



FAST FRIENDS

It's so magical to just click with someone—why can't we connect that way every day? Actually, we can, say two *New York Times* best-selling authors who let us in on the secret.

BY TERRI TRESPICIO

AS A SINGLE WOMAN, I often find myself sitting opposite a perfect stranger, trying to make magic happen over a martini. And while many of my fellow singles bemoan the horrors of dating, I look at it as a chance to explore what makes another human being tick. I just do what works at parties—kick the conversational ball in the air and invite my partner to kick it back. It helps that I'm not shy, and that I'm happy to share a self-deprecating detail if it'll get a laugh. But it still surprises me when I've spent a lovely but unremarkable evening

with someone and he sends a message the next day about how we instantaneously “clicked.”

When I picked up the new book *Click: The Magic of Instant Connections*, I knew that the co-authors, psychologist Rom Brafman, Ph.D., and his brother, Ori, an entrepreneur, had my number. The best-selling authors of *Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior* claim to have uncovered the mystery behind how people connect instantly.

According to their theory, the recipe for clicking contains five ingredients: proximity, vulnerability, resonance, similarity, and a safe place. In other words, you're more likely to click with someone if you're in her immediate vicinity, disclose something personal, tune in to her emotions, have something in common, and share a frame of reference (via your church, your culture—anything that separates you two from the rest of the world).

As you might have guessed, some people are wired for instant connection. The Brafmans refer to these folks as “high self-monitors,” borrowing a term from personality researcher Mark Snyder, whose work in the 1970s explored how some people adjust their verbal and non-verbal communications based on the situation and who they're with.

High self-monitors have an uncanny ability to tune in to nuances in conversation and tone, to tap in to and complement (not just mirror) other people's emotions. “They create the conditions for clicking,” Ori says. “They make us feel comfortable and have a way of drawing us out.”

Because they tend to gravitate to the center of social networks, natural clickers are surrounded by more people, and so their relationships tend to flourish—as do their careers. One study of M.B.A. students found that high self-monitors switched jobs often, because they were given more opportunities and more frequent promotions. “They

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may not even be the smartest ones in the room—but they know how to make relationships work," Ori says.

If clicking is a social language, high self-monitors may be native speakers, but there's no reason we all can't become fluent—to connect with more people and find more opportunities in our lives.

TEST THE WATERS

High self-monitors are social chameleons; low self-monitors are the exact opposite. Take the colleague who barges into a meeting complaining about the broken printer, though everyone else is on pins and needles after a recent round of layoffs. The first thing a high self-monitor does is assess the situation: She observes the body language and tone of the people around her before she acts. Sage advice: Enter a room slowly.

MEET SOMEONE WHERE THEY ARE

The high self-monitor not only pays close attention to the other person, but complements that person's mood, which builds trust. Ori tried this himself and was surprised to find that it improved his marriage. As the chattier spouse, he might have normally just charged in and started talking whenever he and his wife, Hilary, were together. But then he began assessing where she was emotionally. If she was quiet, instead of asking her why she wasn't talking, he'd just be quiet, too. "The intimacy seemed to deepen between us from just that one simple thing," he says.

ASK QUESTIONS

According to Ori, "When we're meeting new people, we're worried about what

we're going to say, how we appear to them, and so on." But he's found that by focusing on making someone else comfortable, you shift the pressure off yourself. This may mean taking the lead in asking questions—almost as if you're the host of a talk show and that person is your guest.

FIND SOMETHING IN COMMON

We tend to think the bigger issues (religion, politics) matter most when it comes to real connection—yet lasting relationships have been founded on far less. One student survey done by clinical psychologist Donn Byrne, Ph.D., at the University at Albany in New York, discovered that students were just as likely to rate someone as attractive when they agreed on the small issues (music, hobbies), as well as on the big ones (family, values).

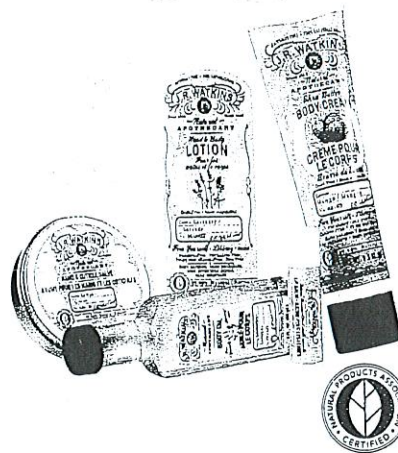
DARE TO DISCLOSE

When you chance a little intimacy, perhaps by sharing something that you're currently struggling with or a personal anecdote, you make yourself vulnerable and give the other person something to respond to. It should come as no surprise that Rutgers professor Jennifer Gibbs and her colleagues at Michigan State University and Georgetown found that Match.com members who made an active choice to share personal info were more likely to have a successful dating experience.

