



Mind: International Friendship Day - Making It Even Better

Body: Social Isolation

Spirit: Friendship

International Friendship Day - Making It Even Better



No one would dispute the power that friendship holds in our lives. We feel connected, loved, safe, appreciated and acknowledged. Our friends inspire us, challenge us and support us. We laugh together, cry together, and make lasting memories. Not only do our friendships make us feel good – they also help us to think better, live better, live stronger, all while we live longer!

But did we know it can even get better than that? When we cultivate a more DIVERSE constellation of friendships, the benefits grow in meaningful and unexpected ways.

Diversity is an interesting concept. It is not something we typically seek out. Differences may be easy to embrace on the surface but not so easy when beliefs, ideology, traditions, and practices rub against what is familiar, comfortable, or even convenient.

Just where on our personal continuum does ‘different’ transition from intriguing, to provocative, and ultimately to threatening?

It is suggested that we meet our point of resistance when we are pulled too far from our comfort zone. But isn’t it outside of our comfort zone where real growth and opportunity live? This prickly place of uncertainty holds the rich promise of something even more exquisite.

The Marcus Lemonis Team offers us a glimpse of the benefits of diversity that awaits us on the other side of our friendship comfort zone:

1. Diversity confronts and shatters invisible barriers. Close groups have their own history, shared private jokes, and experiences. To those on the outside, cohesive groups can appear to operate by their own unspoken ‘code’ that keeps the group united and potentially inaccessible. If you don’t know the code, you can’t gain entry to the group. Be aware of the potential for your group to appear exclusive to others, and make a conscious effort to invite and welcome new perspectives. Adding new friends, perspectives, and history expands the collective experience and starts to dissolve the perceived barriers.

2. We spend a lot of money to acquire additional experiences when we travel to new places around the world. We learn about different cultures, food, lifestyles and traditions. Imagine enjoying all those benefits without the cost of flights and hotels! A group of diverse friends can introduce these

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opportunities in simple, inexpensive and convenient ways.

3. Our friends teach us a lot. They provide a rich pool of ideas, strategies, and insights about our life challenges. Exclusively like-minded groups can become an 'echo chamber' reinforcing one shared viewpoint. I have heard it said that if we both think and behave the same way all the time, one of us is redundant! When we add diverse opinions and solutions to our group, we expand the collective knowledge, resources and options at our disposal.

International Friendship Day is celebrated annually on July 30.

This invites us to take the opportunity to reflect on how greater diversity in our friendship circles can enrich our lives. But is it as simple as making a decision?

Research conducted by Dr. Angela Bahns reveals that while individuals can embrace the intention of diversity in their relationships, this diversity is typically expressed in the areas of race, religion, political affiliation and sexual orientation. Interesting enough, this did not extend to also include diversity in thought and values. Perhaps that was pushing the boundaries of our comfort zones just a little too far!

Furthermore, her research indicates that just throwing people together and hoping something positive and magical happens is not an effective strategy. As with our discussion in other newsletters about the power of inter-generational groups and activities, these need to

be created with thoughtful planning and education to set the foundation for a successful experience for all.

It is all about making a start. Look around your local communities. What variety of experiences, race and lifestyles define your environments? Is this mosaic reflected in your friendship circles? What can we learn from each other, what can we share and enjoy together, and how can we grow together? There are multiple notes and tones in our world. With intention, education, curiosity and respect, we can create a beautiful life song.

Rhonda Latreille, MBA, CPCA
Founder & CEO
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Social Isolation

According to the National Academy of Sciences, social isolation negatively impacts our physical and mental health at every life stage. An article in the Guardian discusses the research of Kathleen Mullen Harris, documenting that social isolation increases in blood pressure, body mass index, waist size and inflammation. Indeed, those who report having no family ties and community connections have a 50% chance of dying earlier than those who do report positive levels of engagement.

Friendship

When the world is so complicated, the simple gift of friendship is within all of our hands.

Maria Shriver