is a guide to rediscovering great friendships. In this book you’ll discover unique content on the art and science of friendship—full of inspiration, learning and practice. Lifeboat will help you move beyond fast-food-friendships into deeper, more meaningful relationships with friends. Join us on this extraordinary journey to better friendships!
## Steps

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Here’s to great friends! The sidekicks. The best buds. The comrades in foxholes. The ones who see us differently. They embrace us—warts and all—and they have no mind to judge. You can remember them, fight with them, celebrate them and even neglect them. About the only thing you can’t do is live life without them. That’s because great friends change who we are and push us to be our best selves. Where some just see great friends, we see inspiration.

Thank you to those great friends—you know who you are. You inspired Lifeboat and we are forever grateful.

We are also eternally thankful for the leadership of our intrepid crew, the kindred spirits who generously volunteered their time to help kickstart the friendship revolution. This wouldn’t have been possible without you.

Darren Barefoot and Julie Szabo, Capulet Communications
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Kevin Gottesman, Gott Advertising
Neal Maher, I Am Neal Design
Sam Dorman, Sam Dorman Consulting
Mark Rovner, Sea Change Strategies

You know what they say, “If not for the courage of the fearless crew, the Minnow would be lost, the Minnow would be lost.”

Finally, we want to give a special shout out to Julie Szabo for editing this book. Her firm recommendations and gentle hand are a winning combination. We are grateful to her.

—Alia McKee and Tim Walker

February 2015
We live amidst an endless tsunami of media for the lovelorn, the love scorned and everything in between. Theater, film, and television would collapse without romantic drama. The economy of the online dating business alone probably exceeds the GDP of the average developing country.

It’s ironic, given how dependent we are on our non-romantic friends, that we spend so little time thinking purposefully about them. This friendship blind spot is what inspired Lifeboat, a project and philosophy aimed at helping people be better, get deeper and live more fully with their friends. That’s what this book is about.

In these pages we’ll ask some tough questions about friendship. Questions like, does having more friends make you happier? Can you improve your satisfaction with life by improving the quantity or quality of friendships? We’ll show you what we learned when we surveyed people across the country in 2013 for Lifeboat’s *State of Friendship in America* report. And, we’ll share practical findings from the art and science of friendship—things we’ve learned from academic geeks, philosophers and psychologists. Most important, we’ll offer up some simple, yet powerful practices that will help you become a self-assured friendship pioneer! For those who choose it, Lifeboat is a pathway to living more fully with friends.
AUSTIN, TEXAS. The journey back to friendship began very personally for Alia McKee. “At 33, I had everything I’d set out for. I owned my own company. I was married to a great guy. We had a place in Austin, Texas and a cute rescue dog named Blue Jean. But something in me was deeply unsettled. I felt anxious all of the time.”

Alia wasn’t able put words to it until one morning on a walk with her dog along the local spillway. “I completely froze up there on the bank. I’d arrived where I thought I wanted to be, but I wasn’t satisfied. And worse, I’d stopped growing. I knew I had to make some serious changes.”

The next six months—decision making and unravelings, counseling sessions and eventually divorce—were the toughest Alia had faced. “I’d been through mud slides and muggings in the slums of Venezuela. But I wasn’t prepared for this.”

Friends take on new meaning when you lose your bearings. But Alia was disheartened by some friends’ reactions to what was happening to her. “I hadn’t let myself be vulnerable with many of my friends, and it showed. Many of the friends I thought I was close to didn’t understand. Thankfully, others showed up in a big way.”

The contrast was stark. And that was the beginning of everything.

VANCOUVER, CANADA. Meanwhile, on the other side of the continent, Tim Walker was speeding towards a parallel experience with his circle of friends.

Four years ago he sold his company, a small web firm he’d built with some of his best friends. “It should have been an awesome moment,” he reflects. “This was success, and a big relief of stress and responsibility.” Instead, he felt empty inside. “It’s like I had a case of tunnel vision. I started seeing all these
parts of my life I’d set aside that were suffering. I wasn’t proud of myself—as a friend, boyfriend, brother, you name it.”

It can be difficult, especially for men, to turn to their friends for help. “But my friends rallied more than I expected. And certainly more than I thought I deserved.”

Tim remembers a particular evening at his friends’ house, where he stayed for a few months. “After an amazing dinner and a night of candid and honest conversation, I saw them with new eyes. I had a newfound respect and admiration for the kind of friends they were. Not just to me at that moment, but in the world generally.

“I felt both guilty and nostalgic. Guilty because I doubted I had been the kind of friend they could have reached out to. And nostalgic because this renewed sense of friendship reminded me of a feeling I hadn’t had in a long time, since university or summer camp.”

He went to sleep feeling better than he had in months, and somehow changed.

**CHACALA, MEXICO.** In February 2010, Tim and Alia—longtime colleagues and a budding couple—found themselves in the small fishing village of Chacala in Mexico. Chacala has a distracting, slow-paced charm and was far away from their workaday worlds. Tim and Alia reflected on friends present and past.

“We sat there on this beach talking about how deeply meaningful these people and moments were to us,” said Tim. “And we were both dumbfounded at how little we had done to intentionally bring great friendship into our lives.”

Alia casually pulled from the back of her memory a metaphor she’d heard, but
hadn’t thought of in years. “The handful of friends you care most about are in your lifeboat.”

**BROOKLYN, NEW YORK.** In the months that followed, Tim and Alia’s journey turned outward. Alia began digging into the science of friendship. “My degree in social work kicked in,” she says, “and I discovered a trove of studies and academic papers full of insights about friendship.”

Tim, who was once-upon-a-time a journalist, began interviewing everyone he met about their experiences with friends. “It was cathartic. We kept looking at one another and saying, ‘how have we not learned this before?’”

Alia and Tim immediately began applying these new discoveries to their own lives. They chose Lifeboats and began to practice how to be better friends. “It was like using a new muscle.”

After months of personal practice and deep study, they shared their learnings with the world—hoping to spark a movement of people rediscovering friendship and unleashing the happiness, joy and meaning it can bring. That movement is Lifeboat and this book is the beginning of your journey to better friendships.
All good stories have a bad guy—ours is The Friendship Crisis.

Unlike Darth Vader, Sauron or the Joker, our villain is not imaginary. He’s getting in the way of our happiness, love, security, health, joy and meaning. He’s stealthy and he’s slipped under the radar for far too long. Today we’re giving him a name, calling him out and leading a charge to take him down. Meet our villain. Meet The Friendship Crisis.

The average American adult reports having only one real friend.\(^1\) Paradoxically, in an age of Facebook and always-on connections, a growing body of science is proving what we already feel deep in our gut: we’re lonely and isolated. The way many of us use the Internet is making the crisis worse. The Friendship Crisis is real and we’ve got data to prove it.

Only 25 percent of Americans say they are truly satisfied with their friendships.

Using the UCLA Loneliness Scale, a research tool developed for measuring loneliness, in 2010 researchers found that 35 percent of adults older than 45 were chronically lonely, as opposed to 20 percent of a similar group a decade earlier.\(^2\) In 1985, 10 percent of
Americans said they had no one with whom to discuss important matters, and 15 percent said they had only one good friend. By 2004, 25 percent reported having no one to talk to and 20 percent had only one confidant.\(^2\)

Roughly 20 percent of Americans—about 60 million people—report being unhappy with their lives because of loneliness.\(^2\) What’s more, most Americans are not satisfied with or secure in the state of their personal friendships. Asked about their overall satisfaction with their friends (excluding family and romantic relationships), only 25 percent say they are “extremely satisfied.” Similarly, only a third of men and roughly 40 percent of women say they are confident their friends actually value their friendship.

### THE MIDLIFE FRIENDSHIP SLUMP: IT’S MAKING US MISERABLE

We’re all feeling the friendship crisis, but Gen-Xers are least happy with the state of their friendships. Hang tight as we dig into some stats from the *State of Friendship in America* report, commissioned by Lifeboat in 2013. Seniors (aged 70 and over) and Millennials/Gen-Yers (ages 16 to 34) are more likely to say they are extremely satisfied with their friendships than are Gen-Xers (ages 35 to 49) or Baby Boomers (ages 50 to 69). The gap is most pronounced with Gen-X. Where 35 percent of Seniors say they are extremely satisfied with the state of their friendships, only 18 percent of Gen-Xers say the same: that’s a 2-to-1 difference.

What’s causing this “friendship slump” in people’s middle years? Arguably, life is more complex and challenging for Gen-Xers and younger Boomers, who are in the midst of child-rearing and elder care, managing careers, and navigating momentous social and economic currents. Retired persons and young people, on the other hand, may have fewer distractions and worries, and can spend more time on quality of life pursuits, including friendships.

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Just as there is a pronounced slump in satisfaction with one’s friendships in mid-life, there’s a similar pattern in satisfaction with life as a whole. Roughly one-third (31 percent) of Millennials and Seniors say they are “very satisfied” with how their lives are going right now. For Gen-X and Boomers, the percentage drops significantly—to 16 percent. In fact, that pattern holds across a range of life satisfaction measures.

But, there’s good news! There’s a better path forward. Social scientists are showing that in order to experience the joys of friendship—including health, well-being and happiness—we need to focus on quality relationships, not quantity; depth instead of breadth. And, that’s what Lifeboat is all about. Even if you’re smack in the middle of a mid-life friendship slump, there are practical and actionable ways to build friendships that bring you a whole lot more joy, meaning and support. Are you ready?

35% of Seniors say they are extremely satisfied with their friendships. By comparison, only 18% of Gen Xers say they are extremely satisfied.

At Lifeboat we believe meaningful friendship takes purpose, effort, time, uncertainty, risk and skill. Being a great friend isn’t rocket science, but it’s not something we’re taught.
Those daunting stats in the last chapter show us that friendship can be hard. In his sardonic song, “I Am a Rock,” Paul Simon’s solitary protagonist walls himself up in his room, shielded from friends—the people he believes can hurt him most. He may be a rock. He may be an island. But this anti-hero is protecting himself from the very thing that could make him truly happy and healthy—friends. Don’t get me wrong. There are days when I want to follow his lead and build a fortress tall and mighty. The effort too great. The risk too scary. The day too short. The list too long. But despite the friendship challenges we all face, the benefits that meaningful friends bring to our lives outweigh the risks.

Science says so.
SCIENTISTS SAY, “FRIENDS ARE WORTH IT.”

Let’s start with Harvard psychology professor, Daniel Gilbert: “If I had to summarize all the scientific literature on the causes of human happiness in one word, that word would be ‘social.’ We are by far the most social species on Earth. Even ants have nothing on us. If I wanted to predict your happiness,” he explains, “… ‘I wouldn’t want to know your gender, religion, health, or income. I’d want to know about your social network—about your friends and family and the strength of your bonds with them.’”

Pretty compelling, right? And while Gilbert speaks to the happiness connection, other social scientists are finding that deep friendships are actually essential for our physical health, too. For instance, research out of Brigham Young suggests that “high levels of social support” predicts longevity as reliably as regular exercise. Alternatively, insufficient social support can be as damaging as high blood pressure. Beverly Fehr, a friend-focused Canadian scholar, found that “socially integrated individuals”—that’s academic speak for people with close friends—have lower adjusted death rates than people with few or shallow friendships. University of Chicago professor John Cacioppo has found that lack of strong bonds carries a greater health risk than smoking or obesity. “It sounds hard to believe,” he admits, “but it’s crucial.”

The benefits of real friendship even reach us on a spiritual level. A study by Fehr asked a sample of adults: “What is it that makes your life meaningful?” Friends came out on top, mentioned more frequently than family, religious faith and occupational success.

From happiness, to health, to meaning—the science is in. Deep and meaningful friendships make our lives better. Pure and simple. And the pursuit of these types of quality relationships is a worthwhile endeavor. So, while rocks feel no pain. And islands never cry. The work of building solid, deep friendships will always pay off.

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In 2013, Lifeboat commissioned a nation-wide, in-depth State of Friendship in America report. Of those surveyed for the report:

- Nearly half (49 percent) of those who say they have seven or more “close friends” strongly agree with the statement: “I feel happy more often than not.” By contrast, only 24 percent of those with only one close friend say the same. For those who say they have no close friends, only 19 percent say they are happy most of the time.

- Two-thirds (66 percent) of those who say they have seven or more close friends strongly agree with the statement: “My life has meaning.” Among those with only one close friend, the percentage falls to 36 percent. Among those with no close friends, only 27 percent agree with the statement.

The more close friends you have, the greater the sense of personal happiness, meaning and purpose in life and the more empathy you feel towards others.
STEP 4

LIFEBOAT: A WAY BACK TO FRIENDS

WHO IS IN YOUR LIFEBOAT?

In order to be truly great friends, we have to make the hard choice of focusing more intensively on a smaller group of people. So that’s the Lifeboat metaphor. It doesn’t mean we ignore everyone else or neglect fruitful networks. But we do invest ourselves more openly, deeply and purposefully with a handful of friends, our Lifeboaters.

The Friendship Crisis is real, and it’s making us less happy. But, the solution isn’t to throw in the towel. It’s to aim higher and to re-think what friendship means in adulthood. Indeed, it’s time to explore uncharted relationship territory—academic research, philosophy, expert advice and our own heads and hearts—for a better path forward. Welcome to Lifeboat, a way back to friends!

THE LIFEBOAT MANIFESTO

GO DEEP, NOT WIDE

Do we need more friends or deeper friendships to be happy? Turns out, those of us with more close friends are happier and more satisfied than those with few or no close friends. The pattern is reflected in mid-life friendship as well. On average, participants in our 2013 Lifeboat survey say that they have four close friends. Millennials and Seniors have more close friends than Gen-Xers or Boomers, and those happen to be the two cohorts most satisfied with their friendships—and their lives. Across the board, people with seven or more close friends are happier than those who have fewer.
But, given the choice, survey participants say they would prefer deeper friendships over sheer numbers by more than 2-to-1 (48 percent to 23 percent). This proportion holds for all demographic groups: gender, age, geography and political leanings.

The takeaway is clear—close friends are the ones that matter. It’s not about the number of people you associate with. It’s about the quality of those relationships.

It’s not about the number of people you associate with. It’s about the quality of those relationships.

But can you do both? Can you enjoy quality relationships with lots of people? The hard truth is no. Maintaining quality relationships with a large group of people is very difficult. Nurturing relationships takes time, emotional energy and cognitive capacity—all of which are limited. Anthropological research suggests that due to the limits of human brain capacity, we can only maintain casual social relationships with less than 150 individuals—a principle known as Dunbar’s number. But 150 is still too many people for deep relationships. Strong bonds tend to occur in what psychologists refer to as “sympathy groups”—groups of 10-15 people. If we try to nurture deep relationships with more people than that, we simply begin to overload.

So that’s the Lifeboat metaphor. In order to be truly great friends, we have to make the hard choice of focusing more intensively on a smaller group of people. It doesn’t mean we ignore everyone else or neglect fruitful networks. But we do invest ourselves more openly, deeply and purposefully with a handful of friends, our Lifeboaters.

CHOOSE YOUR LIFEBOAT

Aristotle spent a lot of time thinking about friends. That’s right. One of the most important founding figures in Western philosophy—while tackling physics, poetry, logic, politics, ethics and biology—also set his considerable mind to the dynamics underlying our favorite everyday relationships. Yes, he thought friends were that important. And thankfully so, because he developed a framework for tackling a terribly tricky task: choosing friends.

Even writing from around 335 BC, Aristotle understood the importance—and the difficulty—of choosing a Lifeboat. How do you evaluate friends? And how, with limited time and energy, do you choose wisely with whom to invest deeply?