When you create the conditions for clicking, say the Brafmans, the goal isn't to imitate someone else but to be more fully you with the people who come into your life. "We can all learn to be more greatly attuned to each other's emotional states," Ori says. "It's human nature to connect, and there's nothing more authentic than that."

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Reader's Digest June 1999

How to Mend a Broken Friendship The payoff for you is well worth the effort

By Patricia Skalka

Growing up across the street from each other in Twin Falls, Idaho, Lisa Fry and Paula Turner never doubted their friendship would last forever. But after Fry married, moved to New York City and had a baby, her letters to Turner suddenly went unanswered. "Do you think I've somehow offended her?" Fry asked her husband.

Turner, meanwhile, had convinced herself she was no longer important to Fry. "She's got a family now," she told herself. "We're just too different to be close like before."

Finally, Fry summoned the courage to call her old friend. At first, the conversation was awkward, yet soon they both admitted that they missed each other. A month later, they got together and quickly fell into their old habit of laughing and sharing confidences.

"Thank goodness I finally took action," Fry says. "We both realized we were as important to each other as ever."

There are good reasons to cherish our friendships. Some years ago a public-opinion research firm, Roper Starch Worldwide, asked 2007 people to identify one or two things that said the most about themselves. Friends far outranked homes, jobs, clothes and cars.

"A well-established friendship carries a long history of experience and interaction that defines who we are and keeps us connected," says Donald Pannen, executive officer of the Western Psychological Association. "It is a heritage we should protect."

Ironically, says Brant R. Burleson, professor of communication at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind., "the better friends you are, the more likely you'll face conflicts." And the outcome can be precisely what you don't want—an end to the relationship.

The good news is that most troubled friendships can be mended. Here's what experts suggest:

1. Swallow your pride. It wasn't easy, but that's what Denise Moreland of Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii did when a friendship turned sour. For nearly four months, Moreland, 45, had watched over Nora Huizenga's two young daughters, who were living with their father on the base, while Huizenga, 40, completed training as a dental hygienist in Nevada. "I felt honored to be asked to step in," Moreland says.

When Huizenga returned Christmas, Moreland recalls, "I had so much to tell her, but she never called." One daughter had a birthday party, but Moreland wasn't invited. "I felt like I'd been used," she says.

At first, Moreland vowed to avoid Huizenga. Then she decided to swallow her pride and let her friend know how she felt. Huizenga admitted that she'd been so worried about being separated from her family that she'd been blind to what her friend had done to help her. Today she says, "I would never have figured out what happened if Denise hadn't called me on it."

When a friend hurts you, your instinct is to protect yourself. But that makes it harder to patch up problems, explains William Wilmot, author of *Relational Communication*. "Most of us are relieved when differences are brought out in the open."

2. Apologize when you're wrong—even if you've also been wronged. No one should allow himself to be emotionally abused by anyone. But over the course of a friendship, even the best people make mistakes. "A relationship can grind to a stand-still if the offender refuses to make the first move at reconciliation," Wilmot explains. "Under

these circumstances, it may be best if the wronged person takes the initiative and apologizes—for getting upset, for not understanding the friend's circumstances. When you apologize, give your friend the opportunity to admit that he'd screwed up."

That's what happened to a 29-year-old salesman from Deerfield, Ill., when a dispute over unpaid rent threatened his friendship with a college pal. Because the salesman and two roommates all signed the lease, each was responsible for the debt. After graduation, the salesman tried to cajole his friend into paying up. Finally, when the landlord threatened to sue for the arrears, the salesman called his friend, yelling, "This is no joke! You're ruining my credit."

Later he regretted his outburst. He knew his friend was not trying to hurt him—he was just being irresponsible. "Even though my friend should have apologized first of the aggravation he had caused me, I shouldn't have lost my temper. I didn't want this to destroy our friendship," he says. When the salesman called to apologize, the friend admitted he was wrong. He apologized and paid the debt.

Experts agree that one of the worst things you can do when you're upset is to start a fight. "We don't think clearly when we're arguing," says Michael Lang, a professional mediator in Pittsburgh. Instead, says Lang, ask: "What's going on? This doesn't make sense."

3. See things from your friend's point of view. Sociologist Rebecca Adams of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and Rosmary Blieszner, professor of gerontology and family studies at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, interviewed 53 adults who each had many friendships lasting decades. "We were curious how these people managed to sustain strong friendships for so long," says Blieszner.

