

A ROADMAP TO
RELATIONSHIPS

*how to navigate your social world and
build healthy connections*

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A Roadmap To Relationships

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Thank you. I hope you enjoy this e-book and get a lot of value out of it.

Contents

Introduction.....6

Your Relationship With Yourself 15

Tools of Communication: Verbal41

Tools of Communication: Non-Verbal.....54

Characteristics of Positive Relationships79

Learning From Role Models 108

Navigating Your Social World..... 120

Conclusion 138

Resources141

INTRODUCTION

Whether we are at home, at work, at a party, at a store, or just anywhere in public, we are constantly interacting with people, creating different types of connections – small and large, healthy and unhealthy.

We've evolved to become a very social species. Not many of us can live in today's world without having to build relationships with the people we see on a daily basis.

It started with our ancestors, who depended on building tribes to increase their likelihood of survival. They worked together to hunt and gather food, build shelter, mate, take care of their young, and protect members of their tribe from dangerous predators.

And due to this long evolutionary history, we still have instinctual needs today to socialize and belong to a "tribe" of some sort. It is very much hard-wired into our brains.

Today, however, our social networks have developed into a complex arrangement of families, businesses, markets, towns, cities, governments, and even global organizations.

And with the help of technology, especially improved means of transportation (cars, boats, planes) and communication (cellphones, internet, TV), we are - in a very real sense - all becoming part of one

huge, diverse, and interconnected “tribe.”

We have more relationships to juggle in our lives than any other time in our history. It is therefore crucially important that we learn to navigate through these various relationships as effectively as possible, whether they be related to business, family, romantic, friendship, or just one time acquaintances.

And without this sense of belonging, without healthy relationships, it can become very difficult to find happiness and success in life.

In many ways, our ability to survive and adapt to our world is still dependent on the relationships we build on a daily basis. Knowing the right people can get you a good or find you a date. Having friends can bring joy and emotional support. And having a family can give you a new sense of purpose and meaning to your life.

Today, we have become a highly developed social species, seemingly surpassing almost any other species on our planet.

A big part of it is due to our advanced language and communication skills, which has led to the passing down of knowledge from generation to generation, and, as an extension, science, technology, culture, art, religion, and tradition.

We each depend on social relationships in our lives to be happy and successful. Those who are extroverted may crave a bigger social circle or a higher frequency of social interactions than those who are introverted - but we ALL need some level of human connection to

live a fulfilling life.

The psychologist Abraham Maslow correctly identified in his 1943 paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" that, just like we have an instinctual need for food, water, sleep, and shelter to be satisfied with our lives, we have an instinctual need for relationships too, especially feelings of "love" and "belonging."

Maslow believed that every human being in some way wants to be loved and wants to feel like they belong with a group, community, and or something larger than just themselves.

Relationships create a deep down feeling of belonging, comfort, and security. It's good to know that we have support from family, friends, coworkers, and loved ones. And it's good to know that these people want us to be happy and successful.

The benefits of relationships come in many different forms. They provide us with joy, laughter, and entertainment, such as being able to play a friendly game with someone, or watch a movie together, or go out to a restaurant. And at the same time they also help give our lives new meaning, purpose, and appreciation.

Of course, relationships can also become a terrible burden and nuisance when they don't work out the way we want them to. That's why it's so important to read guides like this and understand the how relationships work and how to connect with people better on a daily basis.

Why “A Roadmap To Relationships”

I’ve wanted to write a guide on relationships for a long time now.

About 7 years ago I first started studying various aspects of communication, social skills, and psychology. I’ve used all of this knowledge to benefit my own social life over the course of those years – and it’s made me infinitely happier and more successful as a person than I would’ve been had I never learned this stuff.

And the things I know *now* about relationships aren’t anything I was taught by my teachers or parents. I had to willingly seek out this information and apply it to my own life to see what worked and what didn’t work.

That’s why I find it so important to share this information in an easy and digestible way, which hopefully anyone can read and benefit from (if they are willing to take the contents of this guide seriously and actively apply this stuff to their real world lives).

You see, before I embarked on this change, I had always been shy, awkward, and uncomfortable around people – even close friends and family.

I found it hard to connect with people. I found it hard to find dates and girlfriends. I found it hard to succeed at job interviews or get along with coworkers. I found it hard to participate in school and in other extracurricular activities. I even found it hard to just go out with friends and have a good time.

Suffice to say, I was miserable.

I tried to convince myself that relationships weren't important to me and that I could be happy all on my own. I was wrong.

I would try to escape from my vacant social life by playing videogames, surfing the internet, reading a book, writing music, or take long naps. These activities were rewarding, but they weren't enough to give me true happiness.

Like Maslow understood, I needed that human connection to be truly satisfied. That was an important piece of the puzzle that was missing in my life.

The few relationships that I did have were deteriorating. I became more and more alone and apathetic. Something had to change or my depression would get worse and my life would spiral out of control. I had to start building healthier relationships in my life.

Since then I've been very focused on learning what makes people tick, what makes relationships truly work, and how I can change my own beliefs and behaviors to build healthier and more constructive relationships. The truth is despite all of the progress I've already made, it's a never-ending process.

A Roadmap To Relationships is a guide that teaches you how to begin making these changes.

It focuses on general principles and advice that can be applied to any kind of relationship whether it's with a friend, family member,

coworker, loved one, enemy, or just a random acquaintance. It teaches you how to begin building a healthier social environment in your life, and in return leading a happier life as well.

I chose the title *A Roadmap To Relationship* because most of the principles in this book are to be taken as guidelines or signposts. This book isn't meant to give you a step-by-step breakdown of how to approach every single social interaction. Instead, it teaches you how to approach your relationships and navigate your social world in a way that best suits your personal values and needs.

How to Use this Guide

Everyone's social life is different. We're each attracted to different types of people for different reasons. And we each go about our relationships in ways we personally think are best.

In light of that, I don't want you to think anything in this guide is 100% what you need to do to be successful at your relationships. Instead, everything in this guide is a *suggestion* on something you can do to help improve your social life— and I only ask that you give them an honest consideration, because they are things that have generally been proven to work for many people (but certainly not everyone).

So as you apply this stuff to your everyday life, you're going to find some of it works and some of it doesn't, and that's perfectly normal.

All self-improvement requires some form of trial-and-error. You're going to need to try new and uncomfortable things, make mistakes, and probably get embarrassed or frustrated. It sounds painful, but remember it's part of the growing process.

Each section of this guide can be read independently; so don't be afraid to skip around a bit. Find something that is relevant to what's going on in your social life right now, and focus on working on that.

There's a lot of information throughout this guide, and that can get overwhelming if you try to consume it all too fast. Don't be afraid to take your time reading each section. And feel free to re-read anything if you think you haven't fully grasped it. To get the most out of this guide, be sure to reflect on the information and ask yourself how it may apply to your daily life. The more you get your mind thinking in new ways, the more it will translate into your speech and actions.

This guide is only a stepping-stone in getting you to build stronger relationships in the future. Simply reading the whole e-book won't make you a social wizard overnight, but it can be an excellent starting point in turning around your social life.

Breakdown of the Guide

Before we dive into the material, let me provide a quick breakdown of the types of things we will be covering.

Your Relationship With Yourself – Advice and tips on how to first build a positive and healthy relationship with your own self, including how to build confidence, honesty, forgiveness, love, and gratitude in your personal life.

Tools of Communication Pt. 1 – Verbal Communication – How we use language and words in daily interactions as our primary tool to communicate with others. Learn how to have fun, meaningful, and effortless conversations with others. This will be your first step in building healthy connections with others.

Tools of Communication Pt. 2 – Nonverbal Communication – How non-verbal communication makes up a large portion of what we communicate, and is often just as important as the words we choose to use. This type of communication includes our posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, use of touch, and other forms of communication that aren't based on language or words.

Characteristics of Positive Relationships – The key characteristics that embody all positive relationships, whether with family, friends, coworkers, loved ones, or just random acquaintances. Learn about the importance of approaching all of your relationship with an attitude of reciprocity, empathy, equality, fun, kindness, respect, authenticity, love, and interconnectedness. These are the building blocks of all flourishing relationships.

Learning from Role Models – Identify role models in your lives, then use them as a learning resource to improve various aspects of your

relationships. By observing and learning from our role models, we can change the ways we think and act about our relationships.

Navigating Your Social World – This section covers the broader principles that govern our daily relationships. I emphasize the wisdom that our relationships are always changing, and how we can identify the healthy relationships in our lives vs. the toxic and unhealthy ones.

Resources – Additional resources you can use as a supplement to all of the advice in this e-book. Includes “100 Affirmations for Self Improvement” and “50 Acts of Kindness.” I also share a list of 30+ videos and lectures from psychologists, sociologists, and other experts on social psychology and relationships.

Let's Get Started!

We're now ready to get started! Remember to be patient with yourself and recognize that this is a long-term process of improvement. You will not turn your social life around over night, but with time and effort you can begin to make significant changes.

YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOURSELF

Every single relationship we build in this world centers on our relationship with one person: our own self. How we see ourselves affects how we act toward others, and that's the driving force behind the relationships we make on a daily basis.

If you view yourself as a person who is weak or angry or hateful or shy, then you are more likely to act in those ways.

You think "this is just who I am" and you continue to treat people in the same ways you always have, because that's all you've ever known about yourself.

As a result, other people see you exactly as you see yourself.

They pick up on your self-inflicted feelings of weakness, anger, or hatred based on how you act, and they too begin to believe that you are a weak, angry, or hateful person.

In this way, our beliefs create a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, in which the thoughts we have about ourselves lead us to act in ways that re-affirm our current beliefs about who we really are as a person.

But these beliefs aren't set in stone. They can seem permanent, but that's only because we choose to hold onto them.

In truth, we can change how we perceive ourselves, and thereby

change the kind of relationship we have with ourselves, as well as the relationships we have with others.

With practice, individuals can actively cultivate new beliefs that make them more confident, honest, forgiving, and loving toward themselves, which then makes them more likely to let those characteristics shine through in their behaviors.

1. **Confidence** – You are a person that believes he or she is worthy of respect and is capable of creating real value in this world.
2. **Honesty** – You are a person that acknowledges all aspects of yourself, whether good or bad.
3. **Forgiveness** – You are a person that makes mistakes, but learns from them and doesn't beat his or her self up over them.
4. **Love** – You are a person that believes you deserve happiness, peace, and enjoyment in life.
5. **Gratitude** – You are a person who is thankful for what they have in life, because you realize that it's easy to take all the good things for granted, and we don't realize what we really have until it's gone.

These characteristics are the foundation of every healthy human being. When we build these characteristics in ourselves, they make us far more likely to experience happiness and success in our lives and our relationships.

Building Confidence

It is nearly impossible to build healthy relationships with others if we don't have any confidence or self-worth.

Without confidence in ourselves, we harbor much insecurity. We may have many relationships, but we don't feel we deserve them or that we aren't "good enough."

This can't be healthy.

As a result of a lack of confidence, we won't be able to hold onto these relationships very long, because we feel deep-down they will never work out.

Confidence is one of the biggest obstacles people face throughout their lives, not just in their relationships, but in their work, goals, and personal endeavors.

People are attracted to those who are confident and comfortable in their own skin. When we see someone who believes in himself or herself, we are more likely to believe in that person too.

While many people are born with certain levels of confidence, we can improve our confidence by changing our beliefs about ourselves, as well as our habits.

Here are the most useful things we can do to begin improving our confidence on a daily basis:

Focus on your positive attributes

We all have positive things about ourselves.

While none of us are good at everything, we're all good at *something* - we just take these things for granted or choose not to recognize them.

Make sure you take the time every now and then to reflect on your own positive attributes and accomplishments.

Write a list out if you have to: name the top 5-10 things about yourself and then put it somewhere as a constant reminder that you have the capacity to be a great person, because it's true.

Reframe negative beliefs about yourself

Unfortunately many of us have negative and destructive beliefs about ourselves.

These thought patterns can often be embedded in our minds due to years of bad experiences, but they can be reversed with time and effort.

One of the most effective ways to reverse these negative thought patterns is to reframe them. This means trying to find a "positive spin" to our negative thoughts.

For example, if you fail at something and become upset with yourself, then try to view it as a learning experience and put your best foot

forward in the future. Failure is a natural part of everyone's life, but how we respond to it can make all the difference between a happy person and a miserable one.

Or, if you don't like something about yourself ("too short," "too fat," or whatever), then try to find a way that trait can actually be good or beneficial.

Maybe it helps you weed out people who will judge you for superficial reasons. Maybe it's something you can joke about with others in a playful and attractive way. Or maybe your unique characteristics help you to stand out from the crowd and can be used as a way to meet new people.

At the end of the day, most of our negative perceptions about ourselves aren't based on how reality actually is, only how we interpret it. Our social reality can be very flexible if we learn to frame things in a more positive way.

Exercise and take care of your body

One of the most simple and commonsense ways to build greater confidence is to take better care of our bodies.

Exercising on a frequent basis has shown to have many benefits on our mental health, including minimizing stress, improving mood, and sharpening cognitive abilities (making us feel more energized and focused). Some research has even shown exercise can be a

good supplementary medication for serious mental illnesses like depression and anxiety disorders.

Every time you exercise, endorphins are released and you get a “temporary high” that can last up to two weeks. Daily exercise also gives you a sense of accomplishment and pride, because you know you are taking positive action to take care of yourself, and that is very rewarding.

Diet is important too. Eating healthy foods and cutting out junk food and soda is one commonsense measure that can make a drastic difference on your mood and self-esteem. Speak with your doctor and experiment with different foods until you find a diet that benefits you.

The smallest changes in our health can make a huge difference in our confidence and mental well-being. Start small by going running a few times a week or substituting your soda intake with water. You will feel the difference right away.

Do activities you enjoy

Building confidence is a matter of living a joyful and fulfilling life, and a big part of this is finding activities and hobbies that we have a deep-seated interest for.

I believe everyone needs at least one passion to live a confident life, whether that’s playing sports, or writing music, or sculpting, or

hunting, or whatever.

We don't have to be amazing at these passions, and we don't need to be professionals, we just need to have a drive for something and follow through on it.

Fulfilling these deep-seated interests give us passion, zest, and character. They help create a spark in us that we often can't find in meaningless chores or work. And in many ways they help create who we are.

Perhaps even most importantly, doing the things we love makes us happy and content. So don't be afraid to spend your free time doing things that you enjoy. It's one of the easiest ways to keep yourself healthy, minimize stress, and cultivate an overall satisfying life.

Visualize a confident version of yourself

Confidence is something that we need to build both inside and out. It begins in how we see ourselves mentally, and then it manifests itself in our daily habits and behaviors.

When we aren't used to acting in a confident way, it can become really difficult to reverse those old patterns of being shy, anxious, or scared.

We want to act differently, but then when we are in a situation where we want to be more confident, we can't seem to muster it up.

One way to begin overcoming this mental block is to visualize yourself acting more confident in different situations.

Recent neuroscience has revealed that when we imagine ourselves doing a particular habit it activates many of the same regions in our brain as when we are physically doing the same habit. This is evidence that visualization (or “mental rehearsal”) can be a useful way to condition us toward new and more desirable behaviors.

So the more we visualize ourselves acting confidently, the stronger the neural connections will be that are associated with “confidence.” And once the neural connections are successfully built, the habits we associate with “confidence” will come much more easily and natural to us.

Take a moment right now and define what “confidence” would look like in your life. If you were a confident person:

- How might you think differently than you do now?
- How might you act differently than you do now?
- How might you feel differently than you do now?

Answering these questions can begin getting your mind to think in new ways. We can’t successfully build confidence unless we first know exactly what it means to us and how it would look in our lives.

You can take this exercise one step further by visualizing yourself in a specific situation. For example, maybe you want to build more

confidence on dates or job interviews, then imagine yourself on a specific date or interview acting in a more confident and self-assured way.

Here are key things to keep in mind to help make the most of your visualization practice:

- *Visualize process, not just goals.* See yourself acting out your confident habits step-by-step. From the moment you begin the interaction to the moment you end the interaction.
- *Picture yourself in situations that are similar to your everyday life.* The more your “mental rehearsal” accurately reflects the real world, the better it will translate when you actually find yourself in those types of situations.
- *Use all your senses.* Don’t just imagine what you see, also imagine hearing, touch, smell, and taste. You want to imagine the “complete experience” as much as possible so that your neural wiring is fully integrated.