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THREE KINDS OF FRIENDS

For philosophy enthusiasts out there, pardon any over-simplification. Our take is that Aristotle believed that there are three types of friendships:

1. Perfect friendships
2. Useful friendships
3. Pleasurable friendships

In her book *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, professor Lorraine Smith Pangle describes the nuance between the three types of friendships. Aristotle considered friendships based on usefulness the “furthest from perfect” because “each loves the other person only incidentally,” she writes. By contrast, friendships of pleasure are much closer to the best kind of friendship. They are often a “characteristic of the young, who live by their emotions… [these] friendships are transient, but as long as they last they are warm and heartfelt.” But, it’s the perfect friendship that transcends usefulness and pleasure (what Aristotle calls “incidental qualities”) and is instead based on the idea of mutual goodness. Aristotle’s perfect friendship relies on highly developed altruistic emotions like empathy, concern and care. And it requires genuine interest in the good of the other person. British sociologist Ray Pahl suggests that these friendships go so far as to actually “enlarge and extend [our] moral experience.”¹

In a nutshell, Aristotle says we choose friends because they are:

- **USEFUL** (colleagues, the dad who drives the kids to soccer practice or your wine distributor neighbor with that amazing cellar).
- **FUN** (party friends, fellow Brooklyn Nets fans and that friend who makes
you laugh till your sides hurt).

- GOOD (those who bring out our best self, and vice versa).

**WHAT’S MY TYPE?**

It’s a tough and ever-evolving question that requires reflection, humility and honesty. **Who is in your Lifeboat?** We can apply Aristotle’s framework to help better understand our friends and begin choosing our Lifeboats. But to prompt your thinking, we’ve created five friend archetypes that we aspire to have in our Lifeboats—the Michelangelo, the Truth Teller, the Mentor, the Foxhole Friend and the Stalwart.

**The Michelangelo**

**QUOTE:** “Each friend represents a world in us, a world possibly not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born.”
—Anais Nin from *The Diary of Anaïs Nin, Vol. 1.*

**IN POP CULTURE:** Maude from the movie *Harold and Maude*

The Michelangelo will bring an infusion of new ideas, influences and perspectives to your life and you’ll feel more satisfied because of it.

Social scientists have found that people use relationships to accumulate knowledge and experiences, a process called self-expansion.¹ Recent research with couples has found that the more self-expansion people experience from their romantic partners, the more satisfied they are in the relationship. We believe the same holds true for friends.

The problem, as we’ll discuss later in this chapter, is that we tend to run in packs of people who are similar to us. Push yourself to meet unlikely friends who share different cultural backgrounds, interests and professions—you’ll

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be rewarded with renewed passion, ideas and dreams (and probably a new favorite band or two).

**The Truth Teller**

*QUOTE:* “True friends stab you in the front.” – Oscar Wilde

*IN POP CULTURE:* Dr. Gregory House from the TV show, *House*

Yes, the truth can hurt, but it can also help. That’s why letting a trusted truth teller into your Lifeboat is invaluable. The truth teller knows how to broach sensitive topics in a direct and helpful way and isn’t afraid to help re-tint your rose-colored glasses or make your half-empty glass full. A far cry from a yes-man, the truth teller always operates from a place of good intent and will help you see yourself and love yourself for who you really are, not who you think you are.

Ready to grow and stretch? Get a truth teller in your Lifeboat, pronto.

**The Mentor**

*QUOTE:* “I am not a teacher, but an awakener.” – Robert Frost

*IN POP CULTURE:* Dr. Dre

People tend to think of mentors in the context of their professions. But mentor-style relationships are healthy friend material too. The mentor has weathered
life’s ups and downs and can provide sage advice during times of uncertainty. A wealth of support, the mentor will provide much-needed encouragement and guidance that can keep all things in perspective.

Looking for a boost of wisdom? Find yourself a friend mentor—or let one find you.

**The Foxhole Friend**

**QUOTE** “If you’re ever in a tree, phone to me. If you’re ever down a well, ring my bell. If you ever lose your teeth, and you’re out to dine… borrow mine.”

—Lucy and Ethel singing a Cole Porter classic in *I Love Lucy*

**IN POP CULTURE:** Sam and Frodo from *The Lord of the Rings*

The saying goes, “there are no atheists in foxholes.” While that might be true, there are indeed friends. They are the friends who watch our backs, who know our deepest secrets, who give us strength in adversity, who share our defeats and our victories. Foxhole friends typically bond over a shared, challenging experience—think marathon training or a grueling work project. They bring out each other’s best through it all and prove that they will always be there when the going gets tough.

Need some courage to live the life you want? Find that foxhole friend and—as Sam in *The Lord of the Rings* says—“share the load.”
The Stalwart

QUOTE: “Words are easy, like the wind; Faithful friends are hard to find.”
–William Shakespeare

IN POP CULTURE: The Beastie Boys

The stalwart has known you forever and sees you and accepts you for the complicated mess that you are. Your recent success doesn’t matter. Your gray hair doesn’t matter. Your money doesn’t matter. The stalwart friend remembers you with braces and goth hair and loves you anyway.

Our short list of archetypes is not comprehensive. But we hope it offers some food for thought about the qualities you’re seeking in the people who are closest to you.
To answer the question “Who’s in my lifeboat?” start by making a list of your 10-25 closest friends and ask yourself:

Which of Aristotle’s friend categories apply for each person?
(Remember one person can be all three types.)

How does the balance look overall?

Review “What’s My Type” in this chapter to see if your friends are weighted in any one category.

Now, write down the names of a few people in your life that you would like to invest more time and energy with (we’ve found 5-8 people is most manageable). If that feels like too many, pick one person to start. This group can and will be dynamic. Friends change as life changes.
TELL PEOPLE THEY ARE IN YOUR LIFEBOAT

The core philosophy of Lifeboat is purposefully investing more deeply with a small group of people. Telling those people how meaningful they are is an important practice—whether it’s framed as Lifeboat or not. Too often we take for granted that people know how much we care for them.

- We believe our care is evident through our actions.
- We worry our sentiment won’t be reciprocated when verbalized.
- We’re not comfortable sharing words of affirmation with friends, a particularly tough struggle for men.

The practice of telling people they’re in your Lifeboat, however, is transformative. We’ve personally experienced that validating our investment and care in a friendship through words creates trust and alignment, which has allowed us to break through walls and get deeper with those we care about.

And for those who are cringing as they read this, remember, this doesn’t have to be wimpy. This practice, when done in a way that reflects you and your style, is the stuff of courageous friends.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: YOU ARE WHO YOU MEET

As you read through the names on your Lifeboat list, it’s worth considering how much our friends shape who we are and who we become. Indeed, our friends may be one of the most powerful forces shaping our lives. This should give us pause—and powerful motivation—to get serious about who we choose to get close with and how we manage their influence. It may also spur us to consider in new ways the impacts we have on those we care about most.
These findings are from four studies among hundreds from the past decade exploring the spread of behavior through social networks. The topic might seem obvious at first: of course we’re all affected by the choices and lifestyles of our closest friends. But new research is delivering surprising insights about the true extent of our impact on one another.

Skeptics argue that similarities among friends are actually better explained by people choosing similar friends in the first place. Smokers like smoking with smokers, for example. This birds-of-a-feather phenomena is well documented, referred to by social scientists as homophily or “love of the same.” Similarly, close friends often share physical environments or “contexts” (towns, workplaces, dorms), which tend to shape their lifestyles in parallel, leading to greater similarities.

Still, proponents of “social contagion theory,” as it is called, believe the facts are on their side. In particular, Harvard professor Dr. Christakis and his colleague James H. Fowler from the University of California, San Diego have spent the past decade proving the powerful role our friends play in what we feel, think and do.

Indeed, our friends may be one of the most powerful forces shaping our lives. In 2002 the pair uncovered a unique source of raw data (referred to as the Framingham Study) on the intimate lives of 12,067 people spanning 32 years including their social network ties. It was a goldmine for statistical analysis and has produced some of the field’s most compelling findings. They found from the data that the spread of obesity is significantly affected by the nature of people’s relationships: the stronger the bonds, the greater the chance of packing on pounds. An anonymous neighbor getting fat, according to their research, is actually less likely to impact your weight than if a close friend gains girth—even from 500 miles away: “Social distance,” they say, “appears to matter much more than physical distance.”

The analogy flowing from findings like these is compelling: behaviors—like working long hours, keeping fit or being satisfied—pass from friend to friend.
like contagious viruses. We influence one another while socializing, infecting by way of bonds. In a summary paper for *Statistics in Medicine* in 2013, Christakis and Fowler lay out the evidence for social contagion in convincing fashion and suggest the challenge is no longer to prove whether we influence one another—that is a given—but rather to “disentangle” the how.

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?**

Friends just-like-us can be great, of course. But they tend to be a choice we make by default, like watching summer blockbusters starring Nicholas Cage. The other option is to stretch a little and be open to friendships with people unlike us. It can be scary and uncomfortable connecting with someone [insert your opposite here]. But it can also be remarkable and rewarding.

Let’s take more seriously whom we choose to surround ourselves with—based on their influence. Many of us put less thought into our social circle than we do the food we eat, the schools we attend and the jobs we do. Yet our friends may impact our lives more than all of these choices combined. In this light, the question, “Who is in your Lifeboat?” takes on some pretty high stakes. Here’s how marketing guru Seth Godin puts it:

> “Who you hang out with determines what you dream about and what you collide with. And the collisions and the dreams lead to your changes. And the changes are what you become. Change the outcome by changing your circle.”

Now, flip the influence equation and look outward to the impact you have on those around you. How are you rubbing off? What habits and choices are you spreading? How are you unconsciously impacting the lives of those you care about most? Here’s a takeaway to consider as you decide on what work lies ahead: one the biggest gifts you can give to your friends is to show up as your best self. That stuff is contagious.

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Lifeboat is a revolution, a friendship revolution.
And like all great revolutions, we have a manifesto!

WE BELIEVE IN GREAT FRIENDSHIP.
Friends electrify our lives.
And light us up with meaning, health & happiness.

WE ARE NO STRANGERS TO ISOLATION & LONELINESS.
The puzzling paradox that in our hyperconnected age,
the average American has only one real friend.

WE FEEL THIS FRIENDSHIP CRISIS, BUT WE REFUSE TO RETREAT.
Instead we dig in.
Choosing to forego fast food friendships,
and rediscover what great friendship really means.

WE TAKE FRIENDSHIP BACK.
From the Internet, from our schedules,
from the breakneck pace of our busy lives—
purposefully reinvesting in the people that matter most.

WE EXPLORE THE UNCHARTED ART & SCIENCE OF FRIENDSHIP.
Learning from experts & each other,
and practicing from our own heads & hearts—
how to be better, get deeper & live more fully with
our friends.

WE ARE ON THIS PATH BACK TO FRIENDSHIP,
pioneering something greater together.

ARE YOU IN?

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Our *State Of Friendship in America* report shows that “loyalty” is the top quality people look for in close friends, cited by 81 percent of adults across the country. For anyone looking to improve their friendships, understanding what qualities matter most to friends can be helpful. So can understanding why. So, what are the top five qualities we value in friends? And, what do we care about least? Here are our key findings.
Just behind “loyalty” on the list of qualities friends look for in friends, people say they look for close friends who are “decent and good” (80 percent), will “be there in a crisis” (74 percent), “like them” back (73 percent) and are “fun to be with” (68 percent).

**TOP FIVE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A decent good person</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will be there in a crisis</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes me</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is fun to be with</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Want to know which qualities friends don’t look for?

**BOTTOM FIVE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>See this person often</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares my spiritual or religious beliefs</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help getting ahead in career</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same political view</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically attractive</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see, qualities at the bottom of the list were an interesting split: On the sincerity side, people say they don’t care much if their close friends help them get ahead in their career (21 percent) or are physically attractive (14 percent). On the values side, people say it also doesn’t matter if they share spiritual or religious beliefs (26 percent) or have the same political views (17 percent) as their friends.

Interesting, right? How do we make these findings actionable in our friendships? Good question. Here are three ways.

**MAKE CLOSE FRIENDS CONFIDENT**

Our study found that 63 percent of adults lack confidence in even their closest friends. It’s nice to think that our close friendships are resting on solid
foundations—and they may be. But the reality is most of us feel like we’re balancing on a tightrope, uncertain and shaky with pals. So, anything we can do to reassure our close friends about where they stand and that we’ve got their back will go a long way. Consider, for example, letting someone know they are in your Lifeboat.

**DECIDE WHICH FRIENDS ARE CASUAL AND WHICH ARE CLOSE**

As mentioned above, the qualities people care about least in close friends were an interesting split, from the sincerity to the values-based. Can you help me get a promotion? Do we share the same politics? These don’t seem to matter so much. What’s interesting here is that these qualities are things people care about in more casual relationships.

It seems, however, that close friends are a different animal, with loyalty and related qualities superseding these interests. Are you clear about which of your friends are casual and which are close? Who is looking to you for loyalty versus other qualities? How about vice versa?

**UP YOUR GAME WITH YOUR GAL PALS**

There’s so much written about the differences between men and women in relationships—about men being from Mars and women from Venus. But when it comes to friends, our study found the opposite: that men and women want precisely the same qualities in friends, even in the same order, with loyalty right up top. One important finding though is that women tend to rank each of the qualities higher than men, including loyalty (87 percent versus 75 percent). So be prepared to up your game a little more on this front with your closest gal pals.

There are a few other substantive differences worth noting. Men, for example, are statistically more likely to value close friends who introduce them to new things (36 percent versus 29 percent). And women are more likely to prize close friends who don’t judge them (72 percent versus 56 percent). But overall there is striking uniformity throughout the list.

Intrigued by how women’s friendships differ from men’s? We’ll be diving deeper into the phenomenon of women’s friendships in Step 11.
THE KIDNEY TEST, AND OTHER FRIENDSHIP FAVORS

So, how good are we at being friends? First, let’s think about how far we’re willing to go to help a close friend in need. In our survey we asked how likely respondents would be to engage in several “high bar” friendship activities, ranging from loaning money to donating a kidney to forgiving a lie. As the chart below shows, a third or less of participants say they’re prepared to do any of these things. Nor do they expect extraordinary acts of kindness from others. In general, participants were slightly more likely to think a friend would do them a big favor than they would be to do it for the same friend.

The high water mark here is about money. Nearly one-third of participants say they would loan $500 to a friend going through tough financial times. Twenty-eight percent say they would donate a kidney. By contrast, fewer than one in five say they would stand by a close friend who was unfaithful to their lover or spouse. Only 15 percent say they would bail a close friend out of jail. Participants are least likely to invest in a business a friend is starting or to lie in order to protect a friend’s secret.

Not prepared to hand over a kidney or invest in a friend’s new business? Don’t worry, that doesn’t make you a bad friend. Far from it. But, taking stock of the survey results above helps us to think a little harder about what loyalty can look like and where we fit on the spectrum when it comes to performing acts of kindness for our closest friends.

**Twenty-eight percent of survey participants say they would donate a kidney to a friend.**

![Married people are 18% more likely to donate a kidney to a friend](image-url)
YOU AND YOUR SHADOW

They lurk beneath our best selves.  
They appear when we’re most insecure.  
We’re often not aware of them.  
And when we are, we’re sure as hell not proud of them.

They are our shadow selves.

As we think more deeply about how to become better friends, it’s helpful to notice those moments when we’re not at our best. Did you secretly stew when your BFF got her promotion? Have you belittled a friend behind his back? Are you sometimes the Debbie Downer when your friends get together for a good time? You’re not alone! Swiss psychologist Carl Jung said the “shadow” is the unknown side of our personality that consists primarily of primitive emotions that are completely obscured from consciousness.¹

The shadow—a universal feature of the human psyche—is notoriously hard for individuals to acknowledge within themselves. And, according to Jung, it actually projects our own personal insecurities into a perceived deficiency in others. Because the shadow self is so darn scary to face alone, we thought we’d discuss five friend shadows that might lurk within us all. You might recognize slivers of these archetypes in yourself. Rather than take a defensive stance, think of this exercise as a guilt-free flashlight. Shine what you surface at the shadow and, poof, you can make it disappear.
The Control Freak

POP CULTURE REFERENCE: Heather Chandler from *Heathers*

QUOTE: “You wanted to be a member of the most powerful clique in school. If I wasn’t already the head of it, I’d want the same thing.” —Heather Chandler

A perfectionist, the control freak wants her friends to do things her way, in her time, and according to her rules. The control freak uses power and manipulation to pressure others to change and conform to her standards. She will plan everything from a bachelorette party to a 20th high school reunion because she doesn’t trust others to do as good a job as she could. At her worst, she will belittle or embarrass friends to mask her own insecurities.

See a control freak in your shadow self? Release your grasp.

