



## Facets of Friendship Part 2 - Chemistry (August 2009)

Hello, and welcome to your message page. This is the second article on friendships, and this month the focus is on friendships with the opposite sex. As usual, I'm interested to hear your perspectives, so do drop me a note (email address below).

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 was, though having buried my nose in romantic novels from the age of 11, maybe I saw guys as potential romance material only. I was certainly too shy to approach any and find out!

Once I was old enough to go to work and earn a living, I had male colleagues whom I liked and connected with on a work basis, but no close male friends. Except for my husband, which of course is a different relationship.

Since I began 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 to learn about so many different issues and perspectives. I have learnt that, mostly, people are not so different really ... even males and females!

The unexpected gift that coaching has brought me is that I now have great male 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 the understanding of men I have gained through coaching has helped me connect and build friendships with other males.

Having heard hundreds of relationship stories over the years, I know that sometimes, when there is a "chemistry" there it can make managing the friendship tricky and confusing.

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 and/or your friend are already in a committed relationship)
3. manage yourself within it, so you can keep the friendship, with your integrity and authenticity intact ... but how?



As I reflect on conversations with coaching clients and friends, I find most people go for either option 1 or option 2. I guess the statistics on divorce these days would indicate that option two is a popular choice. On the other hand, who knows how many "sliding door" moments happen each day, where people walk away from a potential relationship that would change their lives? 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. She recommends that we take mutual responsibility for maintaining personal boundaries and developing an "ethics of energy". We do this by shifting the energy to different parts of our body, thereby taking

responsibility for the interactions we have with others. This sounds fascinating, and possibly requires a high level of spiritual and self-awareness. Yet the shift from an initially platonic friendship to a romantic connection does not happen by accident. It requires a choice in response to an attraction. Granted, we have no control over the attraction or our initial reaction to it. But thereafter we choose one response after another, and for those choices we are accountable. We always have the power to make them responsibly and consciously, which means recognising and relating to our feelings rather than being possessed by them. Attraction simply happens, but love is a process that requires our participation.

Then there is the question of "are we on the same page with this friendship"? Fondness can be mistaken for attraction, genuine care for someone you consider a friend can be mistaken for something more intimate. Trust flourishes with self-disclosure and truth-telling. Some people are more comfortable with light relationships or friendships. They are driven not by fear of intimacy but by truthful recognition that intimacy is not for them. No wonder confusion reigns at times!

We have the right to 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 jointly define the relationship, the sooner we can decide an appropriate course of conduct for ourselves within it. Honesty and directness are often the best policy.

Would you like to read the 10 boundaries/commitments I have created for myself, in order to enjoy "appropriately connected" friendships with the opposite sex? If so, drop me an email [alison@gaincoaching.com](mailto:alison@gaincoaching.com) and I will send them to you.

Finally as a close to this month's message for you, I'd like to share with you a truly wonderful book I have been reading on relationships. It is called "How to be an Adult in Relationships" by David Richo. Having read this book ... I know I still have some work to do, for sure!

Wishing you connected and clear friendships,



until next time,

**Alison**

write to me at [alison@gaincoaching.com](mailto:alison@gaincoaching.com)

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