Confidence is a process, not a thing

Remember that confidence isn’t something you just magically “possess” one day and then forever carry around in your pocket.

Instead, it’s a never-ending *process* of growth, learning, and self discovery.

Focus on making gradual changes on a daily basis and I promise your confidence will improve drastically over the weeks, months, and years.

Be Honest with Yourself

Cultivating honesty toward yourself is just as important as cultivating confidence.

In fact, in many ways the two are inextricably entangled. We can't be truly comfortable in our own skins (ie, confident and secure) if we can't also be honest and genuine with ourselves.

Honesty is a huge part of self-improvement, overcoming our delusional thinking about ourselves, and living a happy life.

If we aren't honest with ourselves then we can't expect to learn and grow as individuals, because we aren't willing to recognize reality for what it is, however uncomfortable, painful, or even terrifying it may be at certain times.

When we are dishonest, we only choose to see what we want to see, but we ignore what we don't want to see. This may provide short-term happiness or relief, but in the long term it's unhealthy and destructive toward ourselves.

Being honest can sometimes be painful, but it's a necessary component to long-term happiness and success in our lives.

Acknowledge both the good and bad in your life

One common way we delude ourselves is by ignoring the “bad” aspects of our lives, sometimes it’s easier to turn a blind eye to our problems rather than confront them face-to-face.

However, the truth is that ignoring problems in our life doesn’t fix them. It can even make things worse in the future - because when we aren’t honest about our problems they can grow out of control. Then what started out as a small problem can become a much bigger one.

For example, say you have a bad habit like smoking cigarettes or eating a lot of junk food. You know it’s bad for you, but you ignore the problem because you think nothing will happen to you, or you’re special, or you can always change in the future.

We push our problems aside and then years down the line they build up into much bigger monsters, and it’s too late.

This is the result of someone who isn’t being fully honest with themselves in the moment - because if they were then they would’ve addressed the problem much sooner in their lives.

Be honest about both the good and bad in your life. A balanced view will keep you humble and practical.

Take time to reflect

A big part of being honest with ourselves is spending time to reflect and introspect on our inner thoughts and feelings.

So many people miss the value in spending time alone (and not busy doing anything), but it can add tremendous benefit and insight into our lives.

It's easy to get started too. Just take 5-10 minutes every night to reflect on your day. Ask yourself questions like...

- How did things go today?
- What did I do right?
- What could I have done better?

Be honest with yourself, but not too judgmental or critical. The goal isn't to hurt your self-esteem, but to take the information of the day and use it to improve tomorrow.

Studies show that reflection plays a key role in learning and problem-solving. When we give ourselves time to analyze the events of our day, we can often walk away with greater knowledge into how to improve ourselves going into the future.

There's a tremendous power in asking ourselves questions in general. The right question can often yield important insights into who we are, what we really care about, and how to improve the state of our lives.

Key questions you may want to reflect on include:

- What do I really value in life?
- What does “happiness” and “success” mean to me?
- How can I build stronger relationships with others?
- What am I looking for in a romantic partner?
- Where do I picture myself in 5, 10, 20, or 50 years?

If I died today, what would I regret the most?

We learn more about ourselves when we try to answer these types of questions, even if our answers aren't completely certain or are subject to change.

If you ask yourself these questions every now and then, you'll have a much deeper understanding of yourself rather than if you avoided these questions altogether. So don't hesitate to introspect and be honest about what you discover about yourself.

Admit it when you make mistakes

One of the most painful things about being honest with ourselves is admitting when we make mistakes.

Often times we try to protect our egos by coming up with excuses or blaming others for our problems. However, true honesty (and self-esteem) can only be found when we are comfortable and open

about our mistakes and shortcomings.

We have to recognize that everyone makes mistakes. It doesn't make us less of a person, it actually makes us more human.

The difference is only a person who admits their mistakes can learn from them and correct them, while someone who ignores their mistakes is setting themselves up to repeat them in the future.

Be honest with yourself and admit it when you could have reacted to a situation in a better way.

Be straightforward – don't over analyze

I believe self-analysis is an important and underestimated aspect of self-improvement; however, I also know that many people have a tendency to get carried away and over analyze themselves.

Being honest with yourself isn't about trying to over-intellectualize or rationalize everything that happens to you. Just be straightforward and "matter of fact" with yourself.

You don't need to make up some elaborate story about why some bad event happened to you. Just make note of how things are in the moment, learn what you can, and put your best foot forward.

You don't need to understand everything in the world, just enough to be practical and realistic.

Honesty takes practice

Honesty is something we need to practice on a daily basis with ourselves. We don't just become completely honest with ourselves overnight. It takes constant self-awareness and vigilance.

Being honest can be painful but highly rewarding. Only when we are honest with ourselves to truly know and understand ourselves at a deeper level.

And when honesty meets our willingness to adapt and change, there is no telling the ways we can grow and improve as a person.

Forgiving Yourself

Forgiveness also plays a major role in our relationship with ourselves.

We have a natural tendency to self-blame when something goes wrong in our lives. This is because we have evolved to experience emotions like embarrassment, shame, and regret, especially when we behave in a ways that violate the expectations of ourselves and others.

For example, say as a child you get into a fight with one of your younger siblings. You both want to play a video game, but it's single-player, so you're both arguing over when it's your turn to get to play.

Your sibling refuses to give up the game, so you get angry and you

punch them really hard in the stomach. They get the wind knocked out of them, fall to the floor, and start crying.

Most of the time, you're going to feel a little bad and regret that decision. That's because you acted in a way that disappointed yourself (and others). You got caught in the heat of the moment, you acted impulsively, and that ended up hurting someone you really cared about.

We all experience shame and regret from time-to-time, especially since we all make mistakes.

And while these emotions can be uncomfortable, many psychologists believe they serve a useful function in our lives.

Negative emotions like these trigger us to reflect on our actions, learn from them, and use this knowledge the next time we are in a similar situation. In this way, our emotions are a kind of "signal" that guides us on how we should behave (or not behave) in the future.

However, sometimes we cling to these emotions and we never learn from them or forgive ourselves for them. Instead, we carry these emotions around with us and we beat ourselves up over them constantly.

They build up, they get worse, and it becomes harder and harder to forgive ourselves for the mistakes we've made.

But I believe that no matter what we did in the past, we have the capacity to completely forgive ourselves and move on. Here are the

most important things we need to do to achieve self-forgiveness:

Accept that everyone makes mistakes

The first step to forgive yourself is to accept that everyone makes mistakes. I've mentioned this already (when it comes to honesty), but it's worth re-iterating again, because it's so important.

No one is perfect, and even the smartest and kindest individuals will occasionally make errors in judgment - and even hurt others accidentally.

Therefore, experiencing shame and embarrassment doesn't mean that you are inferior to anyone – it just means you are a human being.

These emotions are not only natural, but an often necessary part of life, so being able to forgive yourself doesn't mean that you never experience shame or guilt anymore.

Instead, it means that you accept these emotions when they happen – but at the same time you don't attach to them or center your whole life around them. They are only one part of a much bigger whole.

Don't underestimate situational factors

We like to believe that we have complete free will over all of our choices, but psychology research shows us that situational factors can sometimes overpower our better judgment.

In the popular Milgram Experiment, individuals were instructed to send a “lethal shock” to a participant in another room (who didn’t really exist). The study found that 65% of individuals gave in to this peer pressure, merely because they were told to do so by an authority figure in a lab coat, who insisted that the “experiment must go on.”

Milgram used this study to help explain the “obedience of authority” that was rampant among Nazis during the Holocaust. It is surprising the things people do when someone who is a perceived authority orders them to do it, but this is an influence we are all susceptible to.

(There’s a video explaining the Milgram Experiment in the Resources section of this e-book.)

Another study that illustrates the power of situational factors is the Stanford Prison Experiment. In this study, participants were randomly assigned to play the role of “prisoner” or “guard” in a fake prison setting. As it turned out, the situational factors were so strong that participants actually began to act as if they were really prisoners and guards. Many of the “guards” enforced authoritarian measures and subjected some of the prisoners to psychological torture (even though, somewhere in their minds, they knew this wasn’t a real prison).

(There’s a video explaining the Stanford Prison Experiment in the Resources section of this e-book.)

These situations don't necessarily excuse bad behavior, but they do help explain these behaviors and put them into context. In that way, we can at least understand why we may occasionally give in to these negative influences and do bad things when we don't really want to.

We are all susceptible to subtle social influences all of the time that affect our choices and behaviors on a daily basis.

And when we find ourselves under certain conditions and stress, we are all capable of making some truly terrible decisions – and it's not completely our fault.

You are not in control of everything

Sometimes bad things happen that we have little to no control over. Unfortunately, that doesn't stop us from blaming ourselves and beating ourselves up over these events.

It could be that we are just in the wrong place at the wrong time, or we engage in "magical thinking" that leads us to believe we caused an event that we really didn't.

People sometimes take too much responsibility for what happens to others. Like a child that blames themselves for their parent's divorce, or when someone dies and we think we "should've been there" even though we had no way of knowing.

Our minds are designed to build causal associations between ourselves and the events in our lives, but it is also highly prone to

error.

We think that our favorite sports team lost because we were at the game or watched it on TV, but if we really ask ourselves we know that these couldn't have possibly influenced the outcome in a realistic way.

The truth is we don't control everything and we can't possibly know everything. Understanding these personal limitations plays a big role in not putting unnecessary blame on ourselves for events which we have no influence over.

Learn from regret and guilt when possible

I firmly believe that you can take something positive away from every experience you've ever had. Even when you make a mistake or embarrass yourself, you can use that experience as a "learning tool" to help make you a smarter and better person in the future.

As mentioned before, negative emotions can serve a valuable function in influencing our behavior. Shame and regret teach us not do certain behaviors that may disappoint and hurt ourselves or others. Often we cannot fully forgive ourselves until we've digested these emotions and learned what we need to from them.

On the contrary, if we don't learn from these emotions, we are more likely to repeat the negative and destructive behaviors from which they stem. Sometimes we need to make a mistake several times

before we fully “learn our lesson” and can move on.

Once we do learn the lesson behind our emotions, however, then it’s like a weight is being lifted off of our shoulder. We no longer need to cling to our shame and regret, but we feel glad that it happened and we feel like a better person at the end of the day.

Make a habit of forgiving others

We are all susceptible to the same flaws and imperfections. Therefore we should exercise forgiveness not only toward ourselves, but also our family, friends, coworkers, acquaintances, and even enemies.

Forgiveness doesn’t mean that we have to continue a relationship with someone who has hurt us or disappointed us. Instead it means that we sympathize with that person’s wrongdoing, and we hope that they eventually correct themselves and find their way.

When we practice forgiveness toward others, we make it into a habit, and it becomes easier to forgive ourselves when we discover our own self in a similar situation.

Often times we are a lot more similar to other people than we think. And once we recognize our commonalities as human beings, we become kinder and gentler in our judgments toward everyone.

Loving Yourself

Loving yourself is the last, but most important, characteristic in developing a healthy relationship with yourself.

All of our relationships stem from our ability to love ourselves. And when we can't love ourselves, it becomes nearly impossible to genuinely love others.

Love can have many definitions and come in many different forms of love: romantic, friendship, and family. But I like to define "love" in very broad terms:

Love is an emotional attachment and investment in a person's happiness, success, and well-being.

Therefore, "self-love" is the investment in your own happiness, success, and well-being. It is the deep-seated belief that you deserve to be happy.

We can't find self-love in any material possession, relationship, career, or hobby – it has to be something that resonates from our inner core.

While self-love is a never-ending process of honesty, forgiveness, and confidence, I've developed a small meditation that is specifically designed to increase feelings of self-love.

“Self-Love” Meditation - Instructions:

- Choose a quiet environment to meditate in.
- Close your eyes and take 10 deep, slow breaths.
- Find a place inside yourself where you can be relaxed and comfortable.
- Picture yourself in your imagination, as honestly and accurately as possible.
- Say each affirmation in your mind 5 times while you exhale:
 - » “I deserve my love.”
 - » “I deserve happiness.”
 - » “I forgive myself for my mistakes.”
 - » “I grow to be a better person everyday.”
 - » “I deserve my love.”
- Repeat affirmations with intention and clarity. The meaning behind the words is more important than just the words themselves.
- Allow warm and positive feelings of self-love to build as the meditation progresses. See just how strong you can make them.
- End the meditation with 10 more slow, deep breaths.
- Open your eyes and continue your day with these new improved

feelings of self-love.

Just one session of this meditation can give you a temporary “high” of love, warmth, and confidence. To make long-term progress, however, you should try to practice on a periodic basis.

I challenge you to try this meditation twice a week for a couple of weeks. After that, do it on a monthly or “as needed” basis, whenever you need that extra boost.

You can also create your own version of this meditation by writing affirmations that resonate more with you.

(This meditation is actually the first step of a much longer “loving-kindness” meditation that I’ll be teaching you later on in this e-book).

Be Grateful for What You Have

At the end of the day, it’s important that we are able to be grateful for all the good things that we actually have in our lives, which we so often take for granted.

One way to appreciate what you have in life is to imagine other people who have it worse than you, or to imagine what your own life would be like without these things.

Studies in psychology show that individuals who take time to count their blessings often show increases in happiness and well-being. This is something simple and easy that any of us can do.

Take 5 minutes right now and write down all of the things you are grateful for in your life. And when you're done, save the list somewhere as a warm reminder of all the good things you already have going for you.

Sometimes it can be difficult to find things to be grateful for, but I think we all have things in our lives that we can appreciate.

I like to believe that so long as we are conscious and alive, we have at least that to be grateful for – because being able to experience life and existence is certainly better than never having the opportunity to exist at all.

So try your best to find things in your life that you are grateful for, and actually take the time to reflect and appreciate them. This is an integral part of our happiness.

Final Words on Your Relationship with Yourself

Your relationship with yourself will continue to grow and develop as you get older, until the day that you die. The “self” is a dynamic concept, it's always changing and evolving, and rarely static.

We are constantly learning new things, having new experiences, and meeting new people, all of which play a key role in the type of person we become in the future and continue to transform into.

If you keep in mind the principles of confidence, honesty, forgiveness,

self-love and gratitude, and you recognize that you are a human being who is always evolving, then you'll be well on your way to developing a healthy relationship with yourself.

Of course, like anything worth achieving, a healthy relationship with yourself requires time, work, and dedication. It isn't something that necessarily comes easily or just falls into your lap. And it's certainly not something you achieve simply by reading this chapter.

To see lasting results in your life, you need to actually develop a practice or awareness toward being more understanding and kinder to yourself. It's a process that truly never really ends.

TOOLS OF COMMUNICATION

1. VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Language is the primary tool we have in communicating with others and building relationships. The way we speak, and the words we choose to use, can have both positive and negative consequences on the people we interact with on a daily basis.

It may seem like most of our speech is casual, unimportant, or harmless, but it has a real effect on how other people think, feel, and behave.

A simple compliment or light-hearted joke can brighten someone's whole day, while a rude comment can ruin someone's whole day.

It's therefore important that we remain mindful of our speech and choose our words carefully whenever possible.

Different people can speak the same exact message, but depending on how they frame it and how they present it can make all the difference in how the listener responds to it.

Whenever communicating with someone else, the most important thing is to speak using their terms and from their perspective. It's important to pay attention to who you are talking to, and in what context the conversation is taking place.

For example, you wouldn't speak to a child with the same vocabulary as you would an adult. And you wouldn't speak to someone who is a beginner in a subject in the same way you would speak to someone who is an expert.

Social setting also matters. You probably wouldn't talk to a stranger at the library or in a classroom in the same way you would talk to a stranger at a bar or concert.

All of these factor into effective communication, and we need to take them into account if we want ourselves to be understood as clearly as possible.

If you walk away from a conversation and find that the person didn't really get you, ask yourself, "How could I have said that differently to make my message more clear?"

Keep in mind everything we say has consequences, however small or large – even if a person doesn't seem to directly respond to what we say.

