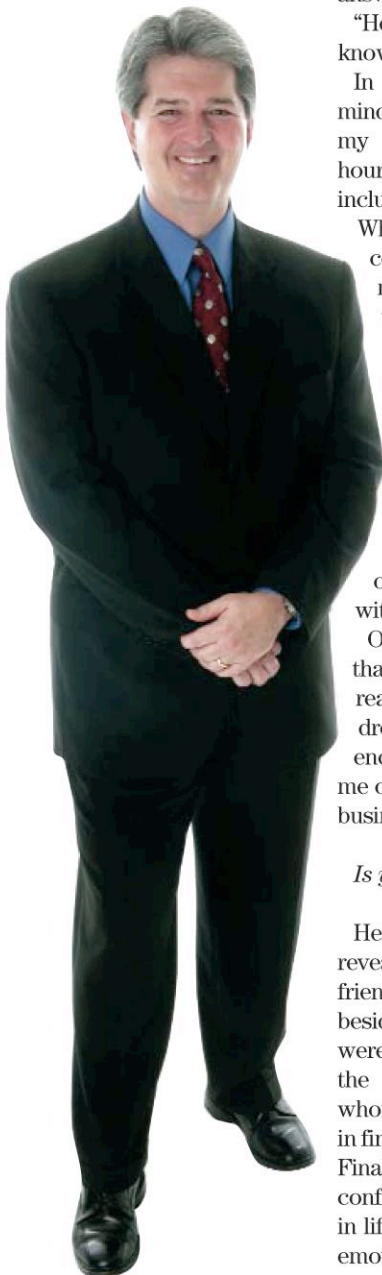


Enriched friendships

How to build three-star relationships



I was driving home late one night, my mind filled with a troubling challenge I was facing at work. A series of unexpected problems in a major project had rocked my team and caused my confidence to falter. With each new challenge, my fears had increased, and I could feel myself spiraling into a mindset that I knew would only make it worse.

As I waited for the traffic light to change, my cell phone rang. Despite my inward cringe that the call would only bring another new problem, I pressed the button to answer.

“Hey man, it’s Steve!” said a voice I had known for over 20 years.

In one miraculous moment, my state of mind changed as I reconnected with one of my closest friends. Throughout the next hour, we shared the latest events in our lives, including the challenges I was facing.

When I described the problems and my concerns about the team, Steve reminded me of similar challenges I had faced in the past and had successfully overcome. When I confessed my worries that I wasn’t leading the team well enough, he spoke of his confidence in me and reminded me that others believed in me, as well. We also laughed about all the things we had been through together and at ourselves for all the times we thought our challenges would overwhelm us, only to see them resolved with patience and hard work.

Our call came to an end as I arrived home that night, but thanks to my friend, I was ready to make a new beginning when I drove to work the next day. This experience and many others like it have taught me one of the most important lessons in the business of life — the power of friendship.

Is your life enriched with real friendship?

Here’s an exercise that can provide a revealing answer. Make a list of your closest friends on a sheet of paper. Now, place a star beside those whom you would call if you were sick and needed help in the middle of the night. Put another star beside those whom you would ask for money if you were in financial trouble and had no other options. Finally, place a star beside those you would confide in if you had made a major mistake in life — a mistake that might carry serious emotional consequences if it became known.

How many “three-star” friends do you have?

If you have even a few, you are blessed with one of the greatest gifts in life. Although there are many levels of friendship, these three questions are good indicators of the deepest level because they reveal the friends you can count on when you are most vulnerable. If you want to create this level of friendship, here are three things you must do.

Become the friend you want to have. If you want friendships at the deepest level of trust, then be absolutely trustworthy, never revealing a confidence shared with you by a friend. If you want friends who are there for you in times of difficulty, then make time in your schedule this week for a friend in need. Begin to model the characteristics you want most in a friend and you will soon find friendships that return them to you.

Invest in the friendships that matter. Friendship can deepen over time but only if you invest the emotional energy to be vulnerable, to listen and to share the things that really matter. Although it takes time to make this investment, even one friendship at this level of depth is more valuable than a hundred surface-level acquaintances.

Choose friends that expand your vision. Remember that your friends are a model of who you will become because, over time, their influence will shape your ideas and your character. There is real truth in the ancient teaching that says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one friend sharpens another.” If you choose friends that reflect your own values, such as integrity, fairness or compassion, they will challenge you to stay true to who you are and what you believe.

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