The Bad Influence

POP CULTURE REFERENCE: Jimmy McNulty from *The Wire*

QUOTE: “Hey Jimmy, you know something? You’re no good for people, man. I mean, damn. Everybody around you... Christ.”
—McNulty’s partner, Bunk Moreland

The bad influence seeks validation by encouraging others to join him in destructive behaviors. He doesn’t care about the negative impacts he might have on those around him.
See a bad influence in your shadow self? Make a conscious decision about the habits and choices you are championing.

**The Measuring Stick**

POP CULTURE REFERENCE: Louis Litt from *Suits*

QUOTE: “Success is the best revenge? Bullshit, revenge is the best revenge.”

Competition and insecurity go hand-in-hand with this shadow self. The measuring stick judges herself based on the achievements of others and is threatened by friends’ successes and accomplishments. This archetype bristles with envy when a friend gets a public shout out, a promotion or a new romantic partner. Also known as a “drama” friend, the measuring stick is drawn to friends experiencing slumps—the better to be compared against, my dear.

See a measuring stick in your shadow? Measure your worth based on you, not others.

**The Gloomy Gus**

POP CULTURE REFERENCE: Eeyore

QUOTE: “End of the road... nothing to do... and no hope of things getting better. Sounds like Saturday night at my house.” –Eeyore
The Gloomy Gus puts less into relationships than he gets. He thinks everyone is happier, more popular and more connected than he is and withdraws from engaging with others out of fear that he won’t be accepted. An energy suck, he often comes to friends during times of woe and rarely allows himself to get picked up by their enthusiasm and cheer.

See a Gloomy Gus in your shadow? You’re good enough. You’re smart and enough. And doggone it, people like you.

**The Plateau Friend**

*POP CULTURE REFERENCE: Frasier from Cheers*

*QUOTE: Norm: “[About Cliff] Frasier, straighten him out, OK. What happens to old, dead skin?”*  
Frasier: “Apparently, it sits on bar stools and drinks beer all day.”

A great acquaintance, the Plateau Friend doesn’t go much deeper. Afraid to show vulnerability, the plateau friend likes the shallow end of the pool and is more comfortable sharing a funny quip than a true personal concern. The plateau friend hides from imperfections by creating an impenetrable—yet collegial—wall between herself and others. She’s close, but still so far away.

See a plateau friend in your shadow? Try to open up with someone you care about.

The cold, hard truth is that no one is a perfect friend and we can all see a little bit of ourselves in each of these shadows. By simply recognizing that the shadows exist, we can make small adjustments to be better, get deeper and live more fully with our friends.

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THINKING ABOUT OUR FRIENDSHIP DEFICITS CAN BE A DOWNER. BUT, LIKE EXERCISING AND HEALTHY EATING, BECOMING A BETTER FRIEND SIMPLY COMES DOWN TO CREATING NEW HABITS. FOR RUNNERS, THE FIRST FEW STEPS DOWN THE ROAD EACH MORNING ARE UNCOMFORTABLE, EVERY TIME. IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW TRAINED OR RESTED YOU ARE. THE BLOOD FLOWS TOO SLOWLY. JOINTS CREEK. LUNGS PROTEST. AND YOU CAN'T HELP QUESTION THE WISDOM OF HAVING HEADED OUT THE DOOR. THESE STRAINED STARTS HAVE ONLY GOTTEN HARDER FOR ME SINCE MOVING FROM VANCOUVER TO BROOKLYN A FEW YEARS AGO. NO FORESTED TRAILS OR MAJESTIC VIEWS HERE. IT'S ALL ANKLE-BUSTING POThOLES, MIXED WITH SOME ALARMING ODORS.

The thing about the morning run though (wherever you may be) is that after a few minutes the body begins to regulate. It wakes and catches up with the effort. Then the discomfort becomes a rhythm and eventually a high. By the time you've looped back home you're in stride and glad you made the choice to go, every time.

WHAT DOES RUNNING HAVE TO DO WITH FRIENDSHIP?

SINCE I WAS 16 THE DAILY MEDITATION OF POUNDING PAVEMENT HAS ANCHORED MY ROUTINE. I IDOLIZE PRE. MY FAVORITE BOOK IS Once a Runner. AND I PROUDLY SPORT A SUB 40MIN 10K. FROM FARTLEKS TO VO2 MAX, I'VE LEARNED MORE ABOUT THE ART AND SCIENCE OF RUNNING THAN ANY AMATEUR SHOULD BE PROUD TO ADMIT.

YET IT WAS ONLY RECENTLY THAT I REALIZED HOW TWO ESSENTIAL LESSONS FROM RUNNING ALSO APPLY TO FRIENDSHIP.

FIRST, THE INSIGHT ABOVE ABOUT GRIEULING MORNING STARTS. NOT ALL GREAT FRIENDSHIPS BEGIN WITH PERFECT CHEMISTRY. AND EVERY GREAT FRIENDSHIP REQUIRE SOME DIFFICULT WORK FOR THE REWARD TO KICK IN. THIS PARALLEL, WHILE SIMPLISTIC, IS AS TRUE AS IT COMES WHEN CONSIDERING YOUR LIFEBOAT.

HERE'S THE SECOND ESSENTIAL LESSON ABOUT RUNNING THAT I THINK TRANSLATES TO FRIENDS. YOU MAY HAVE HEARD OF THE 2009 BOOK Born to Run (NO, IT'S NOT BY BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN). THE AUTHOR, CHRISTOPHER MCDougAll, ALMOST SINGLE-HANDEDLY LAUNCHED THE BAREFOOT RUNNING CRAZE, ALONG WITH THOSE FUNNY ULTRA-MINIMALIST FINGER SHOES YOU SEE AROUND. HIS BOOK IS A REMARKABLE READ BUT, I HAVE TO ADMIT, I WAS SKEPTICAL AT FIRST. WHY? BECAUSE HE SUGGESTED THAT I SHOULD CHANGE HOW I RUN.

"I RUN HOW I RUN," I THOUGHT. "TRAINING IS ABOUT RUNNING MORE AND RUNNING HARDER TO BE FIT, NOT RUNNING DIFFERENTLY." IF ONLY I KNEW THEN HOW WRONG I WAS. I HAD ALWAYS TAKEN MY RUNNING STYLE FOR GRANTED, AS MANY RUNNERS DO. BUT TO
combat reoccurring injuries, I took his advice to heart—and strode to a whole new relationship with my favorite sport. I moved onto the balls of my feet instead of my heels. I started taking short, low strides instead of longer kicks. And yes, I bought less supportive shoes. It worked; my sore feet and lower back pain vanished, never to return. My only regret is not learning sooner.

The question is: can you train yourself to change how you do friendship? Of course you can. Just like running, it may not seem that way. “This is how I’ve always been with friends,” you think, “It’s just who I am.”

But nothing could be further from the truth. I recently read this fascinating article in the New York Times by naturalist Diane Ackerman about a new field of study called “interpersonal neurobiology.” It’s based on the understanding that our brains are constantly rewiring themselves based on our daily lives. Ackerman explains the struggle of training yourself to change how you do something, but insists it’s possible and that the changes can ultimately become a part of who you are.

She begins: “Breaking old habits isn’t easy, since habits are deeply ingrained neural shortcuts. But one can decide to be a more attentive and compassionate partner, mindful of the other’s motives, hurts and longings,” she explains. “All relationships change the brain, but most important are the intimate bonds that foster or fail us, altering the delicate circuits that shape memories, emotions and that ultimate souvenir, the self.”

You can get to this place with friendship too. Alia and I created Lifeboat and refocused on a handful of close friends instead of our sea of connections. We began to initiate more activities instead of always relying on others. And, yes, we told our friends that they matter to us, when we once left it unsaid. Today we enjoy far more confident and meaningful friendships. It hasn’t always been easy, but our only regret is not learning sooner.
WHAT'S YOUR FRIENDSHIP CODE?

Before we can start our training to become truly great friends, we must think a bit about what that might look like. What kind of a friend do we want to be? We need a friendship code—some “golden rules” to live by. A friendship code isn’t prescriptive; it can and should be different for everyone. So, we asked some of our great friends to share their friendship codes with us. We hope some of their insights will resonate for you.

MARK'S CODE: BUDDHISM 101
By Mark Rovner

GIVE MORE THAN YOU GET. BUT, DON'T KEEP SCORE

I’m probably the world’s worst Buddhist, but I’m still a Buddhist. That spiritual orientation is probably the most important influence on my own friendship ideals. Mahayana Buddhism is all about compassion and selflessness. There’s a famous—and kind of outrageous—couplet that is said to be the heart essence of the path:
Give all profit and gain to others; Take all loss and defeat upon yourself

It kind of goes against almost every value we learn in our highly competitive culture, doesn’t it? Have I mastered that? Not even close. But it’s always there as a star to steer by. And as a friendship rule, I think it works. For me.

The “not keeping score” part is really important. Being a friend is not a business transaction. Keeping track of who has done more favors for whom dehumanizes the relationship. But if I don’t keep score, how do I give more than I get? By assuming it’s always my turn to treat, my turn to take the initiative, my turn to give in to the preferences of others. Does that make me a doormat? I don’t know. But it makes me happy.

BE THERE WHEN YOU’RE NEEDED

I am perpetually over-extended. That’s not a virtue; it’s just a fact. I have too many passions and I refuse to give any of them up. I have more friends in more different circles than any one person should have. I have diving friends and shark conservation friends. I have writing friends. Dharma friends. Work friends. I don’t know if any sane person would choose this as a lifestyle, but it is what it is. To compensate, I have evolved a personal rule—be there for your friends when you’re needed.

Again, I can’t say I succeed. But I do aspire.

DON’T HIDE YOUR FAULTS

I am a complicated mess of a person. I spent way too many years of my life denying that, or hiding it, or trying to conceal my worst aspects from people who I want to like me. The joke, of course, turned out to be on me. No one was ever fooled. You can’t hide. Your true friends see you and accept you, complicated mess that you are. Trying to pose as something else just gets in the way.

LOVE UNCONDITIONALLY

I had an epiphany watching Charlie Kaufman’s movie, Adaptation. An exchange between the main characters—twin brothers—literally changed my life. It’s so simple, really:
Charlie Kaufman: There was this time in high school. I was watching you out the library window. You were talking to Sarah Marsh.
Donald Kaufman: Oh, God. I was so in love with her.
Charlie: I know. And you were flirting with her. And she was being really sweet to you.
Donald: I remember that.
Charlie: Then, when you walked away, she started making fun of you with Kim Canetti. And it was like they were laughing at *me*. You didn't know at all. You seemed so happy.
Donald: I knew. I heard them.
Charlie: How come you looked so happy?
Donald: I loved Sarah, Charles. It was mine, that love. I owned it. Even Sarah didn't have the right to take it away. I can love whoever I want.
Charlie: But she thought you were pathetic.
Donald: That was her business, not mine. You are what you love, not what loves you. That's what I decided a long time ago.

“You are what you love, not what loves you.” I get shivers just typing that. Those are my ideals. They probably won't work for you. The point is to figure out what your own code is—and navigate toward it as much as you can. What else is there to do?

SABRINA’S CODE OF GRATITUDE
By Sabrina Hersi Issa

Four years ago, I hit the reset button on my personal life.

I lost my father and beloved grandmother, one right after the other, and burnt out in a demanding job. When I finally looked up from the fog to start rebuilding my life, I realized how unexpected and new friends had
shown up and cared for me in a major way. I wanted to do something, anything, to show them how much their friendship and care mattered to me. So the night before my birthday, I sat down and wrote each of them a letter to say thank you.

I said “thank you” to the friend who visited me in hospitals across the country; to the two friends who helped me bounce back with a self care weekend; to others for countless “just checking in” emails that always popped up at just the right time.

Then it happened—a boomerang of gratitude began whirling right back; simple messages from my friends like, “I got your back, always” and “remember we love you,” carried me through. And these exchanges brought us closer than ever before. By being grateful I learned whatever love I put out in the world returned in the awesomest ways.

Since that discovery, I’ve made showing gratitude to friends a core part of my operating system.

WHY GRATITUDE?

First, I want people in my life to know how much they matter to me. This is important, given that Lifeboat research shows 63 percent of Americans lack confidence in even their closest friendships and two-thirds are wishing for deeper relationships.

But gratitude is also a gift to myself: remembering wonderful things to be grateful for is a quick booster shot to the spirits; recalling the incredible people in my life makes me feel rich; and sharing joy makes it easier to receive joy. All and all, when I fill my friendships with gratitude, I open up to a deeper, more soulful connection. Who knew two words could be so powerful?

“Thank you’ is the best prayer that anyone could say. I say that one a lot. ‘Thank you’ expresses extreme gratitude, humility, understanding.”
– Alice Walker

CREATIVE WAYS TO SAY “THANKS”

So often a simple “thank you” goes unsaid because words don’t seem like enough or there aren’t enough hours in the day. But I’ve realized grand gestures are not required to show appreciation. You don’t have
to write messages in the sky or build a Taj Mahal to show friends you care. A simple “thank you” can go a long way and come in different, unexpected ways. In case you want to throw some flavor into your gratitude practice, here are three tips from my arsenal that I invite Lifeboat readers to try.

1. **Birthday Gratitude Notes**  
   (Maximum time: 1 hour)

Normally you’re supposed to receive cards on your birthday but I like to give them. As I mentioned above, on the night before my birthday I write gratitude notes to dear friends in my life. It doesn’t have to be a card per se. I’ve sent a note in the mail, a thoughtful email, even bought a sponsorship on public radio for a friend who always listened in the morning. This year’s practice fell on the night of the Boston Marathon bombings—yet another urgent reminder to people in your life how much they mean to you. Maybe give it a try this year?

2. **Life Lesson Thanks**  
   (Maximum time: 2-3 hours)

“We must find time to stop and thank the people who make a difference in our lives.”  
–John F. Kennedy

A few years ago, I was hanging out with a friend and somehow our conversation turned to leadership and organizational change. Which is just fun, fun, fun, right? She described how she refocused her nonprofit organization, took risks and learned that she “didn’t have to be like everyone else.” It was liberating to hear, and months later I kept revisiting that impromptu master class as I led my own company through a major change. Finally in December, I sat down and wrote to say “thank you” for her lesson.

Then I wrote nine other friends who taught me major lessons that year, too.

Each December I do this now, during my personal annual review (yes, I am your typical goal-oriented Washingtonian, don’t judge!). I sit down and make a list of friends who taught me about life or modeled a new way of looking at the world. In friendships, we have the power to learn and grow through our stories and connections. Who are you thankful to for sharing their wisdom with you? Maybe share a note appreciation right back.
3. Happy Awesome Anniversary!
(Maximum time: 3 minutes)

Have you ever had a friend accomplish a feat that makes your jaw drop? Run an ultra-marathon? Audition for a Broadway show? Climb Mt. Everest? These are just a few of the insane, scary, inspiring things my friends have done.

There is no greater joy than watching people I love chase their dreams. It must have a placebo effect because it inspires me to dream bigger. When friends help you expand your vision of what is possible—simply by living their lives and honoring their ambition—I like to think a thank you is in order.

So on the day the finish line is crossed, or the audition is held or the mountain summit is reached, I set a Google Calendar alert for the next year on the same day. The alert pops up and I remember to fire off a note that usually says something as simple as the following: “A year ago today, you accomplished something remarkable and it inspired me to dream bigger for myself. Thank you for being a wonderful inspiration. Let me know how I can support whatever is in store next.”

WHO ARE YOU THANKFUL FOR?

It’s been four years since I hit that reset button and came through the other side of grief. Even though my career has not slowed down and I travel constantly, I feel more connected and loved in my friendships than ever before. While this may sound meta, I have the practice of gratitude to thank for that.

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1 A great 10min video on the science behind sharing and receiving joy by Shawn Achor. (2011). The Happy Secret To Better Work, TEDx Bloomington.

This is my challenge to Lifeboat readers: you probably have a friend you’ve wanted to thank. Take five minutes and say “thank you” today. Just watch out for the boomerang coming back around.
V IS FOR VULNERABILITY

One of the things you likely noticed about Mark and Sabrina’s “codes” is their willingness to be vulnerable, to put their true feelings on display. Being vulnerable is hard. So hard, that it’s the headliner of my friendship code.