That means our speech can be powerful, and we should be extra careful of the words we choose to use on a daily basis.

How to Speak to Others

Speaking in a way that benefits our relationships is key.

And while obviously there is no way we can just memorize a "script"

of a conversation and duplicate it in the real world (nor would you want to if you want to build genuine relationships), there are some general guidelines we can try to apply to our interactions as often as possible.

If you take the advice in this section seriously, it'll help you choose the things you talk about more carefully. And by doing so you'll be able to build deeper connections with the people you interact with on a daily basis.

Here are the key things I find that can benefit nearly any interaction:

Find commonalities

One of the easiest ways to connect with someone is to find things that you have in common with them.

We tend to like people who are similar to us in some way. And when we find these commonalities they provide us with something simple, easy, and fun to talk about.

A commonality can be anything.

It could be sharing the same hobby, growing up in the same area, knowing a mutual friend, having the same job, liking the same music, or just sharing the same sense of humor.

Commonalities give us an immediate sense of connection. They make us feel closer to people. And in many ways, they are the

bedrock of all relationships.

I believe that you can find something in common with just about anyone.

Human beings really aren't that different at the end of the day. Most of us just want to be happy and live fun and joyful lives – and many of us usually share similar interests and hobbies.

If you focus on people's core values – and what really makes them tick – you'll often find that people are very similar. This realization can make it easier for you to connect with anyone you want.

For example, we may all like different types of music, but most people like music in some form. And if it's not music, then maybe it's movies, or TV, or reading, or playing sports, or art.

These hobbies and activities are cross-cultural and they appeal to a wide range of people. They are almost always topics that provide a good conversation jumping point.

Learn to give genuine compliments

Giving compliments is another great way to build a deeper connection with someone.

Naturally, people like to hear good things about themselves. The brain sees a compliment as a "reward," which in return releases "feel good" hormones like dopamine.

We can't help but feel good after hearing a compliment. And the truth is we hardly ever care about the source of those compliments, so long as they come from a place that is sincere and genuine.

So to make your compliments more genuine, you need to pay attention to the things about a person that you like or enjoy or find interesting. You need to practice "seeing the good in people." Because I believe that we can find something good about anyone if we really look for it - and that should always be the source of where you find your compliments.

Of course, you don't want to compliment people too much either. That could make you seem superficial or weak; so instead, use your compliments resourcefully and when they are most appropriate.

Using compliments wisely can make a huge difference in how you connect with people.

Minimize negative language

Just as people like positive language such as compliments, they usually don't like negative language such as insults, arguments, or pessimism.

It's important to understand that the language we use on a daily basis often reflects the emotions we are conveying, as well as the emotions the listener is experiencing as they listen to us.

If you are someone that dwells too much on negativity or cynicism, then that's going to make it painful for people to always be around you. Maybe you'll attract a few friends who feed off your negativity, but they usually aren't the people who provide the most fulfilling relationships - they just make you more miserable.

Instead, make a conscious effort to be less negative throughout the day: try to avoid gossip, or insulting people, or blaming others, or criticizing too much.

And if you find yourself in a conversation that is turning down the wrong direction, then try changing the subject or making a light-hearted joke before you or someone else says something that they'll regret.

Try using "love" more and "hate" less

"Love" and "hate" are two particularly strong words in our language that elicit highly charged emotional responses from others.

Even when we use these words casually, they can be perceived – consciously or unconsciously – as something more serious. If you're someone who uses the word "hate" a lot, people may begin to see you as someone who is hateful or cynical.

For this reason, I challenge you to dedicate a whole day and try to use "love" more and "hate" less.

It may sound a bit silly or random, but these words have a real impact on the people we communicate to on a daily basis, and better regulating our usage of these words can help people see us in a more positive light.

Notice other “buzzwords” that create strong emotional reactions

There are many more buzzwords like “love” and “hate” that are powerful triggers of certain thoughts and emotions, both positive and negative.

Pay attention to these words when you or others say them - you’ll know they are “buzzwords” based on the emotional reactions you get from others. If someone always reacts strongly when you use a specific word, then it’s a buzzword – and you need to use it wisely.

With practice, you can learn from other’s reactions what words are better to use and what words are better to avoid.

Also, one important thing to keep in mind is that two words may have the same meaning but come with very different connotations. These connotations can make a huge difference in our communication.

For example, asking “You’re a psychiatrist?” is usually more appropriate than, “You’re a shrink?” – because the word “shrink” has a negative social stigma attached to it, and someone who is in that profession will likely find it offensive.

Thus it’s one of those words you’ll want to avoid if you don’t feel like stirring someone up (unless of course you’re teasing someone in a

playful and non-offensive way, which is a completely different story).

Learning to get your message across by using words that have positive (or neutral) connotations, and avoiding ones with negative connotations, is absolutely essential to getting yourself understood as clearly as possible, without upsetting anyone.

In addition, an individual may have their own personal “buzzwords” that you notice they use frequently. Often we get attached to specific words that hold a deep meaning to us, and naturally they pop up frequently in our everyday conversations. We all have our personal vocabulary.

And if you’re able to discern these buzzwords (especially ones that are in someone’s personal vocabulary), then you can use them in a conversation with that person and your message will connect with them much more strongly.

Interact more

At the end of the day, the only real and effective way to get better at speaking with others is to interact more and speak to a diverse range of people.

The more conversations you have, the more natural and easier it will be for you. And the more you talk to people, the more you begin to understand them better as a whole.

If this means starting out with casual talk with a grocery clerk, or an old lady at the library, or some harmless stranger, or just speaking to our parents more, then so be it.

We all need to start somewhere, especially if initiating conversations isn't something we are normally used to.

The more you talk to people, the more familiar you will become with "everyday language" and the easier it will be to connect with "everyday" people.

It's just like learning any other language; you need to immerse yourself in the culture and environment to really learn it and understand it. You certainly can't learn it simply by reading a book – it takes *experience*.

And just because we are native speakers of a language doesn't mean we should stop expanding our vocabulary.

Language is constantly evolving – new words and phrases become more popular, and then die off again - and we need to constantly evolve with common language if we want ourselves relevant and understood.

So talk with other people whenever you get the chance. There are always opportunities for innocent and harmless conversation, and most of the time it's very rewarding.

As someone who lives in the city, I find myself having small conversations all of the time with neighbors, homeless people, store

clerks, kids playing, people walking their dogs, etc.

There is no one I won't talk to, and usually the conversations I have are fun and interesting - I always walk away feeling like I learned something new.

Conversation Threading

It's important to be able to hold meaningful conversations with people. However, a lot of us struggle with keeping conversations going because we don't know what to say, we over-think our responses, or we think we have nothing to add to the conversation.

There's a very helpful technique called "conversation threading" that is great for helping people become better at talking with others.

If you notice other people's conversations, you'll find that they rarely follow a logical sequence from beginning to end. Instead, we usually go in many different directions. We start talking about one thing and then we get lost in another.

Have you ever realized you were talking about something really weird and then thought, "How did this conversation start again?"

That's because there are many possible paths a conversation can take. In fact, it's possible to keep a conversation going forever without ever running out of things to say.

A *thread* is a single subject or topic or idea in a sentence. In a typical

sentence there can be many threads. For example:

“On Sunday, Steve saw the movie Moneyball.”

This is a very basic sentence, but there are several threads in it. In each thread, you can find something to reply to. For example:

Sunday – *“Oh yeah? On Sunday I was helping my mom clean out the garage all day.”*

Steve – *“How is Steve doing? I haven’t seen him in awhile.”*

Moneyball – *“I saw Moneyball last week, definitely one of the best movies of last year.”*

Threads are a lot like branches. When we reply to someone, we usually add new branches – new possible directions that the conversation may lead.

If you choose the “Steve” branch, then you may start talking about what he’s been up to lately, as well as other old friends and how they’re doing. If you choose the “Moneyball” branch, then you may start talking about other good movies that have come out recently.

Conversation threading is effective because it continues the flow of conversation by staying on-topic and relevant.

Here are some tips to help apply threading to your everyday conversation:

- **Actively listen for threads.** Be an engaged listener when someone is talking to you.

- **Introduce new threads.** Don't just repeat back what people say to you, be willing to take threads into new directions.
- **Use open-ended questions.** Close-ended questions can often be answered with a simple "Yes" or "No." But asking open-ended questions, like "Why?" or "How?", take the conversation to a deeper level and give you more threads to branch out from.
- **Have general knowledge about pop culture.** Do stuff that other people do once in awhile, like watch popular movies, TV shows, or sports. Read newspapers, magazines, and some books as well. These will become great sources for conversation fodder.

Finding a Balance Between Speaking and Listening

It is important to understand that communication is always a two way street. Our ability to speak with others is just as important as our ability to listen to others. And being able to balance both is essential to any healthy conversation.

You need to find the right amount of speaking and listening. If you speak too much, people may see you as selfish or arrogant. But if you speak too little, people may see you as shy or bored.

So if you're someone that speaks too much, make an effort to speak

less. Focus on asking questions to the person and listening more, rather than just talking about yourself or sharing your point of view.

And if you're someone that speaks too little, make an effort to speak more. Feel free to share a joke or story about yourself, something that reveals more about your personality and lets people know who you are.

Conversations are an exchange between "give" and "take." We need to let people speak their minds, and at the same time we need to express ours. When we can balance both in a fair way, our conversations will flourish.

(Check out the video "Language as a Window into Human Nature" to learn more about how important the words we use are to our daily lives. A link can be found in the Resources section of this e-book.)

TOOLS OF COMMUNICATION

2. NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Nonverbal communication is the process of sending and receiving messages between two or more people without the use of words.

We can communicate in a variety of nonverbal ways including through our posture, gestures, facial expressions, touch, eye contact, and vocal intonation.

Research suggests that nonverbal communication makes up over 60-70% of all that we communicate. In other words, how we say something is often more important than what we say.

Building relationships and social skills is therefore very dependent on our understanding of nonverbal communication, including our ability to accurately send the right social cues, as well as accurately receive the social cues others are sending us on a daily basis.

Communication is always a two-way street. We play the role of "giver" and "receiver" in every social interaction of everyday. And nonverbal communication is no different.

One of the most important things to know about nonverbal communication is that a lot of it happens unconsciously.

For example, we may not realize it, but when we are lying about

something we tend to not look at someone in their eyes very much. We don't do it purposely, it's just something that happens naturally when we are trying to hide something.

By being more aware of other people's nonverbal cues, we can gain a clearer understanding of what a person is really communicating to us.

And by being more aware of our own nonverbal cues, we can gain a clearer understanding of how to communicate more effectively and congruently.

The following sections in this chapter describe the main ways we communicate nonverbally. However, before we get started, I should point out that these are only guidelines.

There are a lot of reasons why people may act out certain behaviors – and not every behavior is necessarily a nonverbal signal.

For example, a person with their arms and legs crossed may be reserved or shy, or it could also mean that they are just cold.

Nonverbal communication can vary greatly depending on the person and the situation. Culture too can play a big role in differences in nonverbal communication.

It's important to keep all of these factors in mind whenever reading body language. Remember, there are no concrete rules on what a particular behavior may signify – only general guidelines.

The last section in this chapter will provide exercises you can do to practice using body language more effectively in your real world social interactions.

Posture

Our posture is just one aspect of nonverbal communication that can signal a message about our personality and our mood.

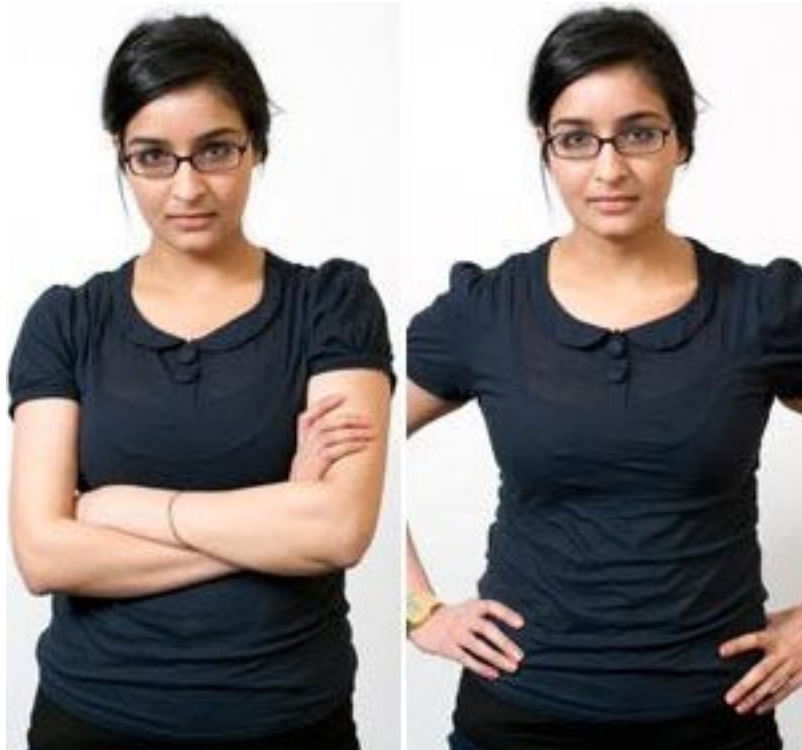
Generally, an upright position while standing up, sitting, or walking is a sign of attentiveness and confidence, while a downward position is a sign of fatigue, boredom, or low confidence.

There are many different types of postures depending on what we do with our arms, legs, hands, shoulders, back, etc.

A closed body stance, where our arms or legs are crossed, is often seen as less socially engaging and less inviting than an open body stance, where our arms or legs are open and relaxed.

Here are some visual examples of the different ways our posture can communicate our mood. Ask yourself what is being communicated when you see each posture:

To me the first picture with the crossed arms and slouched neck comes off as annoyed, upset, or closed off. And the second picture with the open arms and upright neck appears more confident, engaged, or even authoritative.



This is just one visual example of how small changes in our posture can make a big difference in how people perceive us.

Next time you're watching people interact – on TV, in a movie, or in real life – make note of their postures and how that contributes to what they are communicating to the world.

We can learn a lot about nonverbal communication by watching how others use it in their everyday life (I'll elaborate more on this in a later section of this chapter).

You can also practice improving your own posture by using a full-length mirror. This is a great way to monitor your posture (while walking, sitting, or standing) and correct things you may find off-putting.

In addition, exercises like stretching and yoga can be especially useful for improving your body awareness and helping your body move more confidently and fluently.

Make note of your posture throughout the day and ask yourself what it is you're broadcasting to others.

Gestures

Another big part of nonverbal communication are the gestures we make while interacting with others. A gesture is often a quick movement by our hands, face, or some other body part.

The average person knows hundreds of different gestures that they use on a daily basis depending on the person, situation, and what they are trying to communicate.

For example, common gestures we use include:

- Waving "hi" with our hand when we first see someone.
- Giving a thumbs up when someone does something good.
- Making an "okay sign" when we give someone permission to do something.
- Nodding "yes" or shaking our head "no."
- Making a clenched fist when threatening someone.
- Giving the middle finger when we are angry at someone

- Using a choking sign when we are choking on a piece of food.
- Tilting our head to the side when we are confused.

These are just some of the many gestures we use all of the time.

Some people become well-known for creating their own unique gestures, such as “tebowing” used by the football player Tim Tebow as a form of celebration and gratitude. Or the “Clinton thumb” used by former President Bill Clinton whenever he wanted to emphasize something in one of his speeches (search Google Images to see pictures of these).

For the rest of the day, pay attention to the gestures people use when they communicate to you – and the gestures you use when communicating to others. You’ll find they are an unavoidable facet of almost every social interaction. We practically can’t communicate without them.

Facial expressions

Facial expressions are another important part of how we communicate to others.

Many times our facial expressions reflect the emotions we are feeling in that moment. And evolutionary psychologists believe this was a key adaptation in social species who rely heavily on understanding the thoughts and feelings of others in order to cooperate and survive.

Here is a picture chart (created by social psychologist David Matsumoto) of the facial expressions behind basic emotions like joy, surprise, contempt, sadness, anger, disgust, and fear:



Microexpressions are a type of facial expression that happen unconsciously and only last between 1/25 to 1/15 of a second.

