

## Building Friendships as an Adult: Applying Business Principles to Friendship

Most people agree building friendships is an important goal throughout one's entire life span. In recent decades, scientific research has validated this importance and demonstrated that friendship helps people:

- ❖ **Manage Life's Stress:** Feeling lonely increases production of cortisol (the stress hormone) in your brain, which can lead to an increase in blood pressure and hormonal imbalances. Research also suggests that the nervous system actually registers social exclusion as physical pain.
- ❖ **Overcome Disease:** One study found that women without close friends were four times as likely to die from breast cancer as women who had 10 or more friends. Interestingly, proximity and the amount of contact with a friend did not have an impact. So, even those with a small number of friends who lived far away benefited from the relationships.
- ❖ **Protect Against Dementia:** People 75+ years-old who kept in contact with a variety of friends and relatives have a lower risk of developing dementia. Researchers suggest that juggling many relationships is a mental exercise that keeps brains "in tone."
- ❖ **Increase Length of Life:** Having good friends increases longevity even more than having close relationships with adult children and other family. In a particular study, those with the largest amount of close friends outlived those with the smallest amount by 22 percent.



Why then do so many adults find it difficult to make new friendships? Perhaps it is an issue of perspective. This article uses classic business principles as a means of strategically broadening and improving one's friend network. This metaphor can be especially helpful because it is hardworking professionals who often find it difficult to create new relationships.

### Establish Clear Personal Brand



Individuals, much like businesses, are more successful if they demonstrate a clear understanding of who they are and their purpose. What is the impression you want to portray to people? Do you want your brand to be witty, worldly, refined, granola, evangelistic, edgy, etc.? In addition to knowing and demonstrating your brand as an individual, you should also do so as a family. What do you want your family to stand for, and how will people visibly observe those values?

## Purposeful Outreach

Why do commission-based employees approach you rather than waiting for you to express interest? Because initiation of contact often results in purchase. Becoming an initiator makes you much more likely to successfully build friendships.

## Have Good Customer Service

It takes consistent effort to provide a positive experience to all those with whom you interact. Establishments like the Apple Store and Chick-Fil-A demand their employees portray a positive, helpful attitude. If you want people to become a loyal consumer of your brand, never respond with indifference but always with positivity. For example:

### Indifference:

“Some of us from Accounting are planning to go get lunch. Want to join?”

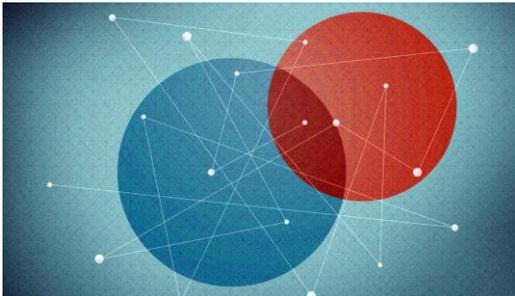
“Umm, I am really swamped today. I’ll join if I can finish some crucial work.”

### Positivity:

“Some of us from Accounting are planning to go get lunch. Want to join?”

“That sounds *really* fun! I have a huge pile of to-do’s, but I will try to knock those out ASAP so that I can join you guys.”

## Foot-in-the-Door Marketing



Company startups do not usually have immediate popularity. They often do marketing and outreach to a wide, generalized population when first launching the business, and then they refine their brand toward a more ideal population as the company grows. Connecting with someone – anyone – is a means of meeting other people, who can then introduce you to other people, and so on. Eventually, you will be able to be more selective about your close friends.

## Targeted Marketing

Targeted marketing allows you to emphasize your brand to a specific consumer. A friendship corollary is to place yourself in the places where there are the kinds of people you want to meet. If you are a new parent searching for people in a similar situation, places like baby gyms can help you connect with other adults. If you are a dog owner, dog parks can be an easy venue for connecting with people because talking about dogs is a non-threatening, fun conversation topic that can reveal a great deal about someone’s life.

## Location, Location, Location

Why is this axiom so important? Because the easier it is for consumers to access a business, the more likely they are to shop there. In addition to initiating contact, propose an accessible activity to your potential friend that makes it easy for people to participate as they feel comfortable, such as a backyard BBQ or public festival.

