

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I had a good friend at work and for years we had lunch together almost every week. But six months ago, I took a new job at another company and now we have virtually no contact. I feel let down and hurt. What happened?

-- Confused

Dear Confused,

I'm assuming that there was no falling out, conflict, or other reason that your communication and connection has fizzled out. If that is the case, it may be that you interpreted your friendship as being more than it was.

Having lunch together with a co-worker is a transactional friendship. That means that the relationship is determined by some external circumstance. You can think of these folks as "friends for a season or a reason." Most of us have many of these kinds of relationships.

Our lives may be enriched by our connections with the mother of the child that our kid plays soccer with, or the guys who meet at the beach to surf every Saturday. We may feel close to these people, but unless the relationship moves to a deeper level, we are likely to find them absent from our lives once our daughter no longer wants to play soccer, or our "friend" gives up surfing to take up golf. Once the season or reason is no longer viable, the relationship ends. This can be very disappointing, if we expected more.

Real friends – those people attached to our hearts, those who Aristotle was referring to when he said, "A friend is a single soul dwelling in two bodies" – are connected in a way that transcends the circumstances that originally brought them together. Richness, depth, and true intimacy (which I define as "knowing and being known") are hallmarks of friendships that will go the distance. These friendships are fundamentally different relationships from the more casual ones we have with people who we just happen to come in contact with during the course of our personal or professional lives.

One way of measuring a friendship – of knowing whether someone is a "friend for a reason or season" or is really attached to our hearts -- is to look at the "out-of-context" interactions that you have. True friends get together in a variety of circumstances, in good times and bad. Your relationship would be strengthened if you included that fellow soccer mom and her family in your Fourth of July cookout, or you invited your surfing buddies to your wedding.

Deepening friendships beyond the original reason for connecting is important for a number of reasons. There is an old Chinese saying that goes, "We will often forget those we have laughed with. We will never forget those we have cried with." Think about people who have been there for you when you really needed support. Life difficulties offer ample opportunities for our casual friends to transform from "Sally who works in the next cubicle," into "Sally who came to my mother's funeral and called to see how I was doing." Sally is no longer just a co-worker, but is now a real friend who has shared an important time in your life.

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If this old “friend” from work really means something to you, I suggest getting in touch with her and telling her just that. Let her know that you miss your time together and that you would like to continue to have her in your life even though the circumstances have changed. You may discover that she misses you as well. Then, invest time and energy in your relationship. Set up a lunch date or another time to get together. And, don’t fall prey to the common idea that “I don’t have enough time.” We’re all busy, of course, but we live happier and richer lives when we act on our priorities, and nurture the relationships that are important to us.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2006 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) www.fullpotentialliving.com