They happen extremely fast, but if you learn to catch them they can reveal a lot about what a person is actually thinking or feeling – even when they are trying to hide something.

Facial expressions are one of the most revealing ways we communicate to others. Pay attention to people’s faces more and you’ll learn a world of information about what is actually going on in their minds.

Tone of voice

How we speak is a form of nonverbal communication because it isn't about the words we use, but how we say them.

Different characteristics of our voice can say a lot about what we are communicating. Two people can recite the same set of words, but their volume, pitch, speed, rhythm, tone, and emphasis can completely alter the message that is being conveyed.

For example:

- Speaking at a really low volume can be seen as shy, reserved, or untrustworthy, while speaking at a high volume can be seen as confident and outgoing.
- Speaking in a high pitched voice can sound more submissive and weak, while speaking in a low pitched voice sounds more authoritative and strong. This effect has been found to be particularly relevant to male speakers.
- Speaking too fast can make someone seem nervous or as if they are trying to hide something. And speaking too slow can come off as stupid or condescending. It's important to find an appropriate speed. Previous research has shown that speaking at around 3.5 words per second has shown to be the most effective rate of speaking.
- Speaking with a different tone of voice can change the meaning of a sentence. Take three simple words like "I love you" and

imagine the different ways people can say it and the different meanings being conveyed. A serious and heartfelt tone can be a sign of intimacy, but a joking or playful tone may just be a sign of friendship. And if you say “I love you” sarcastically, it can even sound hateful.

- Speaking with an emphasis on certain words can also make a big difference in meaning. For example, the sentence “I never said she stole my money” changes meaning each time you emphasize a different word. Speaking it out loud – each time emphasizing a different word – and hear the difference for yourself.
- Speaking with a healthy amount of pauses has found to be more effective than speaking without any pauses. This is because pauses give the listener a short break to process what you’re saying. According to research, people prefer speech with about 4 to 5 pauses a minute.
- Speaking with a healthy amount of animated speech is better than speaking monotone. That means it’s actually good to have changes in volume, pitch, speed, rhythm, tone, and emphasis, and pauses depending on what it is you’re trying to communicate. For example, an unusually long pause can create suspense, or a change in pitch or volume can keep the listener engaged and interested. On the other hand, too much animation in speech can also come off artificial and off-putting, so this is something where each person needs to find

their own balance.

Tone of voice communicates a lot more than we realize, so it's extra important to pay attention to how we speak to others. Often we may think we are saying the right things, but if our tone of voice doesn't match up than people will see through it.

Eye Contact

Eye contact is the main way we determine if a person is paying attention to us and actually engaged in the social interaction we are having with them.

When individuals make eye contact with us while speaking, we tend to find them more interesting, likeable, honest, and confident in what they say.

And when individuals make eye contact while listening to us, we know that they are actually paying attention to us and absorbing what we are saying to them.



Meanwhile, lack of eye contact can come off as bored, shy, upset, or deceptive. When we fail at making healthy eye contact with others, it hurts our ability to connect with people in the best way possible. People either don't trust us or they think that we don't like them.



Studies show that good communication requires eye contact about 60-70% of the time.

So there's a balance to be maintained. Holding eye contact 100% of the time can come off as intense, superficial, or creepy. It's appropriate to take breaks and look away from time to time, and it's natural for our eyes to move around while talking to others.

Like all nonverbal communication, eye contact can reveal a lot about our thoughts and feelings. When someone looks away after we ask them a question, it could mean that they are trying to hide something. Or when someone looks us straight in the eye while answering a question, it usually means they are being very honest

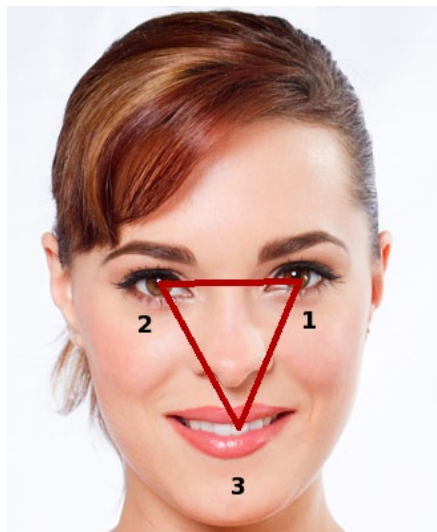
and straightforward.

Unfortunately, some people manipulate eye contact to seem trustworthy when they are really lying. It's important to not take any of this advice as absolute fact; these are merely guidelines.

One of the best ways to improve your eye contact with others is to practice the "triangle method."

It begins by focusing your attention on just one eye (if you notice, you really can't focus on both eyes at once), then shift your focus to the other eye, then move to the person's lips, and then back to the first eye again.

This creates an invisible "triangle shape" on the person's face. Like this:



Practice on the image above by focusing on the first eye (1), holding it for a couple seconds, moving to the next eye (2), holding it for a couple seconds, moving to the lips (3), holding it for a couple seconds, then moving back to the first eye (1), and holding it for another couple seconds.

Working on your eye contact with static images can help you improve eye contact in your real world interactions.

Another tip to become better with eye contact is to find out the color of someone's eyes when you are speaking to them.

You can even make it into a game by asking yourself, "What color was their eyes?" after you're done talking to them. Give yourself a point for every time you can remember it. And if you can't answer it, then you weren't paying enough attention. This little trick will help you become more comfortable with making eye contact.

Eye contact is a tremendously important aspect of all communication – and it's something everyone should work on if they aren't good at it already.

Breathing

A person's breathing can communicate to us what that person is experiencing at any given moment.

Fast and heavy breathing is a sign of high arousal, possibly due to nervousness, or fear, or excitement, or joy.

Slow and steady breathing is a sign of low arousal, possibly due to relaxation, or comfort, or boredom, or sadness.

The meaning behind a person's breathing will depend on the situation and what that person is responding to (in combination with other nonverbal cues).

If someone comes into a room and they are out of breath, you're going to be concerned about what happened to them or why they are so worked up.

Whenever someone deviates from their normal rate of breathing, it usually means there's been some change in their psychology too. Paying attention to these changes can give us extra clues on what might be going on in someone's mind.

The best way to observe a person's breathing is by watching the movements in their chest and shoulders.

The next time you're with someone see if you can find their breathing rate and how it reflects that person's current emotional state.

Clothing and Hygiene

Clothing and hygiene are another part of nonverbal communication that can reveal a lot about our moods and personalities.

To start, we know from everyday experience that certain types of people dress differently depending on their job, age, culture, sex,

religion, confidence, and personal interests.

Someone who is a boy typically dresses differently than someone who is a girl. Someone who is a rapper typically dresses differently than someone who is a metal head. Someone who has a lot of money typically dresses differently than someone who is poor. And someone who has self-esteem about their bodies typically dresses differently than someone who has low self-esteem.

We shouldn't judge a person solely based on what they wear, but we also can't ignore that our clothing and hygiene often reflect who we are in many ways.

A person with a sloppy appearance, messy hair, and wrinkled clothes sends the message, "I don't care." But a person who takes care of their appearance is seen as much more attractive and confident.

As a general rule of thumb, take care of your body and dress in ways that you feel best suit your personality and interests. Pay attention to what other people wear and find things you like that you can build into your own style.

We like to think that our appearance doesn't affect the way we are perceived by others, but it does to some degree, so we should dedicate some time and effort in how we present ourselves.

Clearly, if you're going on a job interview or a first date, you want to look as best you can.

Touch

Touch has a very powerful impact on our relationships.

Harry Harlow's famous studies in the 1960s showed that monkeys who receive warmth and physical comfort from a "wired monkey" dressed in a soft cloth showed better psychological development than monkeys who just had a "wired monkey" that just provided milk. This study exemplifies the instinctual need for touch in our bonding and relationships.

Humans are the same way as other animals. We crave touch so that we feel comfort, trust, and connection with others.

We use touch in a variety of ways to communicate what we are thinking and feeling. Some of these forms of touch include handshakes, high fives, hugs, kisses, pats on the back, holding hands, and brushing an arm.



Touch provides a direct physical connection to other people. It often shows that we care about others and support them in some way, but this form of communication can also be used in harmful ways.

Violence, abuse, and harassment are forms of touch that have a negative impact on others. They are the lowest and most primitive forms of communication. We should try avoiding these negative forms of touch at all costs because they only hurt others and build destructive relationships.

Touch can also be used in both a platonic or romantic way. We use touch among family, friends, and coworkers to signify respect, friendship, joy, and love. And we can also use touch among romantic partners to heighten intimacy, sexual arousal, and deep connection.

In all its forms, touch communicates a message to the person we are interacting with. Not using touch in our relationships only limits our ability to fully connect with others in a positive way.

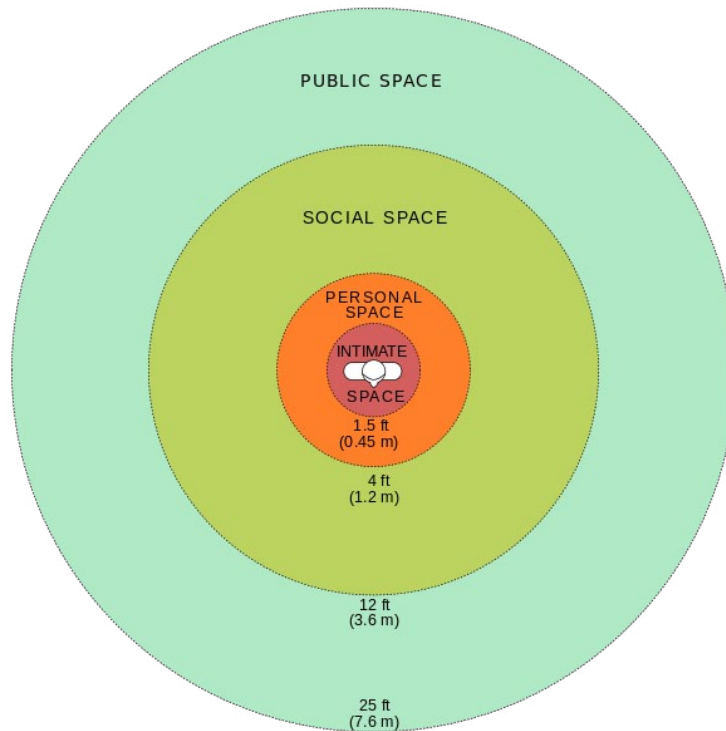
Proximity

Depending on the person and the situation, we all have a different “proximity” where we feel most comfortable with people.

Typically, we’ll let a romantic partner enter into our personal space more than we’ll let a coworker, and we’ll let a coworker enter into our personal space more than a complete stranger.

The social psychologist Edward T. Hall identified that we each have

different personal spaces depending on whom we are talking to. This diagram shows the differences between these different comfort zones:



The important thing to take away here is to realize when we've entered into someone's personal space and recognize when we are making someone uncomfortable (because we're standing too close or too far away). There's always an appropriate distance to each interaction that makes us more comfortable, safe, and relaxed.

Congruence

We've now discussed all the major components to nonverbal communication, including posture, gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, eye contact, clothing, hygiene, touch, and proximity.

The last component to nonverbal communication is congruence, which is all these factors put together into a complete whole.

You see, none of these things are communicated in isolation, but as a group of signals. When these signals don't match up people perceive it as mixed and confusing.

For example, if your voice sounds happy but you're frowning or your posture is down, then people are going to see that you're not being truthful or that you're trying to hide something.

Our nonverbal communication needs to be clear and honest. When our nonverbal communication is consistent, people will perceive it as being truthful and congruent with what we're saying.

But if our nonverbal communication is inconsistent, people will become skeptical and see through us.

Improving Nonverbal Communication in Your Everyday Life

There are two consistent ways we can work to improve our nonverbal communication in our everyday lives:

1. Observe other people's nonverbal communication from an outside perspective.
2. Actively practice nonverbal communication in your day-to-day interactions.

While it can be helpful to read about nonverbal communication and better understand the theory behind these social cues, the only real way to master nonverbal communication is to witness it and practice it until it becomes natural to us.

Observing other people's nonverbal communication

There are many different ways we can observe other people's nonverbal communication and learn from it.

One of the easiest ways is to look at pictures and watch videos of people communicating, and then make note of the nonverbal cues they send and how they are received.

Today more than ever we have the resources to observe people socializing without having to be a part of the interaction itself.

We have television, movies, and the internet – all which provide us a way to view other people communicating and learn what works and what doesn't work, without having to suffer the pain of our own mistakes and failures.

You can take virtually any movie, TV show, picture, or video on the Internet and analyze the ways people are communicating nonverbally.

For example, political speeches and presidential debates are one amazing resource for learning how politicians use nonverbal

communication in a masterful way that persuades millions of people on a daily basis. Watch these videos and make note of what makes their communication so effective to a mass audience.

Ask yourself questions about how the people you're watching are communicating nonverbally:

- What is their posture like?
- What gestures are they using?
- What facial expressions are they making?
- What is their eye contact like?
- What is their tone of voice like?
- What are they wearing?
- How are they using touch?
- What's the proximity between the people communicating?
- Is the person being congruent or incongruent with their nonverbal communication? Does it seem like they are being honest or dishonest?
- Is the other person responding to them in a positive way or negative way?

These questions can help you better analyze the interactions you witness everyday throughout your social world. You can then use the knowledge you gain and apply it to your own life.

This stuff also applies to observing social interactions in the real world, in public – but that can get trickier because you don't want to get caught watching someone too much or come off as creepy.

I happen to have a nice balcony on a busy block where I can hang out and watch people walk by at any time of day. Other options could be going to a mall, or park, or somewhere in public where there are a lot of people hanging out and it's easy to watch people without being too intrusive.

There is an art to being able to watch other people socialize and pick up on their nonverbal cues. Often you don't even need to know what is being said to understand what is being communicated.

Practicing your own form of nonverbal communication

The most effective method of improving our nonverbal communication is to practice it in action. The more we do something, the more it becomes wired in our brains and the easier it becomes to do it on a daily basis.

One of the most obvious ways we can practice our nonverbal communication more is to just go out and socialize more.

You can't learn all of this stuff sitting in your room. You have to actively go outside and engage other people, even if it means making a few mistakes before it becomes more natural for you.

For example, if you're someone who isn't so good with the "touch" aspects of your communication, make it a goal to integrate more touch into your daily interactions: give out high fives more, shake people's hands when you meet them, give out hugs to strangers, rub someone's back when showing support, etc.

You can't change everything about your communication overnight, but you can work in small ways to gradually change how you communicate with others. Like any other set of skills however it does take time, work, and dedication.

You can also practice nonverbal communication on your own at home to help build these new habits. Some things you can try out include:

- Invest in a full-length mirror where you can work on your posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, or fashion. By doing this you can see yourself as other people will see you in person, and when you look in the mirror you can ask yourself "What is it that I'm communicating to others when they see me? What nonverbal cues am I sending?"
- Work on your tone of voice by recording yourself reading a newspaper article or sharing a personal story. Then listen to what you recorded, make notes on your tone, and re-record it fixing the stuff you have issues with – maybe you speak too fast, or too softly, or you mumble your words, or you don't express yourself enough.

- Role-play by yourself. Imagine how you would act with people in specific situations, then act them out as if they were really happening in front of you. Pay attention to how you act in these hypothetical scenarios and ask yourself how you might use nonverbal cues differently to improve how you communicate in real life. If you want, record it in video and play it back later.
- Role-play with others. Do mock interviews, dates, conversations, or speeches with your friends and ask them to give you constructive criticism on how to improve your nonverbal communication. This can be especially fun if you're both working to improve aspects of your communication.
- Use YouTube or Google images to practice nonverbal cues. Search for videos or pictures of people looking directly at the camera, then practice maintaining eye contact or guessing what emotions are being expressed by the other person. This will help you become more comfortable at looking into people's eyes and reading their expressions.

This whole chapter is an excellent starting point in becoming a master of nonverbal communication, but it's not magic. You have to willingly go out in the real world and practice all of this stuff or it will do nothing for you. And it all takes time.

However, even just paying more attention to nonverbal communication in your day-to-day interactions can do wonders in helping you become more socially aware and socially intelligent.