You might be a superhero, but in order to have deep friendships you have to let your Kryptonite flag fly to those who matter most, your Lifeboat friends. Psychologist and relationship expert Beverley Fehr says that the primary hallmark of friendship is intimate self-disclosure—or showing vulnerability. Showing vulnerability is how we get closer with people and requires gradually revealing more intimate information about ourselves. This gradual reveal helps increase trust, support and loyalty—key factors in close friendships.

But showing vulnerability is a hard dance for many of us. We worry about putting ourselves out there for people to see. We worry about saddling people with our baggage. We worry that it will be awkward or uncomfortable. We worry that it isn’t the right time. But showing imperfections, asking for help, being human—that’s what builds and deepens friendship.

WHAT WYNN LOST: A STORY ABOUT VULNERABILITY

When I was growing up, my mom was fascinated with our neighbor across the street, Wynn. Her garden was perfect and she tended to it fully made up, hair coiffed and hands covered in bright green garden gloves to protect her manicure. Her kid was just as perfect as her perennials. Her husband… yep, just as perfect as the vibrant clematis vine growing around her mailbox. She always had a smile on her face and cookies in the oven.

My mom couldn’t stand Wynn. And now I understand why.

Wynn most assuredly had problems like the rest of the families on Hazel Drive: money worries; loneliness; insecurity. But rather than disclose glimpses of vulnerability to her neighbors, she hid under a veneer of perfection, which intimidated everyone in the neighborhood. You just couldn’t get close to Wynn.
Wynn is not alone, nor at fault. Disclosing our imperfections and vulnerabilities is a scary thing to do. But while it is scary, it is the cornerstone of establishing deep relationships. Social scientists have discovered that moving from acquaintanceship to close friends depends on one major factor—the quality of self-disclosure.1

Of course, revealing things about ourselves must be done slowly and over time. It is important that the depth of disclosure feels appropriate to both parties involved. It’s a dance between friends, but one well worth the effort and the risk. By showing cracks in the veneer, Wynn could have won much more than suburban envy. She would have had close friends and trusted neighbors.

**ACTIONS AREN’T ENOUGH**

Ready to practice some vulnerability? Here’s a transformative little secret we’ve touched on already: let your friends know they are in your Lifeboat.

Don’t underestimate the power of language—using your words—to improve your friendships. Give me a minute here to explain why actions alone are not enough; why we so often let close friendships go unsaid and how you might go about this (maybe uncomfortable?) act of telling your friends they are in your Lifeboat.

There are three main reasons that our actions alone often fail to convey our true feelings:

1. **We’re all fallible.** Some days we are more Gregory House than James Wilson. We over-schedule and forget to return calls. We get consumed by deadlines and miss birthdays. We’re exhausted and bail on dinner. If the behaviors are chronic it probably says something about our priorities. But sometimes life just happens and you end up sending strong messages that you don’t intend.

2. **Everyone has different expectations.** Some close friends expect to talk everyday. Some expect to share big dreams and fears. I’m personally big on invites. Yet half of my Lifeboaters don’t frequently initiate activities. Does that mean that they don’t care about me? No, it means they’re more passive. But without words, actions that are unaligned with our expectations can feel hurtful.
3. No other type of close relationship thrives “unsaid.” Imagine what would happen if you cooked dinner for your wife every night but never told her you loved her. Or if your boss gave you a good salary but never told you she appreciated your work. Words of affirmation are central to successful relationships; that so many friendships coast along without them, I think, is central to our insecurity.

The reason we don’t often broach the subject of friendship with our friends is simple: fear.

Here’s a short passage from the memoir of one of my favorite authors and journalists, Christopher Hitchens, that I think is telling: “‘Martin is your best friend, isn’t he?’ a sweet and well-intentioned girl once said when both of us were present: it was the only time I ever felt awkward about this precious idea, which seemed somehow to risk diminishment if it were uttered aloud.”

Hitchens—who was as brave a thinker as anyone I’ve ever read—shares a common fear and perception that our friendships are fragile. Why would you want to open them up and put things at risk? What if it’s awkward? What if it changes things somehow? Worse, what if your friend doesn’t reciprocate? Understandable. But I have another question for you: what’s the risk of leaving a good friend unsure of where she stands?

The practice of letting close friends know how much they matter is truly transformative. Alia and I can speak to this from personal experience. It creates trust and alignment and allows us to break through walls and get deeper with those we care about.

Last thing… if you’re ready to tell your friends but cringe at the thought of fumbling though awkward conversations, you’re not alone. Rest assured, they don’t have to be cheesy or strange. This practice, when done in a way that reflects you and your style, is courageous stuff and your friends will thank you.

To get you started, here are ten phrases to riff on.

“I want you to know you’re one of my closest friends. I really count on you and it means a lot that you have my back.”

“Your friendship means the world to me, you know that right?”

“I love you, man.”

“You are one of my favorite people in the world. I mean it. I hope you know it. If there’s ever anything you need I’ve got your back.”
“I’ve been thinking about the friends in my life a lot recently. I know we haven’t known each other that long, but I really appreciate having you in my life.”

“You’re like family to me.”

“Listen, you’re one of my dearest friends. I know friends don’t always share that sort of thing. But I wanted you to know.”

“There aren’t many people I feel I can turn to like you. You’re a really important part of my life.”

“I’ve been thinking about all the stuff you’ve done for me over the last few years—I don’t even know if you realize. But it means a lot to me that we’re friends.”

Whether your friendship code hinges on making yourself vulnerable to the people you care about most, showing gratitude or not keeping score, creating your own code of what it means to be a truly great friend will not only make you a better friend, it may well help you become your best self.

In the *State of Friendship in America* report, Americans said that friends make life most meaningful more frequently than family, religious faith and occupational success. Still, the average American adult spends only 4 percent of their time with friends (down from 30 percent as a teenager).

It makes perfect sense of course. As we get older, family, work and other demands occupy an increasing amount of our time and brain space. But other less meaningful activities also zap our time and energy. I, for one, have been known to get sucked into marathons of *America’s Next Top Model Cycle 18*. And while Tyra is fierce, she’s not one of my friends.

At Lifeboat, we propose a small additional investment of time with Lifeboat friends each week. It doesn’t have to be big—think an extra phone call, a lunch date, a quick postcard dropped in the mail. A **one percent additional investment weekly** in your close group of friends will pay back dividends in rewards. Social scientists say we’ll feel more connected, more grounded and more supported.
You’re busy. And you can’t just skip laundry or sleep. So how do you find this extra time without compromising other priorities? Here’s a trick: try rethinking some solo habits to include friends more in your everyday life.

Here are eight simple ideas for getting an extra 90 minutes of quality friend-time each week.

1. **Start a weekly viewing.** We all need down time and enjoy a good TV veg out. Why not share the pleasure with friends and host a regular weekly viewing? Sunday night potluck and *Scandal* anyone?

2. **Host a monthly procrastination party.** Who doesn’t waste time avoiding dreaded tasks? Try picking one night each month to invite friends to confront woeful tasks together. Taxes, photo organizing, LinkedIn cleanup—bring what ails you!

3. **Trade the gym for a team sport.** Treadmills are way less painful with a friend. Why not arrange a weekly workout date with one of your Lifeboaters? Or, if you’re feeling ambitious, you could suggest joining a local sports league together.

4. **Eat social.** Friends who eat together stay together. Whether it’s big Sunday feasts or quick pre-work breakfasts, you can combine your meals and pals with ease. Everyone has to eat and you can even do it virtually. Wednesday Skype lunch?

5. **Try carpooling or tag-team transit.** Make the daily commute a time to catch up by sharing a ride or coordinating transit times with a Lifeboater. You can do this virtually too, by making plans for a regular post-work debrief.

6. **Group up for holidays.** What’s your next vacation? Choose a Lifeboater (or two) who you’d want to share more time with and get a (90-minute) trip brainstorm on the calendar. Need to spend your time off with family? Invite a friend to share in the joys of your in-law antics!

7. **Try co-working from home together.** If you have the freedom, scheduling a day to skip office doldrums together can be super rewarding. Could you imagine working side-by-side at the kitchen table with one of your Lifeboaters? Get scheming.

8. **Declare Sunday drop-in day.** This one is particularly great for new parents who can’t easily get out of the house. If you know you’re going to be home anyways, why not shoot an email to friends letting them know Sunday afternoon is drop in day. No expectations or RSVP required.
TACTICS FOR BOOMERS AND GEN-XERS

Remember back in chapter two we told you about the midlife friendship slump? Seniors (aged 70 and over) and Millennials (ages 16-34) are more likely to say they are extremely satisfied with friendships than are Gen-Xers (ages 35-49) or Baby Boomers (ages 50-69). In the spirit of giving one percent more to friendships, here are seven lessons we can learn from Seniors and Millennials that will help lift us out of the dreaded midlife friendship slump.

1. **Focus on Nurturing Close Friendships**

According to our study, people with more close friends are happier and more satisfied than those with few or no close friends. On average, participants reported that they have four close friends. But Millennials and Seniors have more close friends than Gen-Xers or Boomers, and those happen to be the two cohorts most satisfied with their friendships.

Of course, developing more close friends takes added time and capacity. Start small by identifying five to eight people you wish to invest your time with.

2. **Make Friends with a Senior and a Millennial**

We tend to gravitate to friends who are like us—people who match, fit and have the same demographics—at an astoundingly predictable rate. However, mid-life slump generations may find value in developing intergenerational friendships to better understand their own social blind spot. Making conscious decisions about the types of friends you want to invest in (across political, religious and demographic lines) can make your friendships align more clearly with who you are and with who you want to be.

Want to be a better friend? Make friends with a better friend.

3. **Keep Making Friends**

There’s been much ado about how difficult it is to make friends later in life. But GenX-ers and Boomers, don’t give up. Recent social science shows that forming close friendships requires skills that are different than just being liked. In a nutshell, scientists found that the biggest difference between people who have close friends and people who don’t is their ability to initiate activities. So, initiate activities with the kinds of people you want to get close to. As this article on how to make friends when you’re ‘old’ suggests, you’ll need to purposefully decide what kinds of friends you really want; discover where those kinds of people hang out; and go there—frequently.

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HOW TO FAIL AT FRIENDS (AND MANAGEMENT)

What we’re really talking about in this chapter is intention—about being intentional with friends. Which got me thinking about managers. I’m a bit of a business geek; I’m fascinated by start-ups. I’ve read the Economist cover-to-cover almost every week since I was 16. And just recently I realized how profoundly relevant management insights can be to friendship.

Act Now!
Give an additional one percent of your time to close friends each week. One percent of “waking” time each week equals about 1 hour and 30 minutes. What can you do differently to make a little more room for friends?

- Opt out of an episode of Fringe and 30 Rock.
- Play hooky from one useless meeting at work this week.
- Choose an easy dinner over making that double roasted rhubarb arugula bruschetta.
- Check out some productivity Lifehacks that might make other tasks go more quickly.

“*The vast majority of bad managers are good people who simply aren’t managing.*”

Really. This insight about bad managers, for example, sheds light on a hidden choice we face with pals that’s crucial to our success or failure as friends. Bear with me for a moment and you’ll see what I mean.

Back to business: Baker suggests our first instinct with bad managers—to fault their character—is misguided. And that the problem more often lies with someone simply failing to adapt to their role. A programmer becomes CTO; a designer becomes Creative Director; a writer becomes VP of Marketing. She deserves it. Everyone’s excited. Until they are not.

Picture dim-witted Michael Scott from The Office or sinister Bill Lumbergh of Office Space. We like to imagine our bad managers as deeply flawed souls—incompetent, evil or both. The reality, according to consulting guru David C. Baker, is far more forgiving. Baker has spent almost 20 years working in the often-toxic terrain between struggling supervisors and their fed up teams. And he’s come to the following conclusion:
Goal setting? Performance reviews? Difficult conversations? They’re not happening. Anxiety grows in her team. Jane, sensing trouble, closes her door. She retreats to her craft—what she knows best and got her promoted in the first place! It doesn’t help because it’s not management. And Horrible Bosses ensues. Indeed, the actual skills of management are pretty common sense. Forget needing an MBA, according to Baker, the big challenge for Jane and her ilk: just making the choice to manage.

So, how does bad management relate to friends? While re-reading Baker’s book last week, three lessons hit me:

1. Close friendship, just like management, is a unique role. Yes, it’s possible to ignore this and fumble along with your Lifeboat. But it causes stress and misalignment and doesn’t work long term. The magic starts when you choose to accept the role of close friend with someone, and all that comes with it. You’re 95 percent of the way there.

2. Just like management, the actual skills of friendship aren’t rocket science. Once you accept the role, you can follow some basic, common sense strategies. No need for a friendship diploma.

3. Finally just like “bad managers,” the people we think of as “bad friends” may not be the social equivalent of Michael Scott or Bill Lumbergh—incompetent, evil or both. They may be Jane, a good person out of her depth, without the tools or even awareness of the role she’s in. Thinking back to the times I’m least proud of myself as a friend—and there are many—this rings true.

**THE JOB: GREAT FRIEND**

As a final point, let’s flip to Baker’s conclusion about great managers, because it’s super relevant to great friends too. He says:

“Great managers *don’t stand out because they get everything right but because they are active and present... They aren’t remarkable because they always make the right decision but because they act.*”

Indeed, great friends don’t always call or show up or make the right moves. They gaff and embarrass and give poor advice. But they are present as friends in our lives and they act like it. It’s too easy to get caught up in the guilt of our friendship failings and to retreat from the role. Jane would understand, as she clings to her craft.

The management geek in me could go on and on, but I think the central choice is clear: Do we embrace our role as friends? Because remember, you’ve already got the job.

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FAKE SPACE CAMP
A FRIENDSHIP STORY

So, a couple years ago, I was talking about Space Camp a lot. Space Camp is this awesome thing where you spend a week learning what it’s like to be an astronaut. It’s mostly for kids, but they do an adult program once or twice a year. I was obsessed. Like...really obsessed. I talked about it all the time, and felt really sad that I wasn’t at Space Camp.

Guess what my friends Trish and Julia did?

They planned an elaborate “Fake Space Camp” just for me!

Look how excited I was! Crazy-eyed excited! Trish read me the Fake Space Camp Preamble. Important background info: Trish is the funniest person around.
We did activities like a science experiment involving balloons and Newton's Third Law of Motion. And there's Julia with one of the Constellation Cups we made. Important background info: Julia is the most thoughtful person around.

Trish and Julia remembered to include all sorts of essentials, like Tang with glow-in-the-dark stir sticks, and a Fake Space Camp Goodie Bag filled with Starburst and Milky Ways (get it?)

Here are some other things they didn’t forget:

A space-y soundtrack
Temporary space tattoos
Aviator glasses
My NASA badge
A homemade “Galaxy Pie” (frozen custard pie with chocolate and caramel)

This was over two years ago, so I don’t actually remember all of the many little details. What I do remember is feeling so so special.

And here’s what’s totally crazy about this whole thing: Trish and Julia don’t actually care about space that much. They just know that I care about space. So they put all of this together, they did all of this research and planning, just to make me happy.

They are stellar friends.

P.S. Julia is also a talented photographer and took all of these photos. Except for... I suppose, the one she's in. I think Trish probably took that one.
Some people rock at being intentional and initiating activities with friends. Others don’t. If you find yourself in the latter category, think about giving one percent more to friends and initiating some of the activities we’ve talked about in this chapter as a skill you can and should practice. It’s really that simple.
One of the primary predictors of friendship is... proximity. Yes, we are friends with people simply because they live closer to us than others. And we’re not talking about big distances here. Researchers have found that people in an apartment complex are better friends with people living on the same floor and best friends with people living right next door. Does that ring a bell?

The proximity phenomenon is just one of several fateful factors that influences who we have as friends. And while there is nothing wrong with letting the universe work its magic by meeting friends at work, through school or in the apartment leasing office, it’s important not to rely on fate alone. Actively looking for friends who bring out our best selves and introduce us to new and different perspectives can create very rewarding and deep relationships.