Tolerance is key, the researchers learned. The subjects also didn't let problems get blown out of proportion. "It's surprising how often a dispute results from a simple misunderstanding," adds psychotherapist Anne Frenkel.

Jan Yager, author of *Friendshifts: The Power of Friendship and How It Shapes Our Lives*, recalls what happened after her father died and a close friend didn't attend the funeral. "I felt hurt and disappointed," she says.

Later Yager learned that her friend hadn't come to the service because she was still distraught over her own father's death. "My perspective changed entirely," says Yager. "Rather than feeling slighted, I empathized with her."

4. Accept that friendships change. In the spring of 1996, Cindy Lawson, 34, of Chicago, and a close friend decided to co-host a friend's bridal shower. The two women agreed to share the work and the cost. Then the friend, an attorney, took a new, more demanding job. Total responsibility for the shower fell to Lawson.

On the Saturday of the shower, Lawson did all the party decorating, then prepared the dinner for 35 guests. Her co-host did not arrive from her office until shortly before the event. Later her friend complained about the cost.

Lawson was furious. But deep down, she did not want to break off ties. The two women were in a book club together, had many common friends and enjoyed dinners with their husbands. Instead, Lawson decided to remain friends—but not close friends.

"Friendships change as our needs and lifestyles change," Wilmot observes. "It's healthy to have a host of friends and to sometimes shift the status of one or another."

Making friends can sometimes seem easy, says Yager. The hard part is keeping the connections strong during the natural ups and downs that affect all relationships. Her suggestion: consider friendship an honor and a gift, and worth the effort to treasure and nurture.

Friends: The Secret to a longer life

By Katherine Griffin

Elva Robinson will never forget the phone call she received on September morning. Her daughter, Dianne, a 22-year-old college student, had been killed in an automobile accident.

The weeks and months that followed were a blur of grief for Elva. Relatives, church members and neighbors in her tiny farming town of Blue Mound, Kan., reached out to her and her family. But Elva drew the greatest comfort from her old high school friend, Irma Hyson. In a tragic coincidence, Irma had lost her 21-year-old daughter, Nancy in an auto accident just a year before.

Now Irma and Elva would spend hours crying and talking about their daughters. Sometimes they would bring flowers to the cemetery together. Irma understood like no one else what Elva was feeling, and that gave Elva strength.

In the many years since then, the two women have continued to share in one another's losses, hardships—and joys. "I don't know what I'd do without her," Elva says of Irma. "I've told her, 'You have saved my life and my sanity.' And I know she feels the same way about me."

Vital Bond

These might sound like mere homespun sentiments, but in fact there's solid scientific evidence that friendship can extend life. "Friendships like the one between Elva and Irma play a far more important role in maintaining good health and having a long life than most people realize," says Shelley Taylor, a research psychologist at the University of California, Los Angeles. "Social ties are the cheapest medicine we've got."

More than a hundred studies attest to the health benefits of friendship. People with strong social networks are shown to:

- Boost their chances of surviving life-threatening illnesses.
- Have stronger, more resilient immune systems.
- Improve their mental health.
- Live longer than people without social support.

The first important clue linking friendship with good health turned up in 1979. Researchers tracking the health of nearly 5000 residents of Alameda County, California, found that people who had the most social connections were less than half as likely to die during the nine-year study period as those who had the fewest. Since then, more than a dozen studies in the United States, Scandinavia and Japan have confirmed the findings. In some of them, a lack of social support raised the risk of premature death even more than smoking cigarettes. "One of the worst things you can do to someone is isolate them," says Ronald Glaser, an immunologist at Ohio State University in Columbus.

More recently, scientists have zeroed in on how social connections affect recovery from specific health problems. In a Yale University study of 194 heart attack patients, those who reported emotional support were three times more likely to be alive six months after their attack than subjects who had no support.

Friendship seems to make a difference when it comes to more mundane ailments too. In a study at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, researchers rounded up 276 volunteers, dripped cold viruses into their noses, and then quarantined them for five days. Subjects who had a wide range of friends and acquaintances had one-fourth the chance of catching a cold as those whose social networks were minimal.

People with plentiful social support are also less likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and other types of mental illness. In a 2000 study that tracked more than 1200 elderly people for three years, Swedish researchers found that those who had satisfying social contacts were 40 percent less likely to develop dementia than those who had few—or unsatisfactory—relationships.

The Stress Factor

What might account for friendship's health-giving powers? Part of the answer may simply be that friends are likely to encourage you to take good care of yourself and help out when a health crisis looms. That's what happened to Ruth Irwin of Mansfield, Ohio, after she was diagnosed last year with breast cancer. "I was petrified," she says. The first person she called after getting the news was her friend Norma Tooman, who had battled uterine cancer the previous year. Norma offered to drive two hours with her for radiation therapy, five days a week for six weeks, and then helped Ruth find a closer treatment facility. "The fact that she'd gone before me calmed my fears and gave me hope," says Ruth, who's now back at work and doing well.