Hopefully reading through this stuff has opened your mind to new ways of perceiving your everyday relationships, and that can begin to transform how you go about these relationships in the future.

CHARACTERISTICS OF POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Up until this point, we've focused mainly on the "tools of communication," but now I want to broaden our perspective and look at key *characteristics* that seem to embody all positive relationships.

These are the things that really make our relationships work. They reflect patterns in healthy relationships that frequently occur in our daily interactions and conversations.

When we keep these healthy patterns in mind, our relationships really begin to flourish – because we know they are the building blocks of every positive interaction we have.

Here is a rundown of the key characteristics of positive relationships.

Reciprocity

Almost every kind of relationship we have – whether it's friends, family, business, or loved ones – follows a law of reciprocity.

In simple terms, reciprocity means, "you get what you give." In social psychology, it's when we do something nice for someone then they are more likely to do something nice in return; or when we do

something mean to someone, then they are more likely to respond back in a mean way.

It's been mentioned before that our relationships are a constant give and take. The law of reciprocity illustrates this perfectly. Relationships rarely work if both people aren't investing something valuable into the relationship.

For example, if you have a relationship that is all give, and no take, then you're going to become burnt out – because your investing your time, energy, and emotions in a person who isn't providing anything back in return.

But if you have a relationship that is all take, but no give, then it's unlikely that person will stick around long, because you aren't willing to invest any value into the relationship to make it mutually beneficial.

Reciprocity means everyone involved in a relationship should be benefiting from it.

When someone gets you a gift for the holidays, it's usually expected that you give something in return. When someone gives you a compliment, it's healthy if you can respond back with a compliment of your own. And when someone calls you, you should make an effort to call back at some point too.

But when thinking about reciprocity, it's important to remember that value can be exchanged in all kinds of ways: and it doesn't need to

be a direct “tit for tat.”

For example, say there is someone you know who is physically or mentally ill, and you need to devote a lot of your time to help take care of them. That doesn’t mean it’s necessarily an unhealthy relationship, or that you aren’t getting anything in return, it could just mean that you value that person’s life and company enough to help pay their bills, clean their house, or whatever it is you’re doing to help.

Value can be exchanged in all kinds of ways, but the key thing is to make sure that everyone involved in a relationship is happy, including yourself.

(Check out the video “Science of Persuasion” to learn more about reciprocity and how it relates to getting people to be more cooperative with us. A link can be found in the Resources section of this e-book.)

Empathy

Most of the conflict in today’s relationships stems from our inability to see things from another person’s viewpoint.

Psychologists define this as empathy, or “the ability to share and understand another person’s thoughts and feelings as if they were our own.”

In everyday language we may refer to this as “walking in someone’s

shoes” or “seeing the world through someone else’s eyes.”

Empathy is something that comes naturally for some people, and not so naturally for many other people.

However, by practicing a technique called “perspective-taking,” we can learn how to become more empathic and sympathetic. And by doing this, we can start building stronger relationships in our lives.

One of the main assumptions behind perspective-taking is that looking at a problem from multiple viewpoints is almost always more useful and informative than looking at a problem from only one viewpoint.

The problem with most people is that they get trapped in their worldview. They only look at things from a single perspective, and in return they ignore alternative ways of looking at a situation, which may be just as valid.

Every problem in a relationship can be viewed from at least three perspectives.

- Perspective of Self: This is how the problem is interpreted from your own experience, based on your own thoughts and feelings in that situation.
- Perspective of Other: This is how the problem is interpreted from the experience of the other person involved in the situation, based on their thoughts and feelings.
- Perspective of Third Party: This is how the problem is interpreted

from someone who isn't involved in the situation, but instead looking from a neutral, outside perspective (the "the fly on a wall" approach).

None of these perspectives are necessarily right or wrong. Instead, they each contain an important piece of the puzzle. Depending on the situation, there can be many different perspectives. For example, a strike looks very different from the viewpoint of a CEO, a worker, a customer and a supplier.

Solving a problem is almost always harder to do if a person only appreciates their viewpoint, but doesn't consider the views of others. However, when we take into account everyone's perspective, we are more likely to discover solutions that respect everyone's needs.

(Check out the video titled "The Power of Outrospection" to learn more about the importance of looking at problems from another person's perspective. A link can be found in the *Resources* section of this e-book.)

Practice perspective-taking in your daily relationships

The better you are at perspective-taking, the stronger your relationships will become. Here are some tips for practicing this technique:

- Remember your perspective isn't the only one in the world.

- When faced with a problem, walk yourself through everyone's point-of-view.
- From each perspective ask, "What is this person thinking or feeling in this situation?"
- Try imagining yourself in the other person's shoes. What does the world look like through their eyes? What's it like to experience life as this person?
- Identify commonalities in viewpoints and things you may agree on.
- Acknowledge differences in viewpoints and things you disagree on.
- Seek resolutions based on this new information. What are some ways to solve this problem while respecting everyone's needs?

Now, perspective-taking probably won't help you solve every problem in your relationships. However, using this technique can really improve understanding and ease conflict in the long-term.

Individuals who are successful at building relationships are almost always great at perspective-taking, whether they realize it or not.

Fortunately, even if this technique doesn't come naturally to you, you can consciously practice perspective-taking overtime. With dedication you will become much better at putting yourself in other people's shoes, and you'll find your relationships will dramatically improve.

(Check out the video titled “The Empathic Civilization” to learn more about the importance of empathy in modern society. A link can be found in the *Resources* section of this e-book.)

Equality

Many people tend to judge a person, label them, and then put them into a “social hierarchy” of importance based on how valuable we perceive that person to be.

Those who we typically perceive as high value (like CEOs, celebrities, athletes, politicians, good-looking people, etc.) we place at the top of our social hierarchy, while those we typically perceive as low value (like homeless people or the unemployed) fall to the bottom of our social hierarchy.

While sometimes it may be useful to make distinctions about certain people, this kind of thinking can also hurt our ability to connect with some individuals in productive and meaningful ways.

If we perceive someone as having really high value, then we often see ourselves as inferior when compared to this other person.

This perceived difference in value can then cause us to act and think in desperate and anti-social ways so that we are “liked.” For example, we may feel the need to pretend to be more than we are, but this inauthenticity is often counter-productive to real, long-

lasting relationships.

In the same way, when we perceive someone as having really low value, we may treat them with less respect, because we think we are better than them (or that they aren't worth our time and attention). This perceived difference causes us to be more anti-social to people whom we think aren't as good as us.

It's important to remember that while everyone is different in their own way, we are all just people in the end. We all have thoughts and emotions. We all go through struggles in life. And when it comes down to it, we all just want to be happy by the end of the day.

If you can try to view everyone as equals, then you'll notice a huge improvement in your ability to be more friendly and likeable toward everyone. People of both "high status" and "low status" will recognize that your kindness extends to all of humanity, regardless of race, nationality, occupation, gender, or whatever other characteristic people often use as an excuse to divide people and treat them poorly.

(Check out the video "Identity and Stereotype Threat" to learn more about how our perceived social identities affect our relationships and society as a whole. You can find a link in the *Resources* section of this e-book.)

Fun

One of the best parts of having healthy relationships is being able to share fun and pleasurable experiences with others.

Socializing is about *enjoying* the time we spend with other people, whether it's at a concert, at a movie, playing sports, going out to a bar, checking out a new restaurant, playing a video game, or just stopping at their place for a few minutes to chat.

When we're having fun, aren't concerned with our troubles or worries, we're just enjoying the moment for what it is – even if it's only a temporary getaway from our problems and stresses.

And when we give ourselves permission to enjoy ourselves, we also give others permission to enjoy themselves. Our positivity becomes contagious.

Have you ever found yourself laughing for no reason, only because everyone else in the room is laughing? If so, you have experienced what psychologists call an “emotional contagion.”

There is a lot of neuroscience that suggests that our emotions are contagious, similar to a virus. When we see people acting a certain way, it activates neurons in our brain that synchronize with the neurons in other people's brains. These are known as “mirror neurons.”

In the same way, when we step into a room with all sad and gloomy people, we too start to catch on to those negative feelings. But being able to reverse the cycle and radiate positivity can help everyone

you're around become happier and more positive too.

Kindness

Kindness is the state of caring about another person's well-being and taking action to help improve that person's life.

When someone does something kind for us, we like them more and we feel a deeper connection with them, because their good deeds are proof that they really care about us.

And when we do something kind for someone else, we earn that person's trust and respect, and we also feel better about ourselves for being a good and moral person.

Studies have shown that those who exercise more kindness in their daily lives tend to feel better about themselves and are more satisfied with their lives overall.

We can practice exercising kindness more in our daily lives by following these guidelines.

Have good intentions

Having good intentions is the first step toward being kinder toward others and building positive relationships with them.

Research on good intentions has shown that when people know

we are acting with their best interests at heart, this improves their experiences with us and makes those experiences more pleasurable.

For example, in one study researchers had participants sit in an easy chair with an electronic massage pad. In one group, the machine was turned on by a computer; and in the other group, the machine was turned on by another human. Although the massages were exactly the same, researchers found that individuals consistently experienced more pleasure by the massage when a person flipped the switch.

As it turns out, the idea that another human being made a conscious effort to turn on the machine made the participants perceive the massage as more enjoyable.

In the second study, people were given a package of candy with a note on it for Valentine's Day. For half of the participants the note read, "I picked this just for you. Hope it makes you happy." For the other half the note read, "Whatever. I don't care. I just picked it randomly."

Researchers found that the candy tasted better and sweeter when the participants received the note of good intentions rather than the note that said they were chosen randomly. Again we see that individuals seem to enjoy their experiences more when they are accompanied with positive attention.

A third study tested pain from an electric shock. One group was

told the electric shock was done by a person accidentally. A second group was told the electric shock was done maliciously. And a third was told the electric shock was done benevolently, in an effort to help them win money.

People who received the shock benevolently reported much less pain than the other two groups. Just the idea that the shock was done in good intentions made the participant feel less hurt.

These 3 studies are simple, but they have profound implications on the role of good intentions in our everyday lives.

- **By giving people the benefit of the doubt that they are good and well-intentioned, we can improve our own experiences with others.** On the other hand, if we go about our day being suspicious and thinking everyone has ulterior motives, we end up making our experiences with others less enjoyable.
- **By acting with good intentions ourselves, we improve other people's experiences.** People like knowing that other people are doing something out of the good of their heart. When we show that we actually care about someone else's well-being, we make life better for them. This goes on to improve our relationships and our ability to build positive connections.

Often we may fall into the trap of thinking only consequences matter – only physical actions – and intentions are unimportant. But research seems to indicate that we do care about the intentions of others.

It matters if someone accidentally spills their drink on your new shirt, or if they consciously spill their drink on you in order to upset you, even if the consequences of the action itself are the same.

In the same way, it matters if we act with good intentions in mind vs. if we act indifferently or with malice.

In general, we all like to believe that we are living in a world where people are generally good and everyone wants everyone to be happy. Having a cynical attitude toward life can instead hurt our well-being and make us less likely to connect with people in a healthy way. Try exercising good intentions more often and you'll see an increased ability to build positive connections and enjoy your life more.

Practice kindness in small doses

Kindness starts as an intention, but it always ends with an action.

Acting kindly toward others is the only real way to let people know we care about them and their happiness. Without action, kindness just resides in our minds but never makes an impact on the real world.

Being kind to others doesn't have to be complex or fancy. Sometimes the simplest acts of kindness are seen as the most sincere, such as holding the door, helping with directions, saying "please" and "thank you," or even just a smile.

Start there and then build to acts of kindness that take a little more effort. Here is a list of some acts of kindness you can try out:

- Tell someone you love them.
- Smile at everyone you see.
- Do something nice for a stranger.
- Donate to a charity you believe in.
- Volunteer in a local community organization.
- Plan a fun social event for friends, family, and/or coworkers.
- Encourage someone to pursue one of their goals.
- Forgive someone who hurt you.
- Apologize for your mistakes.
- Catch up with an old friend.
- Be a good listener when someone needs to vent.
- Create a mix CD for a friend.
- Dedicate a song or poem to someone.

(There's a list of "50 Acts of Kindness" in the *Resources* section of this guide, you can use those and turn them into a fun 30 day challenge.)

Kindness is like a muscle, the more we exercise it the better we are

at it. Don't be afraid to do an act of kindness - however small it is, it's a step in the right direction toward building better relationships and a better world.

Respect

If we can't show kindness toward others, we should at least try to respect who they are.

Respect means we appreciate someone and we try to understand them as an independent human being, even if we disagree with them or don't like something about them.

Respect is an important part of getting along with others, especially teachers, bosses, or coworkers who we spend a lot of time with, but don't willfully choose to associate with.

Respect people's boundaries and freedoms

The first part of respect is understanding that everyone has different boundaries. This means everyone has certain preferences, opinions, lifestyle choices, and personality differences that we won't always share with them.

Not respecting people's boundaries often comes off as controlling and manipulative. We should never make another person feel like they have to do something they don't want to do, or change who

they are so that we like them.

Instead, we should acknowledge and accept everyone's freedoms and differences.

Of course, we all have expectations about how people should act and the kind of relationships we want to have throughout our lives – so it's normal to sometimes want to change people so that they better meet these expectations.

However, this desire to change people can be unhealthy and detrimental. Our influence over other people is limited, and we can't expect ourselves to completely change any one person.

At worst, we may even push someone further away by trying to change them when they don't want to be changed. Sometimes you just need to leave people alone and let them do their own thing.

If you respect people's boundaries, they will respect yours.

And in the long run, being able to give people an appropriate amount of "space" and "freedom" is key toward building healthy and constructive relationships. Too much attachment and control makes us get sick of people quickly.

Avoid lies, insults, and gossip

Another important way of showing respect is to avoid lying to people, insulting them, or gossiping behind their backs.

Studies show that we think less of people when we know they are lying. We also think less of people when they insults others, or gossip a lot about others and spread false rumors.

By doing these negative things (whether directly or indirectly), you come off as disrespectful, cynical, and even insecure. It seems like you need to bring others down to feel good about yourself, and most people find that unattractive.

We should try to be respectful and honest to everyone we meet, even people we don't like. Individuals who report greater honesty in their relationships also report more satisfaction and happiness in their lives. And being honest with others in a respectful and polite way is an important part of building a trusting connection.

Of course, being honest and respectful to yourself is the first step in being more honest and respectful towards others (see the "Honesty" section in "Your Relationship With Yourself" to work on being more honest with yourself).

However, there are also other guidelines we can follow in our everyday interactions to be more honest and respectful:

- Tell the truth about your daily accomplishments without needing to exaggerate.
- Don't make false excuses for being late or failing to complete a task.
- Avoid a question you don't want to answer by politely changing

the subject, or asking another question.

- Own up and apologize when you hurt or disappoint someone.
- Don't spread rumors or gossiping about other people, especially about situations you know nothing about.
- Don't stereotype people or try to put them in a box based on their race, sex, religion, or whatever.

Taking small steps like these can greatly help us become more honest and respectful toward others on a daily basis.

(Check out the video "The Truth About Dishonesty" to learn more about the small ways we are dishonest in our everyday lives and how this can become a downward spiral. A link can be found in the *Resources* section of this e-book.)

Manage your anger and emotional overload

An important part of being a respectful person is knowing how to manage our anger and frustration.

It's natural for us to occasionally be upset with other people; however, we should try our best to channel these emotions in constructive ways, not lash out, yell, or become aggressive.

One recommended technique to overcome these impulsive emotions is called a "STOP Meditation." It allows us to take a short pause and reflect on our thoughts and feelings before acting on them.

Here are directions on how to apply this meditation to managing your anger.

- STOP whatever it is you're doing. Try to catch yourself immediately when the feelings of anger arise.
- TAKE a few deep breaths, focusing on the sensations of your breathing. This helps reconnect you with the present moment and also creates a buffer between your thoughts and your actions.
- OBSERVE what is happening in the moment. Ask yourself:
 - * What am I thinking?
 - * What am I feeling?
 - * What am I doing?
 - * What are my intentions?
 - * How can I act differently to improve the situations?
- PROCEED with your interaction with this new sense of awareness. If you find there is something you need to adjust in your attitude or actions, then make the appropriate changes before things get too heated.