Proximity—or lack of it—can also cause us to drift apart from really great friendships. I spent four years of university in the remote northern resource town of Thunder Bay, Ontario, a 24-hour cold winter’s drive from Toronto. It’s the sort of place that doesn’t let you forget that you live there. My roommates and I woke each morning to check the frostbite gauge. We spotted each other in the dark afternoons by our colored toques. And we spent most evenings huddled inside, surrounded by snowdrifts piled to our second story windows—
like field mice buried for the season. It’s also the sort of place where strong bonds form.

One of my closest friends was a brilliant, maverick-minded French Canadian named Andrew. I’m not sure I would have made it through school without him. He actually saved my life once while winter camping. But more than that, it was simply this unique everyday experience we created as comrades together that made us close.

We stayed tight after school too, visiting each other across the country. But then we drifted. Time passed. And now it’s been almost a decade since we last spoke. It’s strange because he still pops into my head from time to time (particularly when it’s freezing outside!). I think about reaching out. But I never do.

**IS RECONNECTING WITH OLD PALS WORTH IT?**

Studies show that most adults replace about half their close friends every seven years.¹ This means you’ve likely got an Andrew or two of your own out there. Thankfully, new research on what sociologists call “dormant ties” can provide some useful guidance. It suggests that under the right circumstances re-activating a close bond is not only possible but can also provide a rare and powerful opportunity.

To get us started reconnecting with old friends, it’s worth noting three common objections to the idea of re-broaching old friendships.

1. If your friend is no longer part of your life, isn’t that probably for a reason? Doesn’t it mean one of you made the choice to stop being in touch? Isn’t that why you moved on?
2. Even if you had something meaningful way back when, wouldn’t the bond be lost by now to time and changing circumstances?
3. There’s just so much awkwardness and risk in re-engaging after having gone silent. And there’s the guilt. What if your friend is mad or just not interested?

These are reasonable questions, indeed, but research suggests they’re actually based largely on unfounded anxieties. Most people would agree that friendships you’ve purposefully chosen to end are not worth revisiting. But the truth is, those types of endings are actually the exception. More often, friendships tend to become “dormant” from three unconscious factors: “inattention, happenstance, and inertia.”² In other words: we get distracted, move away, have babies, change jobs and otherwise accidentally drift.

It’s also apparently far less likely than we think for strong bonds to erode with time. First, Stanford sociologist Mark Granvetter, author of the hugely influential paper *The Strength of Weak Ties* says: “Built into human cognitive equipment is a remarkable capacity... to file away the details and especially
the emotional tone of past relations... [Even after many years]... a re-activation of the relationship does not start from scratch, but from some set of previously attained common understandings and feelings.”

Chicago Booth School sociologist Robert Burt agrees, proposing that some “ignored” relationships are better understood as being “on hold, sleepers ready to wake.”

Finally, Professor Daniel Levin of Rutgers University remarks, “strong ties may create a fundamental, permanent connection that time apart, on its own, cannot undo.” And Levin actually goes on to address the awkwardness issue inherent in initially reconnecting. He suggests that the risk a friend takes actually making the effort is a big part of what makes reconnections so “emotionally positive” to experience. The leap demonstrates the significance of the intent.

Curiosity, a yearning for grounding, nostalgia—there are so many reasons you might be motivated to reconnect with an old lost friend. But Levin suggests the rare and special opportunity we have is this: to immediately teleport someone “new” into our life with whom we already share trust and perspective. That sounds pretty ideal, doesn’t it?

I’m going to go see what Andrew thinks.

Past Pal Assignment
Think about one person in your distant orbit who you want to bring closer and make a plan to do it by the end of the week.

FRIENDS AT WORK?

There are many ways to jumpstart friendships. Reconnecting with old friends is a great strategy. So is finding friends at work where we spend a lot of our time. Friendship is a major dynamic in people’s lives. Nobody just leaves it at home. You’ve probably heard the conventional management wisdom that suggests friends and work don’t mix, right? Well, we’re not convinced and all our experience tells us collegial friendships are inevitable anyways. In this light, the more productive question to ask is: how do I do it right?

Before we answer that big question, why do traditionalists argue against pals at the office in the first place? They say that mixing work and friendship can blur decision-making and make difficult calls more difficult. Some worry that friends in the office can lead to distracting—even inappropriate—behavior. How can someone operate in the best interest of the organization, they ask, if they’re also worried about their BFF? These issues get real for managers facing such difficult situations as annual reviews—or worse, layoffs—involving close friends. All good reasons, they say, to remain socially guarded in our cubicles.

Still, advocates like us for a more friendly approach to work suggest this line of thinking is outmoded.

First, with just about everyone spending more time at work—and/or more
time on work at home—colleagues can often seem like the best social option. Where else would you find so many people with similar interests, passions and values? And according to our State of Friendship report, 36 percent of adults say they met at least one of their closest friends at work. The percent rises to 42 percent for Gen-Xers (age 35-49) and to 50 percent of Baby Boomers (age 50-69). So work friendships do indeed happen.

Second, close friendships at work can make you happier with your job. According to this study in the Journal of Business Psychology, workers report higher job satisfaction when they felt they had even the opportunity for friendships at the office. A 2013 survey of 2223 business people across Australia found most respondents planned to stick with their current jobs. They cited “good relationship with co-workers” as the major reason (67 percent) above even salary (46 percent).

Third, collegial friends can help you succeed. Leaders need people in their lives who nurture them through the tough times and who challenge them to be their best selves and live up to their dreams and potential. Sometimes it’s only workmates who can truly understand where you are at and offer cogent advice.

With these arguments in mind, here are three strategies we recommend for starting to create your workplace Lifeboat:

**GO DEEP NOT WIDE**

Nurturing quality relationships takes time, emotional energy and cognitive capacity, all of which are limited. You’ll remember from earlier chapters that anthropologists suggest that thanks our limited brain capacities we can only maintain casual social relationships with less than 150 individuals. Deep relationships with strong bonds, on the other hand, tend to occur in what psychologists refer to as sympathy groups—groups of 10-15 people. And more than 2-to-1 American adults say they would prefer these deeper relationships to more connections.

So we still recommend cultivating a large professional network, but we also suggest investing oneself more deeply and personally with a handful of people you trust—your professional Lifeboat.

**GIVE MORE**

As you get older, family, work and other demands occupy an increasing amount of time and brain space. Often this takes a toll on time spent with friends. The average American adult spends 4 percent of their time with friends—down from 30 percent as teenagers! Our recommendation here, which you’ll remember
from the previous chapter, is simply to invest one percent additional time with friends each week (1 hour 30 minutes). It doesn’t have to be big—think an extra phone call, a lunch date, or a quick note for a job well done.

STOP ASKING “HOW CAN I HELP”

We’ve focused a lot in this chapter on reconnecting with old friends and making new friends. What about existing friendships that have lost their vitality? Sometimes our lack of inertia keeps even healthy friendships from soaring to new heights. An example of a friendship inhibitor is that tired old phrase: “how can I help?” Being willing to help is a good thing, of course, but for a friend who’s going through one of life’s roller coaster moments, it’s too big a question to answer. But, those four words—“how can I help?”—are still our go-to when a friend gets sick or experiences the loss of a loved one, or has a new baby. There are completely rational, well-intentioned reasons why we ask the question:

• We don’t want to do anything for our friend that they wouldn’t want.
• It puts the ball and control in our friend’s court.
• It’s a comfortable way for us to show our friend that we care, without overstepping any boundaries.

But let’s face it. It’s a bullshit question because it’s kind of unanswerable. People don’t like asking for help, even when they need it and even when it’s offered.

In her book, *Mayday! Asking For Help In Times of Need*, M. Nora Klaver writes: “Asking for help is a universally dreaded endeavor. Seven out of ten people admit they could have used help over the last week but didn’t ask for it.” So when the going gets tough for a Lifeboater, here’s your permission to spring into action—without being directed.

But what’s appropriate? What should I do? We asked people who have recently experienced some of life’s “big” moments to share one thing they needed (but didn’t necessarily ask for) to help spur your thinking.

**A FRIEND GETS SICK**

“I just spent six months recovering from a bone marrow transplant. Whenever friends asked, “How can I help?” I found it difficult to come up with an answer. It wasn’t that there was a lack of things I needed. After all, this was a difficult time for me. But nothing felt like the right answer to give. So instead, I would just tell people I was doing fine.
However, the friends that showed up without asking transformed my recovery experience. There was the once-a-week voicemail to say, “I miss you.” There was the perfect care package with my favorite food and trashy magazines. There were hand-painted pictures from my friends’ kids. And perhaps the most helpful of all were the unprompted offers to come for a visit, complete with suggested dates. When someone is going through something as tough as a medical recovery, take the work out of it for them and just jump in. It’s the best medicine.”
—Woman, 32

A FRIEND HAS A NEW BABY (TWO PERSPECTIVES)

“Once you have kids, it’s easy to sort of lose touch with your previous identity and feel like you’re in full-time parent mode. What’s great is when friends don’t write you off socially—when they still invite you out to things or even make the effort to come hang out at your place. Of course you can’t always make it, but it means a lot to still be invited. And sometimes it motivates us to rally... to get a babysitter, go out, and be our own people in the world again!”
—Man, 37

“Wanna know how to help a friend who is a new parent? One word. Food. Frozen food, groceries, takeout delivered from a favorite restaurant... any form, just food, food and food. And don’t feel weird about taking it over there. Contact your new parent friends and give them a couple of options for when you can bring it by. (If they have pets, some treats for them would be very appreciated too).”
—Woman, 37

A FRIEND EXPERIENCES THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE

“When my sister passed away, I was comforted with support immediately. However six months later, the phone calls, supportive emails and cards had stopped. It made me really sad. I could have used a six-month “memory” day to talk about my sister, look at photos and share stories with my friends and family.”
—Woman, 69

A FRIEND IS HAVING PROBLEMS WITH A CHILD

“People want to help you problem solve, but there is often a thinly-veiled judgment that if your kid is messed, it’s because you did something wrong and you’re an inadequate parent. So don’t judge; that alone is hugely helpful. The people who have helped the most have a direct connection with our kid, and they have engaged with him directly. That’s been rare, but really valuable.”
—Man, 58
A FRIEND IS HAVING RELATIONSHIP TROUBLES

“When I thought I was looking at a traumatic, sudden end to my marriage I found I couldn’t stand to be alone. But I also couldn’t stand to feel so pathetic as to tell anyone that. My best friends just showed up, some for an hour, some for a day, some for a weekend, and one for a few weeks, without making me ask. They showed up and didn’t ask for anything of me other than my company, and they didn’t freak out when I was crazy drunk or crazy sad or crazy mad. They were just there, and knew me well enough to know that’s what I needed.”
–Woman, 39

A FRIEND IS UNEMPLOYED

“You lose so many inputs when you’re suddenly not involved in work anymore. All those people needing you for whatever—they are suddenly gone. It’s like a vacuum. Friends who helped fill that up were a huge relief. One booked meetings with me a couple times in the first few weeks for advice and I loved that.”
–Man, 35

Asking for help is an important skill for us to learn. But giving help without being asked is also an essential part of the friendship equation and keeps us actively engaged in building better friendships. So let’s change “how can I help?” into “here’s how I helped.”
The Internet is not the easy button.

We’re still experimenting with how online networks can best enrich our lives. And one of Lifeboat’s biggest concerns is the ease with which the Internet allows us to exchange intimacy of relationships for convenience and broad reach.

For many people technology provides a placeholder—a way to avoid the challenges of relationships, while still feeling connected. We’ve replaced sharing our thoughts, fears, hopes and vulnerabilities with a small group of people with sharing photos, news articles and funny videos with the world. There’s nothing wrong with the latter as long as we’re also doing the former.

My Name is Alia. And, I’m a Technology Addict

I’m addicted to the pings, beeps, and flashing lights that come from a constant flow of text messages, Facebook posts, tweets and emails. These tech inputs make me feel needed, wanted and in the know.

When Tim goes to the restroom at a restaurant, I stealthily maneuver my cell
Like Pavlov’s dog, I hear a bell and I run to my devices salivating. But after I click, I usually feel far from satisfied. Am I really needed? Or do I really just need to feel needed?

— ALIA McKEE

The worst part is that this deluge of inputs from my vast network is distracting me from the people who matter most. Instead of calling a close friend, making plans to meet in person or sending a thank you note, I busy myself by wishing people Happy Birthday on Facebook. And I’m so not alone.

WOULD YOU GIVE UP CHOCOLATE AND CAFFEINE BEFORE PARTING WITH YOUR PHONE?

More than half of Americans would rather give up chocolate, alcohol and caffeine for a week before parting temporarily with their phones. Yet people are lonelier than ever. In 2010, 35 percent of adults reported that they were chronically lonely—nearly a 50 percent increase from a decade earlier.

Next year, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the authority on mental illness, plans to include “Internet Use Disorder” in its appendix. Even Silicon Valley executives admit that the lure of constant stimulation is creating a profound physical craving that can hurt productivity and personal interactions. Stuart Crabb, a director in the executive offices of Facebook, states, “People need to notice the effect that time online has on your performance and relationships.”

Of course, I don’t advocate giving up technology. But I am committed to paying more attention to the effect my tech addiction is having on my personal relationships.

Small, simple changes, like leaving my phone at home when I go out to dinner with friends, can have major impact. Some groups like Digital Detox and Reboot are promoting creative ideas for unplugging including something they call a cell phone stack. They suggest that when you go out to dinner with friends, you all put your phone in the stack and whoever looks first picks up the tab.

Not a bad idea.

SO, WHERE DOES SOCIAL MEDIA FIT IN?

A debate rages today about whether Facebook and other social media are a help or hindrance when it comes to establishing and maintaining stable friendships. Lifeboat survey results suggest the answer is, in fact, neither. Social media appears neither to help nor hurt.

We looked at Facebook in particular. The survey suggests that: no clear relationship was found between number of Facebook friends and overall satisfaction with the state of one’s friendships. As noted earlier, this stands in contrast to the clear link between the number of close friends and overall friendship satisfaction.

There is also no correlation between Facebook friends and overall happiness. People with more Facebook friends are neither more nor less likely to feel lonely or express dissatisfaction with their personal lives.

Survey respondents are more likely to see Facebook (and by extension social media) as a tool for managing friendships, but not so much as a source of new, real friends. More than half of those with Facebook accounts (54 percent) say they have met the majority of their Facebook friends face-to-face. And to be clear, those friendships began offline. Fewer than one in five (18 percent) say they have ever met someone via Facebook who later became a close friend.
For many, Facebook is a way to keep in touch with acquaintances and friends who are less close. Half of survey participants overall (and 60 percent of Millennials) agree with the statement, “Facebook helps me stay in touch with more casual friends.”

Respondents’ answers also suggest that Facebook has not displaced real friendships. Just over one-fourth (27 percent) agree with the statement “Facebook interactions have replaced personal interactions.” Among Millennials that number rises to 37 percent, but declines quickly with age. Among Seniors, only six percent agree that Facebook is displacing face-to-face interaction.

In summary, our survey suggests that Facebook and social media have relatively little influence on healthy relationships and overall satisfaction with life. That is an important finding as we explore strategies for increasing both the quantity and quality of friendships.
I have reconnected with old friends; communication is superficial.

I share only positive events in my life.

I have met the majority of my Facebook friends face to face.

I spend less time in person with my friends.

I share the same things on Facebook that I do in person.

I have reconnected with old friends; relationships are meaningful.

I feel more lonely.

I always stay in touch with my close friends.

I always stay in touch with my close friends.

I help me stay in touch with more casual friends.

I help me stay in touch with more casual friends.

I help me stay in touch with more casual friends.

I help me stay in touch with more casual friends.

I help me stay in touch with more casual friends.

I share the same things on Facebook that I do in person.

I have reconnected with old friends; communication is superficial.

I have reconnected with old friends; relationships are meaningful.

I spend less time in person with my friends.

I share the same things on Facebook that I do in person.

I have reconnected with old friends; relationships are meaningful.

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I share the same things on Facebook that I do in person.

I have reconnected with old friends; communication is superficial.

I have reconnected with old friends; relationships are meaningful.

I spend less time in person with my friends.

