and relationships. It was difficult to choose a quote to leave you with, as there are so many powerful ones in this book, but here goes ..

"Like the tide ebbs and flows, so do the cycles in relationships. We have periods of closeness and periods of distance. We have times of coming together and times of separating to work on individual issues. We have times of joy and times of anger. Sometimes, the dimensions of relationships change as we go through changes. Sometimes, life brings us new friends or a new loved one to teach us the next lesson. That doesn't mean the old friend disappears forever. It means we have entered a new cycle. We do not have to control the course of our relationships, whether these be friendships or love relationships. Let it flow. Be open to the cycles. Love will not disappear. The bond between friends will not sever. Things do not remain the same forever, especially when we are growing and changing at such a pace. Trust the flow. Take care of yourself, but be willing to let people go. Hanging on to them too tightly will make them



disappear."

This note is sent with a smile, a big thank you and hug for all my friends, and some curiosity about who is heading my way next...

Looking forward to hearing back from you. With warm wishes until next time,

Alison

write to me at alison@gaincoaching.com

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