Often by creating a "pause" between our thoughts and actions, we can re-evaluate what we're doing in the moment and change our direction if we find ourselves wanting to do something stupid or

destructive.

So when someone pisses you off and you want to yell at them, take a mental “step back” – breathe a few deep breaths – and then focus back on the situation with a clear mind.

Being able to recognize and manage these negative emotions in the moment is key toward acting respectful to all people, even when they may be irritating us.

(See the video “Defuse Difficult People” to learn more about managing heated emotions in the workplace. A link can be found in the Resources section of this e-book.)

Authenticity

Relationships can only work if we are comfortable being ourselves. No relationship can last if you have to put on a fake persona or lie about yourself to fool people into thinking you are someone different than who you are.

You have to be yourself and let your real personality shine through for a relationship to truly work.

If people don't like the real you, then don't worry about them – not everyone will connect with everyone, because we all have different personalities, interests, values, and beliefs. But when you find people who appreciate you for you, then your relationships really begin to flourish.

Authenticity is when we don't conform our beliefs and actions just to what society thinks they should be.

Instead, we believe and act based on what we each individually find to be the right choices. If these choices happen to be popular in society then that's fine, so long as it isn't blind conformity.

Authenticity is about being true to yourself, not an imitation of someone else. It often requires guts, because society may expect us to be something we're not, and we have to resist giving in to those temptations.

So whether it's choosing a career, a school, a hobby, a boyfriend/girlfriend, or whatever – we have to make sure that we are being sincere to ourselves, and not just giving in to what people want from us.

These are the decisions that define our lives, and it is up to you to live up to them authentically.

If you be yourself, then you'll attract the people in your life who really like you, not just the ones who pretend to. That's important to building sustainable, long-term relationships.

Love

We don't always have to like someone for us to have love for them.

Sure – it may not be “friendship” love or “family” love or “romantic”

love. However, we can have “compassionate” love for anyone, despite any differences or shortcomings that person may have.

Compassion is our ability to understand and sympathize with the suffering of others.

We all suffer in different ways, and we all just want to find happiness. Compassion is the acknowledgement that all humans, at a fundamental level, want the same thing.

“Compassion has the characteristic of wishing that others be free from suffering, a wish to be extended without limits to all living beings...compassion arises by entering into the subjectivity of others, by sharing their interiority in a deep and total way. It springs up by considering that all beings, like ourselves, wish to be free from suffering, yet despite their wishes continue to be harassed by pain, fear, sorrow, and other forms of suffering.”

Bhikku Bodhi

You may not get along with someone. You may not want to associate with them. You may not want to be their friend. But that doesn't mean you can't have good intentions or wish them the best. While you may not interact with the person or directly help them in any way, you can still hope that they find their way and eventually achieve happiness.

This may sound inconsequential, but the implications are tremendous. Cultivating compassion toward others (even people we will never

meet) is closely linked to mental health and positive relationships. It makes us feel more socially connected to everyone and it allows us to maintain a positive outlook on life as a whole.

Practice a loving-kindness meditation

Loving-kindness meditation is a popular tradition in many schools of Buddhism. The aim of the meditation is to cultivate kindness and good intentions toward oneself and all others (even “enemies”). It is a wish that all conscious beings overcome suffering and achieve happiness. Scientific studies have shown that Loving-kindness Meditation can increase happiness and mental health, and can also create long-lasting changes in our brain.

Directions on loving-kindness meditation

- Assume a meditative posture.
- Focus on an individual that you want to cultivate feelings of love and kindness toward.
- Try to visualize the person in your mind’s eye and repeat mantras such as:
 - » “I love _____.”
 - » “May _____ be free from suffering.”

» “May _____ find happiness.”

- And here are some good mantras from Buddhist literature:

“May all beings be free from enmity, affliction and anxiety, and live happily.” - Patisambhidamagga Mettakatha

“In gladness and in safety, may all beings be at ease.” - Karaniya Metta Sutta

- During the loving-kindness meditation, a practitioner will focus on different people, beginning with their self and then expanding to others. Individuals you may wish to cultivate positive feelings toward include:
- These mantras can help create what some Buddhists describe as a “blissful and boundless warm-hearted feeling” toward all conscious beings. However, one thing about mantras or affirmations: it’s important that we mean what we say, and we aren’t just reciting words. If a mantra or affirmation doesn’t stir up feelings, then try writing a mantra or affirmation of your own that resonates with you more.
- Empathy can also play an important role in your loving-kindness meditation. When we see the world through another person’s eyes, it can often become much easier to sympathize with their struggles and show compassion and love toward them.
- Try this: Try beginning your “Loving-Kindness Meditation” by first doing the “100 Breaths Meditation.” This will help you get

into a more relaxed and focused state before repeating your mantras.

Interesting research on loving-kindness meditation

Research in neuroscience suggests that loving-kindness meditation can activate parts of the brain that are involved in how our body responds to emotions (insula), as well as a part of our brain that scientist believe is responsible for empathy (temporal parietal juncture). This effect was particularly strong in experts at meditation vs. novices.

Neuroscientists Richard Davidson and Antoine Lutz say that through practice we can train our brains to be more compassionate and kind: "People are not just stuck at their respective set points. We can take advantage of our brain's plasticity and train it to enhance these qualities."

Lutz believes that loving-kindness meditation may also help curtail some forms of depression. And further research by positive psychologists Barbara Fredrickson found that loving-kindness meditation can increase our daily experiences of positive emotions like amusement, awe, contentment, gratitude, hope, joy, interest, love and pride.

Interconnectedness

In Buddhism, it is said that we are all interconnected to each other.

This means that the “self” and “other” that defines all of our relationships is actually an illusion, and we are all a part of one singular being.

With this deeper understanding of our relationships in the world, we learn to treat people as if they were a part of us, rather than something completely separate.

In other words, when we speak and act in ways that cause suffering in someone’s life, we are actually causing suffering in our own self.

And when we speak and act in ways that cause happiness in someone’s life, we are actually causing happiness in our own self.

Alan Watts, a British philosopher and Zen teacher, describes the concept of “interconnectedness” through the analogy of a spider web with dew drops:

“Imagine a multidimensional spider’s web in the early morning covered with dew drops. And every dew drop contains the reflection of all the other dew drops. And, in each reflected dew drop, the reflections of all the other dew drops in that reflection. And so ad infinitum. That is the Buddhist conception of the universe in an image.”

Alan Watts

We are the reflections of other people in our lives and culture, and they are reflections of us as individuals. So we all play a crucial role in the type of society we build together.

Reflect on the “interconnectedness” in your own life. How have the people in your life shaped who you are as a person? And how have you shaped the lives of other people?

How has your life been affected by people who you may have never met or known before (ancestors, evolutionary history, etc.)? And how will your own life affect people who you may never meet or know (future relatives, influence, etc.)?

With this in mind, we become wiser in how we choose to treat both ourselves and others. We cultivate a deeper understanding of the bigger picture behind our relationships.

(Check out the video “The Hidden Influence of Social Networks” to learn more about the interconnected nature of our relationships. A link can be found in the Resources section of this e-book.)

Final Words on Positive Relationships

All of these characteristics – reciprocity, empathy, equality, fun, kindness, respect, authenticity, love, and interconnectedness – come together to build the bedrock of all of our positive relationships.

The more our relationships reflect these characteristics, the more

beneficial they are toward everyone involved – and that’s really what the end-goal should be for all of our relationships, however big or small.

Make a conscious effort to apply these characteristics on a daily basis. Reflect on them, practice the exercises, and begin changing your attitude about relationships. Internalize a new way of thinking about relationships. Then take small actions to start turning that new way of thinking into real world results.

Ask yourself:

- What would reciprocity look like in a relationship? What kind of actions would fit under a “reciprocal mind frame?”
- What would empathy look like in a relationship? What kind of actions would fit under an “empathic mind frame?”
- What would equality look like in a relationship? What kind of actions would fit under an “equal mind frame?”
- What would fun look like in a relationship? What kind of actions would fit under a “fun mind frame?”
- What would kindness look like in a relationship? What kind of actions would fit under a “kind mind frame?”
- What would respect look like in a relationship? What kind of actions would fit under a “respectful mind frame?”
- What would authenticity look like in a relationship? What kind

of actions would fit under and “authentic mind frame?”

- What would love look like in a relationship? What kind of actions would fit under a “loving mind frame?”
- What would interconnectedness look like in a relationship? What kind of actions would fit under a “interconnected mind frame?”

Get a paper and pen (or open up a Word document) and try to honestly answer these questions as best as possible. Your answers will help provide insight into the actual things you can begin doing in your relationships to make these positive characteristics more prominent in your daily life.

Also, the more you think and practice them, the more you’ll internalize them, until eventually they become natural to you.

Keep in mind that your previous relationships may have been miserable because of negative beliefs and attitudes about how you thought relationships should work.

In order to reverse those negative patterns, you need to change the way you approach your social interactions into something more positive and productive.

LEARNING FROM ROLE MODELS

We can learn a lot from people who have already achieved happiness and success in their relationships. Having strong role models can become a great resource for inspiration, motivation, and education to help fuel your self-improvement.

By learning more about these role models, we can discover the beliefs and habits that have contributed to their success. We can then model those things in our own lives to try to get similar results.

For example, if you want to improve a particular area of your life, then find a couple people who already excel in that area of life. Study them. Ask them questions. Have them show you their technique and share their stories.

The more willing you are to learn from others (especially people who are more skilled or intelligent than you in a particular area of life), the more successful you will be in your relationships.

Make a List of People You Admire

Since the very beginning of our lives, we have modeled actions by our parents, teachers, friends, celebrities, and countless others who have left an impression on us.

This is how we first learned about our world and how to interact in it.

You see, although we often like to think of ourselves as completely independent and autonomous individuals, the truth is who we are is greatly influenced by the people we choose to look up to.

Therefore, one thing I recommend people do is to write a list of the people they admire the most and why they admire them. This is a very useful exercise for determining what it is we really like about others, and how we can model these characteristics in our own lives.

A few years ago I wrote my own list of some of the influential figures in my life. I go back to this list at least once every month to reflect and add new people.

Here is just a small sample of some of the names on my list and how I break them down into different characteristics that I admire:

Intelligence: Carl Sagan, Albert Einstein, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Raymond Kurzweil, Daniel Dennet, Marvin Minsky, Ayn Rand, Christopher Hitchens, Douglas Hofstadter

Humor: Robin Williams, Dave Chapelle, Bill Hicks, Louis C.K., Doug Stanhope, Norm MacDonald, Zack Galifianakis, Steven Colbert, George Carlin, Aziz Ansari

Creative: David Lynch, Frank Zappa, Charlie Kaufman, Quentin Tarantino, Alex Grey, Salvador Dali, Coen Brothers, Pixar, Steven Spielberg, Tim Burton

Kindness: Buddha, Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Carl Rogers, Anne Frank

Ambition: Mark Zuckerberg, Steve Jobs, Gary Vaynerchuk, Mike Patton, Henry Rollins, Lil Wayne, Google, David Wright

Sexy/Seductive: Johnny Depp, George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Gene Simmons, Jared Leto, Neil Strauss

Of course, this list is personal to me, and your list is going to include many different influences not mentioned here. You can also “break down” the list in a way that suits your own values and goals. Maybe you want to focus on your health, then you should make a list of people who you find know a lot about being healthy and fit.

I also find it useful to include family, friends, and acquaintances who embody these characteristics – often having a “real world” reference is even more beneficial than looking up to individuals from afar.

Identifying people we admire is a key component in learning how to improve our self and relationships. It provides us with powerful resources to learn from and be motivated by.

When we focus on people who have achieved values and goals that we care about, we can use their example to achieve similar values and goals in our own lives.

By the way, learning from other individuals is not about trying

to copy or mimic their every move. In the end, you have to be yourself. However, that doesn't mean you can't learn a thing or two from someone else along the way.

Having people you admire doesn't mean you worship everything about those individuals or think they are perfect. Model them only based on what they are good at. If you want to learn how to be a great boxer, watch videos of Mike Tyson, but that doesn't mean you should take relationship advice from him too.

There's something in psychology called "the halo effect" that we need to be careful about when admiring others. The Halo Effect is our tendency to judge a person as solely good because they are really good at one particular thing.

This is a big reason advertisers put celebrities in commercials. We falsely believe that if a person is good at one particular trait then that means they are also trustworthy in something else that is completely unrelated. For example, why is Dr. Dre telling me to drink Dr. Pepper? Sure, he is a great rap producer, but does that have anything to do with knowing good soda? Probably not.

Instead, it's way more useful and practical to see people as a mixed bag. Sure, some people are really great at many things – and we can learn a lot from them – but we all have some flaws and weaknesses too. Don't forget that the people you look up to are human at the end of the day. Don't turn your role models into Gods.

What Would _____ Do?

Once you have a rich selection of role models to choose from, you can begin to use them as a learning resource.

This is one exercise I like to practice whenever I'm stuck and need inspiration – it's called "What Would _____ Do?"

Directions

- First think of a situation in your life that you want to improve yourself in. Maybe it's talking to a good-looking person at a party, or excelling at a job interview, or getting along better with your family, or being nicer to your coworkers, or whatever.
- Now go through your list of role models and find one that you think would best fits that situation - and best fits how you'd want to respond in that particular situation.
- Now that you've chosen both, the simple question is "What Would _____ Do?" if they were in this same position as you.
- Take the time to really imagine the situation as accurately as possible. Watch it unfold in a step-by step sequence from the very beginning to the very end.
- As you do that, try to step into your role model's shoes and perceive it from their perspective. Ask yourself:

- » What are they thinking?
- » What are they saying?
- » What are they doing?
- » What's their overall attitude like?

This exercise will be even more effective if you imagine it at a specific place that's actually a real part of your life (such as your workplace, or school, or home, or a bar you like to go to a lot, etc.)

- Based on the answers to the above step, ask yourself how you could adopt a mind frame similar to your role model.
- Imagine what it would be like if you had a similar way of thinking, speaking, and acting in the same situation. What might the results look like if everything worked out?
- Practice. It can't be emphasized enough but mental exercises are the same as physical exercises. You need to repeat them on a frequent basis before they start having long-term effects.
- Try doing this exercise twice a week for 15 minutes each (and once right before you go out somewhere to socialize).
- If you really want to dive into your imagination, "role-play" these situations in a private room. It may seem goofy, but physically acting these things out (and literally speaking out loud to yourself, as if you were having a conversation with someone else) can help create a much stronger effect on your

brain and neurology than if you just imagine it all in your head.

I already mentioned in the chapter on “Your Relationship With Yourself” how this kind of imagination or “mental rehearsal” can have long-lasting effects on our brains and behavior.

Using role models to facilitate these changes can make the learning process even more effective.

The more we practice these social situations mentally (especially under a “role model” mind frame), the more likely we are to think and behave in these ways when we are actually exposed to these situations in the real world.

Overall, if you choose good models to learn from, and you take the time to practice this exercise regularly, then it will benefit you a lot. There are a lot of positive things we can learn by observing others and actively putting ourselves in their shoes.

Motivated By Other People’s Struggles

Success rarely comes without roadblocks, hardship, and failure.

If you’ve ever read anyone’s success story, then you have undoubtedly found out that their victories weren’t absent from previous failures and struggles.

In many ways, those past failures are what make successful people who they are today.

Recent research has shown that when we focus on both the failures and successes of our role models, we are much more likely to be motivated and inspired by them to improve ourselves.

This is because when we see ourselves going through similar struggles as people who we look up to, we can relate to them much more. We see them as humans, and imperfect, just like the rest of us – regardless of how perfect they may seem inside our heads.

By acknowledging the more humble, imperfect, and “human-like” characteristics of our role models, we feel much more capable of overcoming similar obstacles and achieving our goals.

The truth is that even the happiest and most successful person in the world experiences downfalls every now and again. We should therefore expect to have similar struggles when pursuing our own values and goals.

A related study published in the Journal of Educational Psychology found that students who learned about a topic in science, as well as the struggles scientists go through when discovering their theories, ended up better understanding the curriculum when compared to individuals who didn't learn the history of scientists' struggles.