I share the same things on Facebook that I do in person.
FACEBOOK, YOU JUST DON'T MATTER

So, when it comes to friendship, how or if you use Facebook doesn’t matter. This finding is contrary to the current arguments raging about social media and its effect on friendships. On one hand, some are concerned that Facebook is making us lonely by emphasizing shallow relationships. On the other hand, others believe that Facebook is enriching our lives through accessible connections.

According to a much-discussed article in the Atlantic Monthly, there is a fear that “Facebook is interfering with our real friendships, distancing us from each other, making us lonelier; and that social networking might be spreading the very isolation it seemed designed to conquer.”

Others argue that society, on average, is more isolated than ever. But that Facebook users are less isolated than those who don’t use social media.

As you’ve already read, our survey suggests neither. Use (or lack thereof) of Facebook appears not to help nor hurt when it comes to establishing and maintaining stable friendships. I sat down with the two architects of the study Lisa Dropkin of Edge Research and Mark Rovner of Sea Change Strategies to get their insights.

DOES FACEBOOK MATTER?

Alia: The State of Friendship in America report finds a clear link between the number of close friends and overall friendship satisfaction, but no link between the number of Facebook friends/usage and overall friendship satisfaction? What do you make of that?
Mark: That Facebook friends are not friends in the dictionary sense of the word. We need a new word for it. How about e-cquaintances?

Lisa: I would add that not all Facebook friends are created equal. The study tells us that we are much more likely to meet our closest friends through in-person connection, not digital connection. So those relationships begin in the traditional sense and whatever is satisfying or not satisfying about them probably has little to do with the communications channel we use to stay in touch.

IS FACEBOOK MAKING US LONELY?

Alia: What do you think the study says about the debate about whether Facebook is making us lonely?

Lisa: The study shows that real friends and quality friendships are the difference between feeling lonely or not. Facebook is peripheral.

Mark: There’s a recent Pew study out that suggests that Facebook has cycled from new thing to something we all have, but we aren’t defined by it. We all have cell phones, but for the most part they don’t make us happy or sad. Facebook seems to be becoming a sort of utility—one that has up and downsides.

Alia: Loneliness expert John Cacioppo has found that the greater proportion of face-to-face interactions people have, the less lonely they report being. Is Facebook replacing face-to-face interactions or augmenting them?

Lisa: One thing I have heard from friends is that Facebook can take over when it comes to making announcements or setting up social events. A friend of mine missed the announcement of the arrival of his best friend’s first child because the friend only posted to Facebook! That caused some grief in the relationship since my friend doesn’t get Facebook feeds at work and did not check his Facebook account for a week. There is an expectation that because you put it out there, your friends are seeing it and that is probably not a good assumption. If it’s really important to communicate, you probably need to make a one-on-one connection.

Mark: For the most part, Facebook is icing on the friendship cake, with the cake being face-to-face relationships. Not that there’s anything wrong with icing...

WHAT ABOUT FAKEBOOKING?

Alia: There is a lot of attention being placed on people presenting only the
best parts of their lives on Facebook—a phenomenon known as Fakebooking.\(^3\) The study indicates this is the case particularly for Millennials. How much of an issue is it?

**Mark:** Again, maybe it’s just that Facebook reflects humanity at this point. Most young people are obsessed with how they are seen. By the time you get to be my age, you just don’t care all that much.

**Lisa:** I am not on Facebook because I like my private life private. Actually I like other people’s private lives to be private too!

**WHAT WERE SOME SURPRISES?**

**Alia:** Were you surprised by any of the findings?

**Lisa:** I was surprised by the findings among seniors—that they are the generation most satisfied with their friendships! I would love to dig in more to how friendships play different roles and serve different emotional needs throughout our lives.

**Mark:** I was relieved, in the sense that I am concerned about what feels to me to be the “plasticization” of relationships caused by the obsession with social media. If you’ve never read *Super Sad True Love Story* it’s a plausible and dystopian view of where it could all go. So maybe it’s not all as bad as I think it is sometimes.

**Alia:** If you could provide an analogy for what Facebook is for maintaining friendships, what would it be?

**Mark:** The phone.

**Lisa:** Facebook is just a communications channel. I didn’t think of it as singlehandedly changing anything and the data suggests that it hasn’t. But I do wonder about this “public persona” versus “real me” issue. Psychologists say that when your public self is really different from your private self you create additional mental and emotional stress in your life. We are saturated with media that cultivates a culture of fame. As a culture are we becoming so obsessed with public image that we are not putting our true selves out there even for our friends? And if that is the case, how can anyone really know us? What kind friendships will we really have?

**WHAT’S YOUR ADVICE FOR PEOPLE USING SOCIAL MEDIA?**

**Alia:** What piece of advice would you give to people about their online behav-
ior relative to friendship?

Lisa: Ask yourself if you would want to be friends with the Facebook version of yourself.

Mark: Everything in life is about the fundamentals. Our entire being is encoded on a couple strands of DNA. Basketball stardom is about dribble, pass and shoot. Telling a great story is about character and conflict. Being a good friend is about the fundamentals too.

WHAT SHOULD WE EXPLORE NEXT?

Alia: What didn’t we answer? What should we dig into next?

Mark: Facebook is a vast heterogeneous world. What can we learn about subcultures within Facebook? How can we use Facebook as a tool for combatting loneliness and isolation? How can we get Mark Zuckerberg to keep his nose out of politics?

Lisa: One thing I wonder about more than Facebook is online dating sites. Maybe it’s my generation (Gen X) that is having its turn going through divorces and second marriages, but I see more of my friends and relatives developing relationships through those sites. They tell me it is less scary and awkward than being set up or trying to “go out there and meet someone!” Is this an avenue where digital encounters are better than the real thing? What does that say about the future of romance?

In movies and TV, friends of the opposite sex frequently harbor secret passions for each other that set the plot reeling into motion. You know the typical sequence well:

- Woman and Man meet.
- They grow close together through friendship.
- One or both—at different times—struggle with unrequited sexual or emotional feelings.
- Woman and Man end up together romantically either happily ever after or scarred for life.

We idealize this notion of falling head over heels with the one who’s been right in front of our face the whole time. In homage to this narrative, last spring, two single friends in New York tried an experiment where they dated for 40 days to see if they could fall in love if they just tried hard enough.

Despite typical Hollywood hyperbole, the tension is real. We idealize this notion of falling head over heels with our best friend.
It’s a historically recent phenomenon that women and men work, live and hang out together as friends and engage in what evolutionary psychologists call non-reproductive interactions.\(^1\) And while we seem to cope without jumping each others’ bones every chance we get, researchers are finding that our platonic relationships—at least straight opposite-sex friendships—are veils covering up natural sexual impulses bubbling just below the surface.\(^2\)

In a recent study, scientists brought 88 pairs of undergraduate, opposite-sex friends to a lab to discuss their feelings for each other. In order to ensure honest responses, the researchers required both friends to agree verbally and in front of each other to refrain from discussing the study—ever.\(^2\) The pairs were then separated and asked a series of questions related to their sexual and romantic feelings.

The results suggest large gender differences in how men and women experience opposite-sex friendships. Men were much more attracted to their female friends than the other way around. Men were also more likely than women to think that their women friends were attracted to them. For you nerds out there, you can check out the paired-samples t-test results on page 575 of the study.

For non-nerds, men assumed that any romantic attraction they experienced was mutual. And men were blind to the actual level of romantic interest felt by their female friends. Women were also blind to the mindset of their men friends believing that—because they themselves weren’t attracted to their male friends—the lack of attraction was mutual. In essence, men overestimated the level of attraction felt by their female friends and women underestimated the level of attraction felt by their male friends.

Relationship status didn’t seem to matter. Both men and women were equally attracted to single and romantically taken opposite-sex friends. However, men were more willing to see attached friends as potential romantic partners while women reported being uninterested in pursuing those who were already involved with someone else. In a follow up study, adults—many of whom were married—were asked to list positive and negative aspects of being friends with a specific member of the opposite sex.

Variables related to romantic attraction (e.g.: “our relationship could lead to romantic feelings”) were five times more likely to be listed as negative. However, males were significantly more likely than females to list romantic attraction as a benefit. It’s worth noting that this increased as men aged—younger males were four times more likely than females to report romantic attraction as a benefit whereas older males were ten times more likely to do the same.
SO, WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN?

This falls into “No Shit Sherlock!” territory, but women and men have vastly different views of what it means to be just friends. And sexual tension does indeed exist in male/female friendships. There’s clearly no way of taking the sexual ambiguity out of our cross-sex friendships. Given the facts, the overly-simplistic options are to:

1. Throw all opposite sex friends out of our Lifeboats. Who needs the hassle anyway?
2. Make like it’s 1969 and bring back free love.
3. Keep with the status quo and let our desires, or lack thereof, go unsaid.

But what if we entertained a fourth option—a more difficult one of facing our feelings head on? In one of the first papers on cross-sex friendship, J.D. O’Meara proposed that male and female friends confront major challenges related to sexuality.3

Here are a few questions you can use to help kick start your thinking:

1. Is there sexual tension in any of my opposite-sex friendships?
2. If so, is this sexual tension, or lack thereof, felt by the other person?
3. Do they share my feelings or do I just perceive that they share my feelings?
4. Is this person available?
5. Are my emotional feelings hindering my ability to be friends with this person?
6. Is the intensity of my feelings manageable?
7. Is this something that I need to share with another person or with the friend?
   Or is this best left unsaid, but personally acknowledged?

There’s absolutely no one-size-fits-all answer. But the fact is, men and women will continue to be friends. Men and women will continue to lust. Men and women will continue to grapple with lust and friendship.

From the time I was eight, I wanted to be a Golden Girl.

I would look forward to NBC Saturday nights with Dorothy, Rose, Blanche and Sofia. In my imagination I’d fast forward to far-off retirement years in steamy Florida and dream about the antics my lady friends and I would get up to long after our husbands either left us or died of early-onset heart disease.

Forget Full House. My youthfully eccentric idea of sitcom bliss involved me and my graying gal pals, not John Stamos.

Survey says: Women say they have access to more intimate friendships, but they are no happier than men with the state of their friendships.

But somewhere between eight and my early thirties, I got off the Golden Girls path. And being a good friend to other women became wrought with insecurity, competition and confusion. Before I move on, I’m compelled to write that this chapter speaks of my own personal experience and in no way speaks on behalf of all women. I know many women who are great friends to one another. I’m just not one of them... yet.
So what happened? Why did my *Golden Girls* dream tarnish and why were strong female friendships so elusive to me? I started Lifeboat as a way to find answers to this friendship conundrum and more. And answers I’m finding.

**WHAT WOMEN (AND MEN) WANT**

According to our national survey, it turns out that men and women say they are looking for the same qualities in a friend. The difference is that women express more intensity about this. For instance, 87 percent of women say loyalty is a critical attribute, compared with 75 percent of men. And 81 percent of women want friends who will be there for them in tough times, compared with 67 percent of men.

Women of all generations seem to be on more intimate ground than their male counterparts. For instance, while 74 percent of women say they have access to “someone you can count on when you need to talk,” only 60 percent of men say the same. Seventy percent of women say they have friends who can advise them in a crisis; only 54 percent of men say they do. And women are more likely to say they can confide in their friends, by a 15-point margin.

To some degree this data tends to confirm the societal stereotype of women having deeper friendships than men. But that does not make women happier. While women say they have access to more intimate levels of communication, at the end of the day their level of satisfaction with their friendships is no different than men’s.

Is that because we’re too hard on our female friends? Women say they value a non-judgmental friendship. Almost three-quarters of women (72 percent) say,
“does not judge me or my actions” is one of the most important qualities in a friendship, compared to just over half of men (56 percent).

There’s some good-news research that responds the data of unsatisfied female friendships. A landmark UCLA study suggests that women tend to respond to stress with a cascade of brain chemicals that cause them to make and maintain friendships with other women. The study’s authors found that when the hormone oxytocin is released as part of the stress response in a woman, it increases maternal and social behavior. As women “tend and befriend,” more oxytocin is released, which further counters stress. According to the study, this response does not occur in men because testosterone—which men produce a ton of when they’re under stress—reduces the effects of oxytocin, while estrogen enhances its effects.

So, women, we have special befriending muscles that may just need to be exercised.

Yes, friendships with women have typically been hard for me. But, thanks to Lifeboat, the female friendships I’ve recently forged and nurtured have been worth every bit of soul-searching in my quest to be better, get deeper and live more fully with my friends. Read the next section, “The Road to Better Female Friendships” to dig into what I’ve been learning about befriending other women.

In a letter to my eight-year-old self, I would say, “Alia, you deserve all the Golden Girl friendships you desire. But know, like anything else in life worth having, they will take work and understanding on your part. And my eight-year-old self would smile without any pretense and sing at the top of her lungs, “And if you threw a party, invited everyone you knew, you would see the biggest gift would be from me and the card attached would say thank you for being a friend.”

Here are five things I’ve learned about my friendships with women that I wish I had known much earlier in life.

1. **SAY GOODBYE TO JUDGMENT**

Women hate to be judged. According to Lifeboat’s *State of Friendship in America* report, nearly three quarters of women say, “does not judge me or my actions” is one of the most important qualities in a friendship, compared to just over half of men. I think women hate being judged because we’re quite aware that we judge one another intensely. But why?

When I was in my early twenties, I dated a rock and roll musician—the leader of a band. As a “band spouse” I had to hang out with the girlfriends of the other band members on long sojourns from Austin to Dallas or in the wee hours after a gig. Insecure in my own skin, I was nothing short of barbed and snide to these other young women. I’m embarrassed looking back on it. I would tell my boyfriend that they weren’t smart enough. Or, that they were boring. Or, that they weren’t going places.

Meanwhile, I was terrified that I wasn’t smart enough. Or, that I was boring. Or, that I wasn’t going places. My judgment was firmly rooted in my own personal insecurity. I wish I could say I grew out of it, that “judgey” Alia doesn’t live here anymore.

What I can say is that now I can control it. If and when I feel that oh-so-familiar pang of insecurity, I name it. I make sure I dig into the root of it. I refuse to let it fester. I won’t let my insecurities become a leverage point for judgment of other women’s lives and actions—at least I try.

2. **YOUR ROMANTIC PARTNER CAN’T BE EVERYTHING TO YOU**

My close friend Neena told me this a long time ago: “I’d go crazy if I expected my partner to fulfill all of my needs. And I’d drive my partner crazy too.” As a serial monogamist, I’ve had a hard time learning this lesson. My dependence on my romantic partner has often sabotaged my ability to prioritize fostering lasting friendships, particularly with women. It’s not that I don’t want other friendships. It’s just that being with my partner is easier, more comfortable, less unpredictable. I know he likes me. I know I like him.

This feeling is understandable. Our study says that two thirds of Americans aren’t confident that their friends value their friendship. As we face this crisis of insecurity, it’s easier to retreat into the arms of our loved ones. But I refuse to retreat. I want to augment my romantic relationship with confident, lasting friendships with other women—for Tim’s sanity, and for mine.
3. ALL INTIMACY AND NO PLAY MAKES WOMEN’S FRIENDSHIPS NO FUN

I’ve heard people characterize men’s friendships as “side-by-side,” akin to two guys talking on bar stools. Conversely people characterize women’s friendships as “face-to-face,” with all the intimacy that implies.

At the risk of invoking *Men Are From Mars. Women Are From Venus*, my friendships with women tend to be like *Beaches* and my friendships with men are like *Entourage*. I tend to gravitate towards guys because I like the “side-by-side” nature of our friendships. It’s easier. I can talk casually about music and movies. I can make dumb jokes and look shlubby.

But like everything in life, there are two sides to this coin. Side-by-side friendships are good, but they can’t be everything. We’ve got to have both intimacy and dumb jokes. And women are uniquely positioned for this challenge. So, ladies, let’s bro out sometimes. Let’s go see a band together. Let’s play darts. Let’s ogle dudes in bars. Let’s forget our feelings and just be. All intimacy and no play makes women friendships no fun.

4. GO OUT AND FIND AWESOME WOMEN FRIENDS

I’m getting really good at this one.

In the past, I would let my friendships just happen to me. And I’d make do with whoever came into my orbit through work, school and friends of friends. Not any more. I’m purposefully seeking out awesome women to hang out with, to learn from and to get closer to. If I meet someone professionally who I want to get to know, I ask her out for coffee. If I see someone at the gym that strikes me as cool, I talk to her. If a friend knows someone I want to get to know, I ask for an introduction.