Ruth may have benefited from more than her friend's advice and practical assistance. Scientists have discovered that many of the intricate physiological processes that govern illness can be influenced by presence or absence of social connections. "Our bodies are sensitive to a whole range of social ties," says Teresa Seeman, an epidemiologist at the University of California, Los Angeles. Much of this has to do with how stress affects the immune, endocrine and cardiovascular systems—and how friendship, by easing stress can buffer the impact on the body.

Stress, of course, triggers the famous fight-or-flight response. Orchestrated by a rush of stress hormones, your heart races, blood pressure goes up, muscles tense and the nervous system goes on high alert. Chronic stress can take a physical toll, contributing to heart problems, for instance, by raising blood pressure, constricting arteries and increasing blood's tendency to clot.

Having friends mitigates the physiological consequences of stress. Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh, for instance, have found that when study subjects were asked to do stressful tasks, just having a buddy in the same room—even if the friend wasn't helping with the task—made the task-doer's heart rate and blood pressure less likely to climb.

Boosting Immunity

Ohio State's Glaser and his wife, psychologist Janice Kiecolt-Glaser, studied how social support can blunt the effects of stress. Tracking the health of 69 people caring for a spouse with Alzheimer's disease, they found that caregivers who had good social support when the study began showed measurably stronger immune responses one year later than those subjects who had no such support.

Researchers believe that having reliable friends means that when trouble strikes, fewer stress hormones course through the body. Blood pressure and heart rate are less likely to spike, which helps prevent damage to arteries. The immune system can be more vigilant in patrolling the body for bacteria and viruses, since it's not constantly reacting to emergency messages from stress hormones. Over a lifetime, these subtle differences may add up to big protection against the ravages of time and illness.

What if your best friend is your spouse? That's good news, because marriage offers protection too—especially for men. This may be because men tend to get their emotional needs met by the women in their lives, rather than by their male pals.

The stereotype that male friends watch sports together while women bare their souls says Taylor of UCLA, has some truth to it. "Men and women both form strong relationships, but the patterns are different," she says. "Men tend to do things with other men, whereas women tend to just be with other women." But health benefits are associated with both types of friendships.

Friend or Foe?

Some friendships can leave people feeling depleted rather than renewed. "Research suggest that if your social interactions are hostile, conflicted or less than supportive, they may not have beneficial consequences," says Seeman. A friendship based on one-way dependency or filled with unhealthy competition can raise stress rather than reduce it.

Most studies, however, have affirmed the positive effects of friendship, with some exploring whether you're better off having many companions or just one good one. Some studies find that having a wide range of social contacts—belonging to church and community groups as well as having a network of friends—offers the greatest protection. But others show that most crucial is having even just a few close friends—"the kind of people you can't imagine life without" says psychologist Laura Carstensen Stanford University. "Quality beats quantity all the time."

Elva and Irma would surely agree. Five years after Irma's daughter died, her husband, Paul, was killed in a tractor accident. Elva immediately went to Irma's side and helped with household tasks and anything else she could. "She practically lived here for a while," Irma says.

When Elva's husband, Truman, died in January 2001, Irma stayed close by her side. Elva's doctor suggested she get counseling or join a support group for the bereaved. But Elva told him she really didn't need any of that because she had Irma.

Both celebrating their 84th birthdays this year, the two best buddies still drive, travel and keep guns handy to scare the coyotes off their farms. "In any happy situation or any crisis, I call her or she calls me, first thing," Irma says of her friend of more than 60 years, "I know she will always be there for me."

Keeping Connected

Just as scientists are discovering more ways that friendship enhances our lives, overstuffed schedules make it hard to keep up with our pals. But many friendships need just a little nurturing to help them flourish. Here are some tips from sociologist Jan Yager, author of *Friendshifts* and *When Friendship Hurts*:

- Stop feeling guilty that you can't spend lots of time with old friends, like you did years ago. Acknowledge that your lives have changed, and do whatever you can now to maintain the relationship. Use e-mail, instant messaging and other electronic devices to stay in touch when you have small bits of time.
 - Meet for coffee or an early-morning walk before you start your workday.
 - Schedule a regular "Friends Time Out," in which you set aside one week-night a month, for example, to catch up with your buddies.
 - Invite a friend to share every day activities you normally do alone, like exercising, doing errands or going to your kid's soccer game.
 - Try to be there for key events in your friend's life—weddings, graduations, funerals. Your presence will make a difference.
- K.G.