Researchers say this is because students often hold a stereotype that scientists are big brained, super geniuses. In other words, they hold an ideal about who these people are – and it's an ideal they can't relate to. Therefore they think scientists are somehow “special” and

different from us.

But when students learn about the background of most scientists – they find that they aren't that special, and often times they go through their own frustrations and failures.

Their success is just as much based on hard work and perseverance, as it is their genes or biology. Knowing this, students become more motivated and inspired to overcome their own struggles and frustrations. They begin to believe, "If they can do it, then I can do it."

The big lesson here is to be careful of idealizing mentors, role models, and other people who we may look up to. They are, in fact, human. And they often share much of the same pain and struggles as we do when trying to improve ourselves and achieve our goals.

Once we understand that even the most successful people go through rough times, we feel more capable of overcoming rough times of our own – because we understand that it's part of the process.

Learning the Most You Can About Your Role Models

When learning from your role models, it's important to find out as much about them as possible.

This includes watching interviews and documentaries, reading books, speaking to them in person, discussing them with other admirers, consuming their music or movies or art, and searching for biographies and factoids about them on the Internet.

Anything can be a potential resource. It all depends on who your role model is and what's available to you.

The more knowledge you have about a person, the better you understand the context of their life. This is often much more useful than snippets of a person's personality, because it tells you a deeper story into how and why a person thinks and acts the way they do.

Consequently, the more you learn about your role models, the more you'll become aware of both your similarities and differences.

You'll find some things about that person really resonate with you, motivate you, and inspire you, while other things you may not be able to relate to, or you just dislike those aspects of that person.

Remember the goal is never to become your role model, only to extract things about their story that actually benefit you personally.

If you really want to make the most of your role models, find a way to collect and save as many resources about them as possible.

Try creating a folder on your computer and put whatever images, books, videos, MP3s, quotes, or websites you can find about them. If you do this then you'll always have material available to you when you need that extra boost.

Focus on One Characteristic You Want to Develop

We can't change everything about ourselves at once, it has to happen piece by piece. When we try to change too much, then we quickly become burnt out and nothing gets accomplished.

So when using these exercises, try to focus on only one single characteristic at a time.

For example, I remember when I wanted to work on becoming funnier around people, so I focused only on role models that I had under my "humor" category.

For 30 Days I spent each night watching either a classic comedy movie or stand-up special or interview that featured one of my role models. It was great entertainment, of course, but it was also an amazing learning experience because I got to study and compare what actually made them all so funny.

(I found a particularly useful insight while watching Robin William's "Behind the Actor's Studio" where he talks about the foundations of improvisation.)

As I continued consuming these resources, my own thoughts and behaviors became more fun, light-hearted, and humorous. I always had a desire to be silly and make people laugh, but I really haven't started perfecting that in my social interactions until after this exercise.

In the same way, you can come up with a “30 Day Experiment” of your own, focusing completely on one part of your social life that you really want to improve.

Experiment with New Versions of Yourself

We are often hesitant to change things about ourselves because we feel like it means we are less of a person or that something is wrong with us.

I don't think of it like that. When I try to think and act in new ways, I see it as an experiment. I try something new a few times, and if it fits my personality well then I keep it; but if it doesn't, then I just forget about it and move on.

It's just like any other experiment. It's trial-and-error.

And when you really think about, our “self” is changing everyday whether we play an active role in that process or not.

You're probably a much more different person today than you were 10 years ago, and you'll probably be a much more different person 10 years in the future than you are today.

We're constantly changing based on new experiences and new knowledge. So by taking part in exercises like the ones in this chapter, and actively learning from role models, we are just taking more conscious control over the type of person we evolve into.

NAVIGATING YOUR SOCIAL WORLD

This chapter will be focusing on things to keep in mind as we navigate our complex social worlds.

Throughout our lives, we're going to meet many new people and build many new relationships. Our social world is in a constant state of change and evolution.

It's therefore important that we learn to navigate through our social world as effectively as possible, while making the most of our relationships when we have them.

Know What You Value in a Relationship

The key to finding satisfying and fulfilling relationships in your life is to know what you are looking for, and what you really value in your relationships.

Everyone has different values and preferences. And not everyone is going to be compatible with you. Maybe you are looking for someone who is more out-going and adventurous, while another person is looking for someone who enjoys staying home and relaxing.

Our values are never right or wrong – they are just different. If a person doesn't click with you, that doesn't make them a bad person,

your personalities just don't fit together.

Take 5 minutes right now, and write a list of the types of things you value in a person.

This can include anything: their hobbies, interests, career, age, physical features, education, religion, politics, or whatever you can think of that's really important to you.

Once you have your list, try ranking them in order of "most important" to "least important." This will help give you a clearer picture of what you really care about in a relationship, and what isn't as important to you.

Also, be cautious that your list of values doesn't demand too much from your relationships.

For example, if you only care about dating men who are over 6 feet tall, make a million dollars a year, and look like Brad Pitt or Ryan Gosling, consider re-evaluating your preferences to something more practical and realistic.

It's important to know what you want, but it's also important to manage our expectations and not live in a fantasy world of relationships.

As you navigate your social world, always keep your core values in the back of your mind.

Pay Attention to the Feedback You Get From Others

Our minds are a lot like a feedback loop.

We process information from our environment, we respond to it through our actions, and then we get new information back based on the effects of those actions.

This cycle continues as we continue to adapt and change to new situations in our lives.

One key to “happiness” and “success” in our relationships – however we may define those terms – is paying attention to this constant feedback as much as possible.

When we do things that get positive feedback, from others, we should continue to do those things in the future, because we know that they work and bring desirable results.

And when we do something that gets negative feedback from others, we should change our course of action in hopes of getting different results.

However, some people try to ignore this feedback, or they just aren't good at being fully aware of all the feedback they get from their relationships.

I know there was a point in my life where I wasn't paying attention to the feedback I was getting from others. I was stuck in my own ways.

I attached to old habits and old ways of thinking because I thought they were my only options, not because they actually worked or helped me live better.

Ask yourself, "Are my friends, family, coworkers, and loved ones responding positively or negatively to what I do and say?" If you find the answer is negative or unsatisfactory, then try new ways of interacting with them that bring better results.

The more you pay attention to the feedback you get from others, the better you can adapt and change to your relationships in a healthy way.

Give People Space

Attention is the currency of relationships, but we have to spend it wisely.

While clearly a relationship cannot work if we never spend time with that person, it's similarly true that a relationship cannot work if we always need to spend time with that person.

Too much of any one person can make us possessive and clingy. We become co-dependent on that person to make us feel happy and whole.

When we don't get to be around that person 24/7 – or when we don't get our necessary "fix" of someone – we become easily depressed,

frustrated, bored, or angry.

We become addicted toward these people whom we spend all of our time with. We crave them like a drug. And like a drug addict we begin to need higher and higher doses to keep ourselves happy and satisfied. But this cannot last.

Instead, there is a balance that we need to maintain in every relationship, even if it's just to keep things fresh and interesting in our lives.

We can't physically be with someone at all times. And even if we could, that wouldn't necessarily be a good thing.

People need their space.

Everyone is an individual with his or her own values, interests, hobbies, and goals. When our relationships don't respect this independence they become destructive and harmful.

Giving people space allows us to find ourselves without having our lives revolve around a single person.

Most people don't want to be in a relationship where they are around the other person all of the time. And when they do, it's usually a sign that they have low self-esteem or they don't trust the other person to be doing things on their own.

They begin to feel that if the person isn't spending enough time with them, then they must not be "good enough." And their clinginess

and possessiveness creates jealousy and insecurity.

Here are some warning signs that you are in a clingy relationship:

1. You think about the person a lot when you're not with them.
2. You're constantly calling/texting/instant-messaging the person throughout your day.
3. You spend almost all of your free time with them.
4. You become easily depressed or agitated when you aren't with them.
5. You become jealous and insecure when they spend time with other people.
6. You can't imagine yourself spending a day or week without them.

The truth is it's healthy for both our own self and our relationships to spend time doing other things, seeing other people, or even just spending time alone.

We need this time away from people to remind ourselves the bigger picture in our lives, that there is more to us than just the people we hang out with.

And at the end of the day, giving people space actually makes us more connected to them. It gives us time to reflect and appreciate the people in our lives, so that we don't just take them for granted.

There are a million and one ways we can spend our time differently and allow more space in our relationships. Some of these things include:

- Catching up with other friends and family.
- Reading a book, watching a movie, or listening to music.
- Starting a creative hobby like playing music, or painting, or writing.
- Going to the gym, exercising, or playing sports.
- Volunteering in your local community.
- Going on a week long vacation.
- Joining a club centered around an activity you enjoy doing.
- Taking time to meditate or pray.

How you spend your time is up to you. The point is you should choose activities that align with your interests and goals in life, especially activities that you wouldn't be able to do with the people you normally hang out with.

Balance is a key component in all of life and it's equally important in our relationships. Learning how to spend quality time away from people is just as important as learning how to spend quality time with people.

Relationships Come and Go

If there is one thing that is consistent throughout our lives, it's that things are always changing. This is especially true for our relationships.

Try looking back on your life right now and remember all of the people whom you used to be close to but have since faded away from. Maybe you had a big argument or fight with them, maybe they passed away, or maybe you two just took different paths in life.

Now, take a moment to look into the future and imagine all the new people you'll possibly meet throughout the course of your life. Maybe you'll make new friends, or meet new employees at work, or get married, or have children, or encounter new people at concerts, bars, or parties.

Relationships come and go for many different reasons. It can happen fast and suddenly, or it can happen slow and gradually – but the fact that our relationships change is inevitable.

People themselves are always changing. People get older. People move to new places. People switch jobs. People go to different schools. People change hobbies. And people grow apart. It doesn't have to be seen as positive or negative, it's just the way things really are in the world we live in.

When we come to expect that life will always be changing, and our relationships will always be changing, it becomes less surprising and less shocking when it actually happens.

There's a tremendous power in being able to see your life how it is right now and accepting that it won't always be that way.

By recognizing the impermanent and transient nature of our lives – including our relationships – we appreciate what we have more when we have it. We learn not take the people in our lives for granted, because they may not always be there tomorrow.

This perspective motivates us to make the most of what we have when we have it.

The Desire to Change People

We all have expectations about how people should act and the kind of relationships we want to have throughout our lives. Therefore, it's normal to sometimes want to change people so that they better meet our expectations.

We know from a lot of research in social psychology that individuals are malleable in a number of ways. Often the deeper our relationships, the more that person will be willing to listen to what we say and follow our advice.

However, there is another element of human psychology that is rarely talked about, but always taken for granted: free will. If it's true that everyone has a sense of free will, then it's also true that we can only change people to a limited extent.

We notice this in our everyday life. We've all experienced moments where we try to change something about someone, but they actively resist it. No matter how good our advice was or how nice we tried to be, the other person's will was too strong and they wouldn't budge.

This is something to be mindful of whenever you are consciously trying to change another person. You may have good intentions, you may have all the knowledge to help them, but if they aren't willing to change then your efforts will be thwarted.

Also, when we try to change something that we don't have control over, it can often become a great source of stress. Therefore, we need to know when it's appropriate to let go of this desire to change others when it may become too toxic.

And sometimes when we are too controlling a person they will purposely rebel and do something in spite of our efforts. It's not necessarily the case that they wanted to do what they did, they just felt obligated to do the opposite of what we told them (because they felt their freedoms were being trampled).

In order to motivate someone to create a lasting change in themselves, you have to first-and-foremost respect their freedom and autonomy.

Even when people seek help or guidance, they often just want quick fixes. They want you to do a magic spell or recommend some magic pill so they don't want to put in any work.

It's difficult if not impossible to change people like this, because they aren't willing to accept the responsibility to make that change. You can tell them step-by-step what they should do and share tips that have worked for you, but they will never find the motivation to follow your guidance. It reminds me of the classic idiom "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink."

Here's an example of why we need to be careful of who we try to change. I have a friend of a friend who is occasionally suicidal. My friend knew I was good at talking to people in need, so she had me contact her and try listening to her story. I was very hesitant to give any advice because of how fragile the situation was. I listened and showed my concern, but I could tell she was someone that was very stuck in her ways.

She was ridden with guilt because of some things she had done, but she tried to backwards rationalize it by saying everyone sucked and they deserved it. She would occasionally admit what she did was wrong and that she should change her ways, but then the very next sentence out of her mouth would tell a different story.

In the midst of this confusion, I tried to recommend some actionable advice to ease her mind from the guilt: go for a walk, take pictures, try to channel your emotions in more creative ways.

But she insisted on dwelling and feeling victimized. In some sense, she thrived on it, even enjoyed it. She was addicted to misery and there was little I could do. Eventually I had to tell her that she should

see a professional because I wasn't equipped enough to help her.

Our influence over others is limited. And it's important not to be too hard on ourselves when we can't make everyone happy.

Before anything, we should be responsible to ourselves, and maybe through our example we can inspire others to change in positive ways too. Even the most influential people find themselves limited in their capacity to transform the relationships around them.

In today's world, we are so used to getting what we want that we often try desperately to change disappointing relationships into something more fulfilling, even when it is hopeless.

How Do You Know When To End a Relationship?

Relationships have costs.

We may not always like to look at them in that way, but maintaining a relationship often means spending valuable time, money, and energy.

If we find ourselves in relationships without a net gain, then we may question whether or not we should keep these relationships in our lives.

One fact you have to accept: some relationships throughout your life may be worth ending.

People can abuse people in a number of ways: physically, mentally, financially, spiritually, etc. And maintaining relationships with people who take part in these abuses will suck the life out of you in the long-term.

Unfortunately, that's a huge cost that some people seem willing to bare; but I personally don't think we can live truly satisfying lives with these burdens constantly looming over our shoulders.

For one reason or another, some people stay stuck in relationships that end up being a net loss. Despite the costs, we may stay in these relationships for multiple reasons:

- You don't think you can find anything better.
- You think things will eventually improve.
- You are compelled to stick with the status quo.
- You're ignoring the long-term costs of the relationships.

Take for example my friend Todd. Every time I speak to him he has something to complain about regarding his girlfriend. "She never leaves me alone/She always wants me to buy her new stuff/She hates my friends." Every time it's a never-ending spew of complaints. It makes you wonder if the relationship is really worth it.

Seriously, if you rarely enjoy yourself around her, and there are all these problems in the relationship, then do the benefits really outweigh the costs? And if they don't – are you willing to cut your

losses short?

As painful as it is to be in these kinds of relationships, it only hurts more when we prolong them. But because most people are very loss averse, they stay invested in these relationships hoping that they will turn around.

This is one example of “the sunk cost fallacy” as applied to relationships. Sometimes people over-invest in a losing relationship, hoping that they will eventually benefit in the end. However, instead what happens is these never-ending investments only lead to more costs and more pain.

In a worst case scenario, this can turn into a vicious cycle where losses continue to pile up until we are physically, mentally, financially, or spiritually bankrupt.

This is what will happen if Todd stays together with his girlfriend. She is mentally burdensome (never leaving him alone), she is financially burdensome (always asking for her boyfriend to pay for expensive things), and even burdensome on Todd’s other relationships (she hates his friends and wants him to find new ones). If Todd really values his free time and friends, he should dump her.

But it’s not necessarily my decision to tell you (or Todd) what to value in a relationship. Maybe all Todd cares about is the sex, and he’s willing to bend to his girlfriend’s will in order to achieve that value (because it means so much to him). That’s ultimately his choice.

The big point I want to make is that relationships can have costs, and sometimes those costs outweigh the benefits.

If you find this is true for some of your relationships, you may want to consider putting it to a respectful end (especially if you don't see any possible way that the situation will improve in the future).

Don't wait until you are bankrupt: know when you're being treated unfairly and put a stop to it as soon as possible.

You Have to Be Happy Before You Can Help Others Be Happy

You have to be happy before you can help someone else be happy.

So often I hear of people unsuccessfully trying to make someone else happy when they have not yet found happiness for themselves. It is almost as if they expect to be happy once they make the other person happy, so they give and give and give, but nothing seems to work.

They believe that the more they sacrifice, the more it shows they care, even though it couldn't be further from the truth.