The world is full of amazingly cool women. Timidity isn’t the way to meet them.

5. TAKE A CHILL PILL

Women’s friendships are intense to say the least. In the *State of Friendship* study, women and men say they are looking for the same qualities in friends, though women express much more intensity about those qualities by more than 15 percentage points. For me, the intensity level of my female friendships often makes me feel that they are either fantastic or off-course—with very little wiggle room in between.

Decreasing the pressure I put on my friendships to conform to perfection has been liberating. I’ve realized that I don’t have to be perfect to have strong friendships. I can screw up. I can forget to call. And I can still care about my friends. I just have to tell them that I care.
How a Foxhole Friendship Won Women the Vote

Knowing that female friendships can be one of life’s great joys, I’d like to give a nod to an important historical female foxhole friendship and encourage each one of you reading this story to forge the kinds of friendships that will give you the courage to create the life—and the world—you want (jail optional, of course).

Their was a foxhole friendship from the start. Lucy Burns met Alice Paul in a police station after they were both arrested for demonstrating for women’s rights in London in 1910. Lucy and Alice were opposites in both temperament and appearance. Lucy, a charmer, was the foil to Alice’s uncompromising, often militant spirit. Their passion for women’s equality and their fearlessness of opposition made them quick, deep friends—foxhole friends. And the women’s movement would never be the same.

Lucy and Alice returned to the United States and joined the National American Women Suffrage Association, a moderate organization co-founded by Susan B. Anthony who had died shortly beforehand. With support from one another, Alice and Lucy took a controversial stance and demanded a constitutional amendment to secure the right to vote for women—a position the leaders at NAWSA thought pre-mature at the time.

After years of tension, the two broke ranks with NAWSA and formed the National Women’s Party, a more radical wing of the women’s suffrage movement. The NWP utilized picketing and public demonstrations to attract publicity and keep popular attention focused on the right of women to vote in the United States.

TO JAIL AND BACK AGAIN

In January 1917, the NWP staged one of the first political protests to picket the White House and urge President Woodrow Wilson and other Democrats to
actively support the Suffrage Amendment. Alice, Lucy and other picketers, known as “Silent Sentinels” were arrested on charges of “obstructing traffic,” convicted and incarcerated.³

While in prison, to demonstrate their commitment to the cause and each other, Lucy joined Alice in a hunger strike, which led to her being force-fed through a feeding tube.² Throughout her crusade Lucy was arrested and imprisoned six times. At one point she confessed to her foxhole friend Alice, “I am so nervous I cannot eat or sleep.” ¹ Thankfully, they had one another to lean on during these trying and often terrifying ordeals.

VICTORY

The hunger strikes, combined with continuing demonstrations and press coverage kept pressure on the Wilson administration. In January 1918, Wilson strongly urged Congress to pass the legislation and in 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution secured the vote for women.²

The fight for women’s suffrage took 72 years—spanning two centuries, 18 presidencies, three wars and many foxhole friendships—Lucy and Alice’s among them. While their friendship didn’t secure the right to vote for women, it did help nurture and energize two leaders at the forefront of a movement. For that, I am truly grateful.

When I was six my mom, a modern day Renaissance woman with wonderfully eclectic passions, entered her “baking period.” Like all periods before and since—from pottery making to HIV intervention in Uganda—she didn’t enter casually. She took up with her friend Rebecca (not her real name) to publish a cookbook titled *Mad About Muffins*.

They spent dozens of flour-covered weekends together in our kitchen, gooping and re-gooping recipes for the perfect banana-nut and blueberry-bran. Ovens glowing, they took meticulous notes on the proper proportion of pecans. I played underfoot with Rebecca’s son and remember the smells and chatter and waiting for a spoon to lick or crust to fall from the counter.

Then one day their muffin venture—and their friendship—came to a rack-crashing end. Rebecca called to inform my mom that she was going to publish their cookbook, alone. My mom wouldn’t get an acknowledgement, she said, never mind co-authorship as originally planned. “It was a total shock,” my mom remembers. “Maybe she didn’t need me anymore? Maybe she always considered it her project? I don’t know. But I know we weren’t the friends I thought we were. I was just so hurt and embarrassed. I couldn’t bring myself to speak with her again.”
If you're really looking to ruin a great friendship, betrayal like Rebecca’s is probably your best strategy—it’s certainly the most frightening, hurtful and dramatic. It triggers one of our deepest human fears—that we can’t trust the world as we see it. That’s why, from Shakespeare to Tarantino, betrayal plays so prominently in our cultural psyche.

Yet, there are certainly other ways to sabotage friendships—particularly behaviors we don’t intend, which are no less likely to erode trust or trigger friends to flee for safer distance. Here are three such unintended friend faux pas (friend-pas!?!?) with particular consequence. From our experience they are easy enough to avoid once you’re aware. Read on and hopefully it will help us all enjoy more confident friendships.

THREE SIGNS YOU MIGHT BE ACCIDENTALLY RUINING A GREAT FRIENDSHIP

1. You Don’t Initiate Interaction

Friendship isn’t a passive pursuit best left to circumstance or fate. Sure we’ve all had—or heard stories about—friends we connect with only once or twice a year and can pick up with right where we left off. But the research shows these gems are rare and generally forged from previous meaningful time and experience together. Particularly during friendship formation, studies show that interaction is key.

For example: research by pioneering Stanford Psychologist Robert Zajonc uncovered what’s been called the “mere exposure effect,” by which we tend to prefer things we stay familiar with.¹ Work by Duke University psychologist Steven Asher suggests we more easily create close bond with people who initiate activities.² And one of the key factors in our decision-making about friendship appears to be our perception of someone’s “availability.”³

Basically, if you don’t often connect with your friend, or only when they make the effort, or only if it fits your calendar, it makes sense that they’d lose confidence in your relationship. Do you have a friend who might be feeling this way?

2. You Don’t Know About Your Friend’s Emotional State, Deepest Passions or Current Dreams

This might relate to the above, as it’s difficult to be in tune with your close friends without regular contact. But it can also stem from a failure to ask or
listen. What differentiates our close friends from everyone else is what they know about us—and what we know about them. And, the fact that they stick around despite it all.

Social scientists refer to the process of getting to know someone more deeply as the “dance of disclosure.” Slowly, over time, we reveal ourselves as trust builds with friends. The trick is that people are constantly changing and growing and it’s a friend’s job to keep up.

3. You Haven’t Told Your Friend You Care

Friends are far more likely to forgive, understand and get past the particulars above if they’re generally confident where they stand. They are far less likely to second-guess your friendship after a few weeks of silence or a rain-checked date if they’re otherwise assured. The simplest solution is to tell your friends outright how much they mean to you.

It’s not always easy or comfortable, particularly for men. But it’s a true game changer to sit down across a table and let someone know, however you’re comfortable saying it, that they’re in your Lifeboat.

Whether it’s not noticing your friends’ needs or just waiting too long between phone calls, troubleshooting friendships is an important part of keeping your Lifeboat afloat. In this chapter we’ll hear from a new parent about how she’s working to preserving friendships and we’ll share some of our favorite practical tips for staying focused on friends. Let’s go!

Seasoned entrepreneur, veteran web designer, published author, and business and leadership coach, Lauren Bacon, on preserving friendships at the most challenging moments in life. You can find more of Lauren’s insights on her website.

Last week, I met a friend for lunch. She’s not just any friend. She has been in my life for more than twenty years, since our first days in university. We were roommates; we’ve witnessed each other joyful, studious, drunk, deeply in love, angry, inspired, ugly-crying, you-name-it. But our hour-long lunch date was the first one-on-one time we’ve shared together in at least a year and a half. The truth is, I don’t know exactly when we stopped the habit of making time for each other, but I can guess: it was probably shortly before my son was born.

Our lunch was upbeat, chatty, but a little awkward. How could it not be? Looming below the rapid-fire exchange of stories was the submerged part of the iceberg—awareness that when I became a mother, it had a cooling effect on our relationship.

It may be too soon to tell, but I’m pretty sure we’ve had a successful rekindling. The alternative—letting the friendship go gently into that good night—isn’t something I’m willing to contemplate; twenty-year friendships are not easily replaced. I’ve lost friends this way before, thanks to changing life circumstances, and I’ve learned my lessons.
Unlike most of my romantic relationships, the friendships I’ve lost have fizzled out not with a bang, but a whimper. They faded slowly, ever so slowly, and with little to mark the endings but a vague absence and a suitcase of memories.

In nearly every case, changing circumstances were a contributing factor. Friendship demands a modicum of common ground that can erode over time as our lives evolve. I lost a slew of friends in the months and years after leaving university; a few more when they became parents and moved to the burbs; still more when shared activities, friends, locations—even interests or opinions—diverged. Sound familiar? I’d file the vast majority of these under “drifted apart”: the no-harm, no-foul kind of distancing that tends to happen when people’s paths meander off in different directions. But there have been a couple I really wish I’d held onto—and it’s only in retrospect that I see how easy it was to rely on common ground that was liable to shift over time.

There’s inertia when you can count on seeing a friend at a weekly class, around the office, or in the neighborhood. It takes considerably more effort once one of you graduates, gets a new job, or moves across the country.

So, what are the steps to maintaining a friendship when the conditions under which it formed change? I’ve learned through trial and error (and I’ll be honest here, there have been a lot of errors) some very actionable ways to forestall unwanted drift. They take some vulnerability and courage, but I’m seeing them work.

THREE WAYS TO PRESERVE GREAT FRIENDSHIPS

How do you protect friendships from the slings and arrows of new parenthood, cross-country relocations, boyfriend disapproval, and the lot? Here’s my strategy:

1. Acknowledge Circumstances Have Changed

When I became a mom, my schedule changed drastically—and at the risk of feeling socially awkward—I’ve had several direct and rather pedantic conversations with my close friends to sort through the logistics of how we can continue to spend time together. (A combination of mid-week lunch dates, weekend play dates and post-kiddo-bedtime visits is doing the trick so far). It may not be as spontaneous as we’d like, but it’s helping keep our connections solid during a life change that tends to put many friendships through the wringer.
It doesn't hurt, either, to state the obvious: “I know I'm less available now than I used to be—but I want you to know our friendship is a priority for me. Let’s figure out how to make this work.”

2. Find New Common Ground

If nothing has changed except your mailing address, this may not be necessary. But things get trickier when your lives seem to be pulling in different directions—family for one, and career for the other, or when your new obsession with the paleo diet craze runs up against your and your friend’s once-shared love for home-baked cookies.

At times like these, your best bet is to hone in on the common ground you still share: an appreciation for indie comedy, an affinity for weekend hikes, or just the desire to see each other fulfilled and happy.

3. Reach Out

Let your friend know their friendship matters to you. Take the initiative to plan a time to connect. If you’ve been on friendship autopilot for a while, this may require a bit of a nudge; remind yourself what’s at stake and pick up the phone.

If we want to avoid friendship drift, one of our critical tasks as Lifeboaters may be to figure out what our conditions are before they change. What are the circumstances underlying the health of your closest friendships? Are they predicated on shared activities, interests, friends, locations, or values? What would happen if one or more of those conditions shifted? Life being what it is, odds are good that they will. I’m okay with letting go of a friendship that’s run its course. But when it comes to a decades-old ugly-cry buddy who still lights me up, I’m not going down without a fight.
Are great friends born or made? I answer a resounding, “Both!”

Yes, a lucky few naturally know how to be great friends. But others, like me, could use a little primer. What exactly are the habits and skills of great friends? And how can they be incorporated into our busy everyday lives? Here are ten simple things we’ve learned from academics, philosophers and our own personal practice that can help us be better friends.

1. **Go deep, not wide.** It’s not the number of friends you have; it’s the quality of your relationships. Spread too thin? Pare it down.
2. **Show some skin.** Being vulnerable with your close friends increases trust, support and loyalty. Even superman has his kryptonite. What’s yours?
3. **Give 1 percent more.** American adults spend only 4 percent of their time with friends (down from 30 percent as teens). We’re all busy, but don’t friends deserve 1 percent more?
4. **Don’t Trust-Fail.** Every interaction is one that either builds or diminishes trust. Little things count, so keep dates, respond when a friend reaches out, and stay true to your word.
5. **Break the inertia.** We tend to gravitate towards people who are like us. Making purposeful decisions about who you seek out, why you seek them out and how you seek them out can make your friendships align more clearly with the person you want to be.
6. **Show up.** Getting together with friends in adulthood can seem as complicated as launching a space shuttle. Prioritizing a handful of friends makes it easier to show up for all of them.
7. **Initiate activities.** Some friends tend to invite. Others tend to accept. If you are in the latter category, think about flipping the equation by initiating more activities.
8. **The Internet is not the answer.** The Internet is awesome. But make sure it enhances your relationships rather than replaces them.
9. **Be remarkable.** Friendship should be fun. Plan a remarkable activity with each of your close friends annually.
10. **Tell them about it.** Don’t take it for granted that your friends know how much they mean to you. Tell them.

These practices are the cornerstone of the Lifeboat philosophy. Put them into practice and you’ll start living more fully with your friends.
HOW TO STAY FOCUSED ON FRIENDS

What happens when we let our natural urge to connect get the best of us?

When operating on instinct alone we can commit ourselves to so many new people and things we begin missing out on essentials. Did I accept that LinkedIn connection from Jonah? Shouldn't I follow up? And there's that email from Carl stewing at the bottom of my inbox, isn't there? And what about McRae and Beth, it's been forever... Ugh.

Maybe I'll just watch Game of Thrones tonight instead.

Feel familiar? How in a networked world that pulls us towards thousands of potential connections can we keep ourselves on track with who matters to us most? I ask this question from a place of great humility.

My natural state is chaos. Growing up, winter gloves were a bulk purchase at my house. I could lose a dozen pairs a season, easy. I'd leave them on busses and playgrounds and anywhere else that offered distraction. I came home cold-handed so often my mom actually gave up on the strings and clips and bribes and started buying cheap mittens by the bushel. I share this to illustrate that my natural state is chaos. And I've had to learn, over time, to rely on various systems (some people call them life hacks or commitment mechanisms) to compensate.

For example, I use something called GTD for organizing my to dos. I follow Rockefeller Habits for managing business priorities. I use Run Less Run Faster to keep track of training. And I have developed many of my own systems too, like the one for making sure my closet doesn't explode called, "one in, one out." Sound a bit much? Indeed, I've been called a robot before, but only by folks who don't know what mayhem lies beneath. My systems are just how I cope.
What about systems for friends? For me, actually choosing my Lifeboat was the essential first step in making the social chaos manageable. But what other systems could I think up to stay on track with my closest friends? I’ll share three I’ve developed that I find helpful. Hopefully you find them useful too.

Friendhack #1: Tim Time

One of my biggest struggles with friendship is keeping friends close from afar. With friends not in my immediate orbit—work, city, etc...—I’ve had a hard time maintaining connection. It’s a pattern that began in high school and has plagued me since. Throughout each life transition, I leave behind close friends I care about and simply dive into new circles.

The first step to fixing a problem is recognizing it. So when I moved cities again a few years ago to Brooklyn I made a conscious effort to break the pattern and maintain close ties with my eight Lifeboaters—scattered in Vancouver, Washington DC, San Francisco and India. The system that helps has come to be known as Tim Time. It’s very simple: A regularly scheduled call—30 minutes every month—with each Lifeboater. Having a pre-set date has eliminated procrastination, simplified scheduling and ended any uncertainty with the friends I care about and simply dive into new circles.

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“Hey [name]—We both have nutty schedules, right? What do you think about carving out a regular 30-minute call every month to make sure we keep connected? I’m always wishing I reached out more and this would just make it happen for us.”

Friendhack #2: The Annual Remarkable

This next one Alia and I created together and use to help keep things fun and exciting. Grab your list of Lifeboaters and simply choose one special thing to do with (or for) each one in the year ahead. Now, “remarkable” can be as
simple as planning a trip to visit. Or, as complicated as starting a monthly book club about a shared interest.

Once you get the ideas down, plug them into your calendar to make them happen over the next 12 months.