## Summary

Social science research shows that four factors most affect the probability of making an acquaintance and building friendship:

- ❖ **Proximity:** We are more likely to get to know somebody with whom we have regular contact.
- ❖ **Reciprocity:** We like people who like us.
- ❖ **Similarity:** We like people who share our values and beliefs.
- ❖ **Complementarity:** We are attracted to people whose skills and abilities are complementary to our own. Complementary means different but compatible and mutually beneficial, like people with different skills who work together for a common purpose.

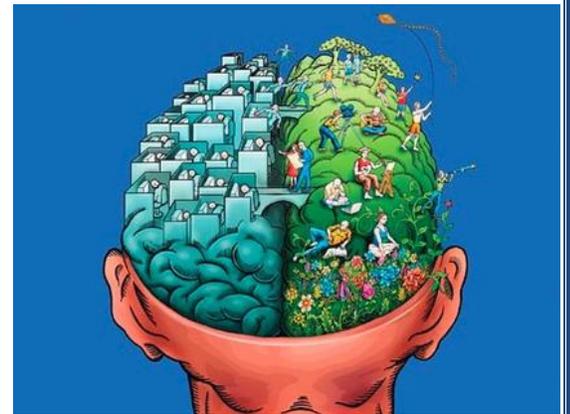
It is difficult to create new friendships, especially in the busy professional world and as a parent. If expanding your friendship base is important to you, acting on these principles will help you to do so.

## More Supporting Information

If your desire for friendship is not enough for you to integrate these business practices into your social life, consider what scientific research says about friendship.

Research by Robin Dunbar, an evolutionary psychologist at the University of Oxford, found that the human mind is limited in regards to friendships. Known as “Dunbar’s Number,” it seems that the average person’s brain has the cognitive capacity to juggle 150 stable social relationships.

These are relationships in which an individual knows who each person is and how each person relates to every other person. “Dunbar’s number” states the number of people one knows and keeps social contact with, and it does not include the number of people known personally with a ceased social relationship, nor people just generally known with a lack of persistent social relationship.



Dunbar’s research is made evident through contemporary social media platforms. The average number of Facebook friends is 130, according to the social-networking site, although many have thousands of associates online.

Despite having so many stable relationships, research by a Cornell University professor, Matthew Brashears, indicates that most adults have only **two people they consider to be close friends**. Regardless of the increasing popularity of social-networking sites, the “friends” orbiting at the farthest reaches of your digital galaxy aren’t the ones that matter when it comes to your health and happiness.

The vital friendships – the pals you hug and laugh and lament with – are the ones who have the greatest impact on your health and happiness. According to the research, individuals need between three and five of them for optimal wellbeing.

Ralph Waldo Emerson may have offered the best advice when it comes to making and keeping close pals: “The only way to have a friend is to be one.”

## Make a Business Plan

### WHO ↔ WHAT ↔ WHERE & WHEN

**Step 1 – Goals:** Determine what social goals are relevant to your life. Do you need to build a completely new social network, or are you trying to improve your current friend network? Different goals will require a different process through the rest of the steps.

**Step 2 – Who:** List specific individuals with whom you hope to improve your friendships. You can also list specific vocations, values, or characteristics that are attractive to you in a friend.

**Step 3 – What:** List activities that you and your friends might find interesting. You may also list venues where you want to connect with a specific kind of person.

**Step 4 – Where & When:** If you know with whom you want to connect and what activity to do with them, it is easy to determine the venue. If you know the venue and what activity to do, you will have the opportunity to meet with new people.

POSSIBLE SOCIAL GOALS
<input type="checkbox"/> Make New Friends in a New Place
<input type="checkbox"/> Expand Friend Network
<input type="checkbox"/> Increase Frequency of Meetups
<input type="checkbox"/> Increase Fun & Fulfillment of Meetups
<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____

WHO	
<b>CURRENT FRIENDS</b>	1. _____
	2. _____
	3. _____
	4. _____
<b>SPECIFIC TRAITS</b>	1. _____
	2. _____
	3. _____
	4. _____

WHAT	
<b>YOUR INTERESTS</b>	1. _____
	2. _____
	3. _____
	4. _____
<b>OTHERS' INTERESTS</b>	1. _____
	2. _____
	3. _____
	4. _____

WHERE & WHEN	
<b>FAMILIAR VENUES</b>	1. _____
	2. _____
	3. _____
	4. _____
<b>UNFAMILIAR VENUES</b>	1. _____
	2. _____
	3. _____
	4. _____