Think about it: if you haven't achieved happiness for yourself, then how could you possibly help someone else achieve happiness of their own? It's impossible. You may be able to provide some short-term pleasures, but you can't teach someone something that you

haven't yet learned.

When it comes to first achieving happiness for yourself, I'm reminded of the tutorial they often give on airplanes about oxygen masks.

They always tell you that in times of emergency you should put your oxygen mask on first, then help your neighbors put on their masks. The reasoning is simple: if you don't put on your oxygen mask first, you suffer a greater likelihood of dying; and you can't help anyone once you're dead.

In the same way, you can't help someone be happy if you yourself are sad and depressed. You have to take care of yourself first before taking care of others. Anything else is a recipe for disaster for the both of you.

Once you have achieved happiness of your own, then you are in a much better position to help someone else achieve their own happiness.

When you walk into a room and light it up with joy, other people catch that like an infection. When you share your stories and advice with enthusiasm, people will begin to perk up their ears and actually listen to you.

And when people see you standing up for your beliefs and achieving your goals and values, they are more motivated to do the same for themselves.

In essence, when you're happy then you become a positive role

model for others. And that's often the best you can do when trying to share your happiness with others.

Focus on the Positive Memories in Your Relationships

Whether we are still in a relationship, or it has come to end, focusing on the positive memories helps us to appreciate all of our relationships, whether past or present.

Positive memories serve a very useful purpose in all aspects of our lives. When we reflect on the good times we've shared with a person (whoever they may be), we feel more connected to them and we appreciate our time spent with them.

But when we only focus on the negative memories with someone, then we're more likely to dislike them and think less of them. It's commonsense, but it's something we don't often practice in our relationships.

When we're upset with someone, we tend to talk about the problems over and over again, both directly to the person and indirectly behind their backs. We continuously prolong and "re-live" these bad times through our daily conversations.

In one related study, researchers discovered that loyal baseball fans are more likely to remember details of events when their team won, rather than when their team lost.

This suggests that our level of commitment and loyalty in a relationship is related to putting greater importance on the positive memories with that person rather than the negative ones.

For example, when a fan's favorite team wins a big game, they often celebrate it and reminisce about it with family, friends, and co-workers for days. This focus on positive memories allows them to feel a stronger bond with the team of their choice.

On the other hand, when their favorite team loses, they tend to dissociate from the memory and not put as much importance on it. Either way, their level of commitment remains intact.

Imagine if you treated your relationships in the same way.

Imagine if whenever something positive in your relationship happened, you reminisced and talked about it for days, but when something negative happened you quickly moved on and looked past it. If you did that, you would maximize the positivity in all of your relationships.

CONCLUSION

I hope if there is anything you've learned in this guide, it's the fact that there are many different ways we can begin building healthier relationships throughout our lives.

Keep in mind, however, that this is a life-long process. You don't become an expert at your relationships overnight, but if you aim for steady and gradual progress then over time you'll see significant benefits. Start by focusing on only one aspect of your relationships at a time.

Try re-reading sections of this e-book that you feel you need to work on the most. And take the exercises in each chapter and practice them for a minimum of 1 or 2 weeks before moving onto another exercise (give them an honest chance, even if they feel weird or uncomfortable at first).

Also, be happy and motivated by any progress you make, however small it is. Success in anything is always a series of small steps in the right direction. It takes a little bit of patience and persistence.

And to really make the most of your progress, I recommend keeping a journal or blog to keep track of your small victories and failures, as well what you learn from your experiences with relationships on a daily basis.

Improving yourself is an active process. This e-book only gives you the information you need to start improving your relationships, but it's up to you to really apply it and make the most of it.

The last section of this guide includes additional resources you can use as a supplement to a lot of the advice I've already written about in previous chapters, these resources include:

- 100 Affirmations for Self-Improvement: Motivational quotes and sayings you can use to re-program your mind and keep yourself inspired.
- 50 Acts of Kindness: Simple suggestions and tips on how to be nicer toward everyone we meet in life.
- Helpful Videos and Links: Other outside resources you can explore to learn more about relationships, mostly lectures and videos by psychologists, neuroscientists, and other experts.

This is just the beginning of your journey, so never stop learning, never stop trying new things, and never stop meeting new people and building positive relationships.

If you ever have any questions about this e-book, please feel free to reach out to me on Twitter or Facebook, or email me at contact@theemotionmachine.com and I'll try to get back to you as soon as possible.

Often I can give more specific advice on relationships if you give me a detailed summary of what exactly you're having trouble with and

what you want to improve.

May your relationships grow and prosper from now into the future.

RESOURCES

Here are additional resources that you can use as a supplement to this guide.

Resource #1

100 Affirmations for Self-Improvement

Neurons that fire together wire together. So the more we practice having thoughts or beliefs that benefit our well-being, the more naturally those thoughts and beliefs will play themselves out in our everyday life.

Affirmations are one way to develop new beliefs that can eventually become second-nature. Every morning or evening we can repeat these affirmations with a clear and focused mind, and with practice these beliefs can take hold inside our brains.

One caveat, however, is to make sure that the affirmations you repeat to yourself are congruent with reality, and aligned with your core values. I've seen many people come up with delusional affirmations and then attempt to ingrain them into their minds. Even when they do succeed, those beliefs can be detrimental.

Please be aware of the meaning and intention behind the affirmation

before you decide to “program it” into your mind.

The following is just a list of suggestions on some of the affirmations you may want to practice. Feel free to use the ones you think will benefit you, and disregard the ones you disagree with. Hopefully this list can also motivate you to think of some unique affirmations of your own.

I recommend only practicing 1 or 2 affirmations at a time. And the affirmations you choose to practice should largely depend on your current goals in self-improvement.

1. Everyday, in every way, I am getting better and better.
2. Every failure in my life can be a learning experience.
3. I live in the present moment.
4. I create value in other peoples' lives.
5. I am always changing.
6. I am worthy of positive relationships in my life.
7. I wish the best for everyone.
8. I learn something new everyday.
9. I am genuinely interested in other people.
10. I have many strengths and positive characteristics.
11. I don't worry about the things I can't control.

12. Listening to my emotions can help guide me to make better decisions.
13. I see my anxiety is motivation to change or improve.
14. I can overcome obstacles in my life.
15. I am a positive role model to others.
16. I will try something different today.
17. I'm not afraid to step outside of my comfort zone.
18. I believe people are generally good.
19. I forgive anyone who has hurt me in the past.
20. I have a rich and supportive social circle.
21. What doesn't kill me only makes me stronger.
22. My past is one big learning experience.
23. I must be the change I wish to see in the world.
24. I will try to be more understanding of others.
25. My sadness is just a stepping-stone.
26. This too shall pass.
27. I can find happiness in every moment.
28. I'm a proactive problem-solver.
29. When I open my mind and senses, I'm much more creative.

30. I can create my own positive energy.
31. When people get to know me, they really like me.
32. Just do it.
33. I can see the bigger picture.
34. I see money as a useful tool for helping myself and others.
35. I take small steps everyday to be healthier.
36. I'm dedicated to my passions in life.
37. I have the resources to take care of my family.
38. My negative emotions can serve a positive function.
39. I determine the meaning of my life.
40. Every decision I make helps shape my future.
41. If I never take risks in life, I'll never be rewarded.
42. I remain focused on what matters most in my life and relationships.
43. I participate in life, I don't wait for it to happen.
44. I will be more conscious when acting and making decisions.
45. I can think rationally and intelligently.
46. I'm dedicated to gradual self-improvement.
47. I treat others with kindness and respect.

48. If I want something I've never had, I must do something I've never done.
49. I know when to relax and not take life so seriously.
50. I learn from my past relationships.
51. I can accept criticism without taking it personally.
52. I love and accept my body.
53. When I love myself, I allow others to love me too.
54. Most of the limitations in my life are fictional.
55. I narrate the story of my life.
56. I exude purpose and joy.
57. All is well, right here, right now.
58. Today, I will open my mind to the endless opportunities surrounding me.
59. I am grateful for the people I have in my life.
60. I am my own best friend.
61. I can find balance in my life.
62. I am mindful of my health and well-being.
63. I exercise freedom in all aspects of my life.
64. I know when to trust my intuition.

65. I can gain knowledge in anything if I'm willing to learn.
66. I strive to achieve my goals and values in life.
67. I can only give happiness to others once I have found happiness in myself.
68. I'm optimistic about the future.
69. I have all the material luxury I need.
70. I will celebrate the small victories in my life and stay motivated by them.
71. I'm interconnected with everything in the universe.
72. I'm productive in achieving what I want in life.
73. Small changes on a daily basis lead to big changes over time.
74. Most of the time there is nothing to fear.
75. When life gets tough, I can persist.
76. I will make the most of this situation.
77. I don't waste my time and energy around toxic people.
78. I'd rather make a mistake than forever regret not trying.
79. I will balance both speaking and listening in my daily conversations.
80. I don't listen to the negative voice in my head.

81. I need to experiment with new things before I can think of myself in new ways.

82. I don't always choose my circumstances, but I do choose how I respond to those circumstances.

83. If I want to understand someone, I need to first let go of my biases and prejudices.

84. I try to see things from other people's perspective.

85. I treat everyone as an equal.

86. I allow myself to let go, be spontaneous, and have fun.

87. I focus on the positive memories in my relationships.

88. I will not let my happiness become dependent on any one person.

89. I have many inspirational role models to learn from and be motivated by.

90. I do kind things for people without the expectation of anything in return.

91. I always act myself around people; I never feel the need to be someone I'm not.

92. I'm not afraid to question my old habits and beliefs.

93. There are always opportunities to meet new people in my life.

94. I don't get easily offended or upset by people.
95. I believe life is meant to be enjoyed.
96. Whatever happens happens.
97. I try my best not to hurt others.
98. I sincerely hope that everyone finds happiness in their lives.
99. I'm willing to pay short term costs for long term gains.
100. I seek to learn new things everyday.

Exercise: Make index cards of all of these and post them around your home as motivational reminders.

Resource #2

50 Acts of Kindness

Here is a list of simple and easy acts of kindness we can begin practicing on a daily basis to improve our relationships with others. Try gradually integrating some of these into your daily actions.

1. Give a genuine compliment.
2. Tell someone whom you really care about that you love them.
3. Smile at everyone you see.
4. Do something nice for a stranger, such as helping someone who looks lost.
5. Donate to a charity that you believe does good work.
6. Volunteer in a local community organization.
7. Plan a fun social event for friends, family, and/or coworkers.
8. Encourage someone to pursue one of his or her goals.
9. Forgive someone who hurt you.
10. Apologize for your mistakes, even if you don't think you were completely wrong.
11. Catch up with an old friend by giving them a call or sending an e-mail.
12. Be a good listener when someone needs to vent.

13. Create a mix CD/playlist for a friend.
14. Dedicate a song or poem to someone.
15. Say “please” and “thank you” – and really mean it.
16. Leave a generous tip for a friendly waiter/waitress.
17. Pass along a great book you’ve just finished reading.
18. Print out inspirational quotes and post them around town.
19. Deliver a small gift (gift certificate/fresh-baked goods) to the local fire department or police department.
20. Donate blood or platelets. .
21. Mow a neighbor’s lawn or shovel their driveway when it snows.
22. Tell someone you appreciate them.
23. Leave a positive comment on a blog or website you enjoy.
24. Spend more time with your kids.
25. Pay the toll for the car behind you and be considerate in traffic.
26. Organize a local event.
27. Create a “Free Hugs” stand.
28. Do something nice for yourself.
29. Hold the door for someone. One person, five people, ten people.
30. Send hand-written thank you notes for basic things, such as

dinner at somebody's house, had fun going to a movie, etc.

31. Pick up after yourself. Don't leave a mess for other people to clean up.

32. Be nice to people on the Internet, especially on message boards, Facebook, or Twitter. It's easier to be mean and inconsiderate when we aren't with someone face to face.

33. Say "hi," "good morning," or "good afternoon" to familiar faces.

34. Invite close friends and family for dinner at your place.

35. Send out cards on people's birthdays, anniversaries, etc. - real paper cards that you have to mail with a stamp (it usually means more than an e-mail).

36. Be patient and polite to someone even if they are really annoying you. Be the bigger person.

37. Teach people useful and practical things you know that they can apply to their own life.

38. Give away old stuff or hand-me-downs that you don't need anymore but could be valuable to someone else.

39. Let someone cut you in line at a store if they appear to be busy or in a rush.

40. Help a child with their homework.

41. Hook a friend up with another friend if you think they will hit it

off.

42. Recommend a new movie, TV show, book, video game, or band/artist to someone who you think will like them.

43. Buy something nice for someone, just because you want to.

44. Write a positive recommendation for someone if they are looking for a new job, school, or whatever.

45. Congratulate other people on their accomplishments and success.

46. Give spare change to a homeless man.

47. Donate food or clothes you don't need to people in need.

48. Let go of grudges, always continue relationships with your best foot forward.

49. Focus on the good times you've had with someone to cultivate gratitude and appreciation toward your relationships, both past and present.

50. Always take into account someone else's perspective – their thoughts, emotions, and experiences – to better manage conflict and disagreements.

Exercise: Choose 30 of these and turn them into a "30 Day Experiment" by doing one new act of kindness each day for a whole month. Start with the ones you find easiest, then work your way toward ones you find more difficult.

Resource #3

Helpful Videos and Links

College Courses

[Social Psychology](#) by Robert Lieberman, UCLA (Academic Earth)

[Communication and Conflict in Couples and Relationships](#) by Benjamin Karney, UCLA (Academic Earth)

[The Evolutionary Psychology of Mating and Dating](#) by Glenn Wilson, Gresham College (Academic Earth)

Social Psychology

[The Empathic Civilization](#) by Jeremy Rifkin (RSA)

[The Hidden Influence of Social Networks](#) by Nicholas Christakis (TED)

[Language as a Window into Human Nature](#) by Steven Pinker (RSA)

[Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are](#) by Amy Cuddy (TED)

[The Truth About Dishonesty](#) by Dan Ariely (RSA)

[The Power of Outrospection](#) by Roman Krznaric (RSA)

[The Power of Introverts](#) by Susan Cain (TED)

[How to Cope With Loneliness](#) by John Cacioppa (Big Think)

[Connected, But Alone?](#) by Sherry Turkle (TED)

[Why Are People Different?](#) by Paul Loom, Yale University (YouTube)

[Identity and Stereotype Threat](#) by Claude M. Steele, Columbia University (YouTube)

[Social Intelligence](#) by Daniel Goleman (Google Talks)

[The Evolution of Empathy](#) by Saron Baron-Cohen (YouTube)

[How Do We Communicate?](#) By Paul Loom, Yale (YouTube)

Love/Romantic Relationships

[Making Relationships Work](#) (Part 1 of 4) by John Gottman (YouTube)

[The Science of Relationships: From Romance to Rejection](#) by UCLA (YouTube)

[What You Don't Know About Marriage](#) by Jenna McCarthy (TED)

[The Brain in Love](#) by Helen Fisher (TED)

[The Power of Vulnerability](#) by Brené Brown (TED)

[What Motivates Us: Sex](#) by Paul Loom, Yale (YouTube)

[The Next Sexual Revolution](#) by Pepper Schwartz (YouTube)

[Brain Sex: Why We Fall in Love](#) (Top Documentary Films)

Work Life

[Corporate Chemistry](#) by Helen Fisher (EconomistMagazine)

[How to Manage Your Work Relationships](#) by Linda Hill (BigThink)

[Let Your Ears Do The Talking](#) by MinuteMBA (YouTube)

[The True Cost of a Bad Boss](#) by MinuteMBA (YouTube)

[Defuse Difficult People](#) by HarvardBusiness (YouTube)

Influence

[Science of Persuasion](#) by influenceatwork (YouTube)

[Conformity](#) by TheraminTrees (YouTube)

[The Bandura Bobo Doll Experiment](#) from “The Brain: A Secret History”
(YouTube)

[Milgram Experiment \(revisited by Derren Brown\)](#) (YouTube)

[The Bystander Effect](#) (YouTube)

[The Stanford Prison Experiment](#) (YouTube)

[Asch Conformity Experiment](#) (YouTube)

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