**Friendhack #3: Lifeboat Contact Group**

This one is maybe the easiest, most useful system of all. Create a group within your address book reserved for your Lifeboaters with all their contact information. Start by sending an email to each of your Lifeboaters (ideally 8-10 people max) getting all their contact info, including birthday, mailing address and phone. As responses come in, put them in whatever address book system you use. And then make a group called Lifeboaters.

The Lifeboat contact group is silly simple. But once I set it up, I connected more frequently and spontaneously with my friends.

You might call me a robot, but these three little systems have altered life-long patterns and have changed the way I interact with my close friends. No system is going to make friendship effortless. But little things like these ideas can make the journey easier—and it’s way less likely your friends will end up like my grade school mittens.
You’ve come so far! You’ve identified a yearning for more meaningful friendships in your life. You’ve created your Lifeboat. You’ve put some of the tools and practices in this book to work in your quest to up your friendship ante. So, are you ready to push your Lifeboat out to sea and navigate the friendship waters?

Remember the kidney test from chapter five? In the Lifeboat survey we asked how likely participants would be to engage in several “high bar” friendship activities ranging from loaning money to donating a kidney, to forgiving a lie. Now, I’m about to ask a personal question. When was the last time you went out of your way to do something extraordinary for a close friend?

- Did you loan a friend some cash?
- Did you fly across the country to be with a friend when she was sick?
- Did you stand by an unfaithful friend?

Tim and I have explored the ins and outs of friendship, we’ve found ourselves peering off the ledge of a steep cliff. On one side are the many stories of extraordinary acts of friendship we’ve heard from people across the country. On the other are stories and research that show that people aren’t confident that their friends value their friendship—and simply aren’t willing to go out of
their way for even their close friends. To truly foster great friendships, we need to close the gap and go further to help friends in need.

Extraordinary Acts of Friendship

SUBMITTED BY LIFEBOAT READERS:

“A friend in California flew to the east coast one weekend to attend a memorial for my father, whom she had never met.”
—Nina

“I became friends with my friend Audra in school. We remained close friends for 25 years despite her living in Toronto, and my living in New York. When she died of leukemia leaving twin daughters, she left them to me to raise. They are now 23, as talented in art and music as she was.”
—Aldona

“A friend of mine bought me my computer when I was broke so I wouldn’t put it on my credit card and pay interest. She let me pay her back in installments over a couple of years.”
—Carolina

Extraordinary acts of friendship are a cornerstone of strong friendships. They are the sails that set your Lifeboat on its journey. Here are simple ways to make them the rule rather than the exception.

**We’ve got to show up for our close friends now.** Roy H. Williams writes, “When a person dies, that person’s friends will rearrange their schedules, take time off work, buy airplane tickets and expensive flowers and say nice things about their friend that their friend will never hear. And the memories those people will carry away from that day will be of their friend lying dead in a box. They will tell you they did these things to honor their friend, but I fear they waited too long. When you have a friend who is worth airplane tickets, buy those tickets while your friend still lives and take them on an adventure. Give your friend roses while your friend walks by your side and tell your friend what you like best about them. And if you awaken one day to find that your friend is gone, you will have the memory of the day you spent laughing together, surrounded by the fragrance of roses.” Nicely said, Roy.

**We must know what’s happening in our friends’ lives.** Friends often won’t ask for favors or directly call upon us for help. If we don’t know what’s going on in our friends’ lives, we simply can’t show up for them when they need us.
We need to tell our friends we value them. It’s the best way to gain trust and confidence and eliminate friendship insecurities.

We must model extraordinary acts of friendship. Just do it already. What extraordinary act of friendship can you do for a friend today? Schedule a visit to a friend who’s had a tough year? Send a new dad a voucher for a babysitter? Or better yet, show up to babysit? Tell a friend that you’ll have their back no matter what they do?

Once you start, you won’t be able to stop—because it feels that good.
Friendships can't be all meat and potatoes. Sometimes you want a chocolate sundae with sprinkles, whipped cream and a super sweet maraschino cherry on top. So, in this chapter we’re sharing our very favorite ways to have more fun with friends. Think about doing some remarkable activity each year with your Lifeboat friends (in groups or one-on-one): go camping; take a yoga workshop together; plan a big party or walk across the whole of your city in a day.

After all, friendships should be fun.

**24 REMARKABLE THINGS TO DO WITH (AND FOR) YOUR FRIENDS**

Shake off the predictable and do something remarkable for each of your Lifeboat friends. Need some inspiration? Here are 24 ideas (plus the time investment and cost to pull them off).

1. Send a singing phone telegram. Our Lifeboat favorites are from TajTunes.com. (No kick backs or affiliations, we just love sending songs from these
guys) → 10 minutes / $7 per telegram
2. Clip out an article about something that person loves and send it via snail mail. → 15 minutes / Cost of a stamp and envelope
3. Play hooky together. Take a day (or even a half day) off work and spend it with your friend at a museum, the park or cinema. → Day investment / Admission costs
4. Email your friend a weekly Friday Friend Song (get free videos from YouTube). → 10 minute weekly / Free
5. Send a magazine of the month. Each month, send your friend a magazine that would spark her imagination. → 30 minutes monthly / $5-10 monthly
6. Start an “interesting fact” text message series. Each day for a week, send your friend interesting facts about something he's passionate about—sharks, baseball, organic farming. Hint: Wikipedia is your friend. → 10 minutes daily / Text message rates
7. Do something you both have never done before. Bikram yoga? Rock climbing? Watercolor painting? → One hour – half day investment / Cost of activity
8. Revisit your childhood. Make a date to play putt putt or laser tag, go swimming or roller-skating. → One hour – day investment / Cost of activity
9. Get outdoors. Plan a camping weekend. → Full weekend investment / Cost of supplies and camping fees
10. Send a care package – for the sick, the weary or the newly moved. Box up some helpful supplies and your friend is sure to feel the love. → One hour / Cost of supplies
11. Get walking. Do a walking tour of a neighborhood or historic district in your city or town. → Two hours / Free
12. Schedule a monthly chat. Plan a 30-minute monthly chat with your friend and schedule it in both of your calendars. → 30 minutes monthly / Free
13. Plan an annual trip together. This one takes time, effort and cash, but starting a travel tradition is a great way to bond with your friends. → One week plus planning time / Cost of travel, accommodations and supplies
14. Play some pranks. Get a funny friend to crank call your buddy or fill her office with 150 plastic turtles (Thanks, Aaron Welch for the inspiration). → One hour / Free to cheap
15. Do some good. Think about a cause near and dear to your friend’s heart and volunteer together. Work at your local food bank. Plant a community garden, Walk dogs at the local shelter. Get more ideas and local opportunities here. → Half day to full day / Free
16. Find a special recipe they'd like and mail the ingredients to their house. This one requires that your friend be in the delivery vicinity of online grocers like Pea Pod and Urban Grocery. → One hour / Cost of ingredients
17. Plan a “One Day Itinerary” in your city based on your friend’s interests and passions. Architecture tours. Brewery visits. Vintage furniture... → One day and planning time / Cost of activities
18. Make a music mix tape. This is a tried and true staple of friendship. Use Spotify, upload MP3s to Dropbox, or go the old fashioned route by burning a CD or actually creating a mixed tape (if anyone can make or play those anymore). → One - two hours / Cheap

19. Host a gourmet dinner potluck for all your local Lifeboat friends. Assign each person a new dish they’ve never made before. → One night plus planning time / Cost of ingredients

20. Commission a piece of art for your Lifeboat friends. My friend Kevin had an abstract painting made (and divided into 12 pieces) for each of his nearest and dearest. He sent each of us a numbered section and a photo of the full work so we could see where our piece fit in. This is high on the wow, time and cost factor. → Planning time / Cost will vary

21. Start a “friend-to-friend” book or movie club. Pick a book/movie each month that you read or watch and then discuss it together. → Time investment varies / Cost varies

22. Make an introduction. Introduce a friend to an interesting connection you already have. Maybe someone in a career they are considering? Maybe someone who just moved to their town? Maybe someone who shares a passion they have? → 15 minutes-hour / Free

23. Get sporty. Whether it’s basketball or bocce, a friendly game is always a friendship highlight. → Time varies / Free or cost of supplies

24. Tell your friend that they are important to you (e.g. that they are in your Lifeboat). We tend to take it for granted that people know how much they mean to us. Send your friend a postcard. Tell her on the phone. Talk to him over beers. It might feel awkward sharing your feelings at first, but it will pay off in deeper friendships. → 15 minutes / Cost of postage or free

GUILT-FREE FRIENDSHIP RESOLUTIONS

We recently celebrated New Year’s. For some, the New Year brings inspired thoughts of how the coming 12 months will be better than the last. Not for me. Resolutions have always pulsed with a guilt-ridden, all-or-nothing approach to “self improvement” that tends to get in the way of “self improvement.”

• The change is too unattainable.
• The timing is too formulaic.
• The goal is too unreasonable.

According to psychologist Timothy Pychyl, resolutions fail because of three primary reasons:

1. People aren’t really ready to change habits, particularly bad habits.
2. People set unrealistic goals and expectations for their resolutions.
3. People don’t have accountability to stick with their resolutions.
Friendships shouldn’t fall into this oppressive resolution rut; making great friendships in the year ahead can be simple and achievable. By choosing to do just one of these Lifeboat activities, you’ll be well on your way to a year of stronger friendships.

- **CHOOSE MY LIFEBOAT.** I will take 20 minutes to identify up to eight people who I want to have deep friendships with this year. Go back to chapter four for some top tips on choosing your Lifeboat.

- **CREATE A LIFEBOAT CONTACT GROUP.** I will send an email to each of my Lifeboaters asking for all of their up-to-date contact info including: birthday, our friend anniversary date, mailing address, phone number and favorites (food, color, author, musician, etc.) As responses come in, I’ll put them into whatever address book system I use. Then I’ll make a group called “Lifeboaters” for easy access.

- **DO ONE REMARKABLE THING.** I will shake off the predictable happy hour and do something remarkable for one Lifeboater.

- **SET UP A MONTHLY CHECK-IN.** I will set up a 30-minute phone call or a lunch date with each of my Lifeboaters.

- **DO SOMETHING FOR A FRIEND WHO NEEDS ME.** I won’t wait for a Lifeboater to ask me for help. I’ll just spring into action for a friend who is experiencing one of life’s roller coaster moments (sickness, new parent, relationship issues, etc.).

- **RECONNECT WITH AN OLD FRIEND.** I’m going to stop wondering about an old friend and reconnect with him or her.

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**When’s Your Friend-Iversary?**

> I like the idea of having anniversary celebrations with your friends. There are friends who have been friends for 20 years and have never stopped to acknowledge that. I’d love to introduce an idea where people celebrate friend anniversaries so people start thinking in terms of, “this is a long-term relationship that I should really value.”

—Carlin Flora, Friendship Expert
SEND A CHEEKY ECARD TO A FRIEND

If friendship were a category on Jeopardy, you’d wow Alex Trebek by knowing these fun facts. Send one of these cheeky e-cards to a friend from the Lifeboat website.
Self-proclaimed introvert, Darren Barefoot, breaks out the Sugar Babies and gives two thumbs up to these five flicks that can teach us all a little something about the meaning of friendship. Lifeboat movie night anyone?

One of my life’s great joys is going to movies by myself. One of the reasons I remain self-employed is so I can sneak away from the office on a Monday afternoon to sit in the darkness surrounded by rows and rows of empty chairs. When I do go to movies with others, I’m a sworn-to-silence monk. I really, really don’t want anybody to talk. How compulsive am I on this issue? I once made a diagram illustrating my ideal seat.

And yet I love a good post-movie debate with friends. As such, I thought I’d share five famous friendships in film.

**Andy and Red in The Shawshank Redemption**

“I hope I can make it across the border. I hope to see my friend and shake his hand. I hope the Pacific is as blue as it has been in my dreams. I hope.”

Tim Robbins’ Andy forms a fast, unlikely friendship with Morgan Freeman’s Red. Red is the prison contraband smuggler and hooks Andy up with the rock hammer and pin-up posters, which, over the next 20 years, he uses to escape from prison. Red also helps Andy navigate the dangers of Shawshank State Penitentiary, and Andy returns the favour by reuniting the old friends in Mexico after Red’s release.

You can’t go wrong with lifelong friendships behind bars. Whenever I see a survey of “films that will make grown men cry”, *The Shawshank Redemption* is at the top of the list.
Thelma and Louise in, uh, Thelma and Louise

“Louise, no matter what happens, I’m glad I came with you.”

What’s that old chestnut? A friend will help you move, but a good friend will help you move a body. That’s not quite what happens to Thelma (Geena Davis) and Louise (Susan Sarandon), but they do help each other flee after Louise murders Thelma’s attacker. They set off on a madcap road trip across the country, pursued by the FBI and a spectacularly hunky Brad Pitt. The movie ends in variation on that classic buddy movie, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.

Frodo and Sam in The Lord of the Rings

“I’m on your side, Mr Frodo.”

Frodo (Elijah Wood) gets the One Ring hung around his neck like a really angry albatross, and is forced to walk all the way to Mordor to drop it in the improbably named Cracks of Doom. Sam (Sean Astin) insists on accompanying his friend across, under and above Middle Earth. The two companions—all that’s left of the first movie’s fellowship—infamously spend most of the third movie trudging across a blasted landscape that would test any friendship’s loyalty. In the end, Sam actually ends up physically carrying a sickly Frodo up the slopes of Mount Doom to finish the job. Interesting side note that gets barely mentioned in the movies: Sam is actually Frodo’s gardener.

Will and Chuckie in Good Will Hunting

“Look—you’re my best friend, so don’t take this the wrong way. In twenty years, if you’re still livin’ here, comin’ over to my house to watch the Patriots
games, still workin’ construction, I’ll fuckin’ kill you. That’s not a threat; now, that’s a fact. I’ll fuckin’ kill you.”

In many ways, this film has been superseded by the actual friendship of its stars, Matt Damon and Ben Affleck. And, at its heart, it’s actually about two friendships—the old one between Will and Chuckie, and the new one formed between Will and his therapist, played with rare restraint by Robin Williams. The film concludes with Chuckie forcing Will out of his old patterns and places, and into the unknown.

**Elliot and E.T. in E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial**

“You could be happy here, I could take care of you. I wouldn’t let anybody hurt you. We could grow up together, E.T.”

For Gen Xers, is there a movie that’s more emblematic of friendship than E.T.? It’s the apex of heartwarming friendship flicks. How can you beat a pair of literally-star-crossed misfits coming together to help each other—one physically and the other metaphorically—find their way home? Sure, the cheese factor is set to Roquefort and the alien’s rubber suit looks shoddy to our 2015 eyes. Still, nobody tells a friendship story like Steven Spielberg.

The film critic Pauline Kael wrote that “Good movies make you care, make you believe in possibilities again.” If you’re struggling a little in your path to better, more fulfilling friendships, then maybe you need a little movie medicine?

Do great friendships take work and intention? Yes. But the critical ingredient is fun! So keep coming back to this chapter to try out some of these remarkable ways to add spontaneity and fun into your friends’ lives, and into your own!
A TOAST TO LIFEBOATERS!

In pursuit of great friendships we’ve dug deep into social sciences; we surveyed people across the country; we interviewed experts and we started practicing being better friends. Most importantly, we made the hard choice of focusing more intensively on a smaller group of people. That doesn’t mean we ignore everyone else or neglect fruitful networks. But we’re investing ourselves more openly, deeply and purposefully with a handful of friends, our Lifeboaters. And guess what? We’re living more fully with friends. We wish the very same for you.
A TOAST

HERE'S TO
GREAT FRIENDS

The SIDEKICKS

THE BEST BUDS
LAS AMIGAS MEJORES

THE COMRADES
IN THE FOXHOLES

THE ONES WHO SEE US
DIFFERENTLY

THEY EMBRACE US

warts AND ALL

and they have no mind to

JUDGE

YOU CAN

remember THEM
fight WITH THEM
celebrate THEM
neglect THEM

about the only thing you CAN'T DO IS

LIVE LIFE WITHOUT THEM

because they change who we are

they push us to be

OUR BEST SELVES

and while some may see them as

JUST GREAT FRIENDS

we also see

HEROES