

This book is such a treasure! We spend a lot of time talking about how marriage takes work and parenting takes work, but we sort of expect friendships to just appear in our lives and sail on for the long haul. But that's not how my life and friendships have gone, and I'm so grateful for Laura's willingness to open an honest conversation about how to make friends, what kinds of friends we need, and how to be a good friend. I love Laura's writing, and her wisdom and wit sparkle on every page. When you finish this book, you'll want to reach out to every friend in your life, and you'll have the skills and perspective to make a few new ones, too.

**Shauna Niequist**, *New York Times* bestselling  
author of *I Guess I Haven't Learned That Yet*

She already taught us the importance of sharing our stuff and was brave enough to go first. Now, Laura Tremaine shows up for us again, this time bringing hard-won wisdom, honest confessions, and a thoughtful new vocabulary for how to talk about being friends (especially for those of us who secretly worry we're bad ones). Finally, a useful friendship book for grownups.

**Emily P. Freeman**, *Wall Street Journal*  
bestselling author of *The Next Right Thing*

A lot of women think that if we're not going on vacation with a montage-worthy bestie, we're doing friendship wrong. In *The Life Council*, Laura Tremaine candidly and compassionately tells us the truth about the beauty and vastness of adult friendship, offering a relational framework that women deeply crave. No longer are we stuck in a restrictive paradigm of what it means to make and keep friends. *The Life Council* teaches us to paint a new picture of friendship, one with more color and texture than we realized was possible.

**Kendra Adachi**, *New York Times*  
bestselling author of *The Lazy Genius*  
*Way* and *The Lazy Genius Kitchen*

# The Life Council

10 Friends Every Woman Needs

LAURA TREMAINE

 **ZONDERVAN**  
BOOKS

ZONDERVAN BOOKS

*The Life Council*

Copyright © 2023 by Laura Tremaine

Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

Zondervan titles may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fundraising, or sales promotional use. For information, please email [SpecialMarkets@Zondervan.com](mailto:SpecialMarkets@Zondervan.com).

ISBN 978-0-310-35998-2 (audio)

---

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Tremaine, Laura, 1979- author.

Title: The life council: 10 friends every woman needs / Laura Tremaine.

Description: Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2023. | Summary: "In The Life Council, author and podcaster Laura Tremaine offers women a new way to think about friendships and practical ways to find, build, and keep the right friend for every season of their lives"—Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022054484 (print) | LCCN 2022054485 (ebook) | ISBN 9780310359951 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9780310367277 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780310359968 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Female friendship. | Friendship. | BISAC: FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS / Friendship

Classification: LCC HM1161 .T74 2023 (print) | LCC HM1161 (ebook) | DDC 302.34082—dc23/eng/20221222

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022054484>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022054485>

---

Any internet addresses (websites, blogs, etc.) and telephone numbers in this book are offered as a resource. They are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement by Zondervan, nor does Zondervan vouch for the content of these sites and numbers for the life of this book.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

The author is represented by the literary agency of Alive Literary Agency, [www.aliveliterary.com](http://www.aliveliterary.com).

Names and identifying characteristics of some individuals have been changed to preserve their privacy.

Poem by David Gate used with permission.

Cover design: Faceout Studio / Jeff Miller

Cover illustrations: mini cherry studio / OoddySmile Studio / Shutterstock

Interior design: Sara Colley

Printed in the United States of America

---

ScoutAutomatedPrintCode

*For my Life Council members currently  
serving lifetime appointments:*

*Kimi Dallman*

*Andy Duty*

*Jaime Hammer*

*Lindsay Lawler*

*Cara Pence*

*and Meg Tietz*

Be kind about the names  
Your friends give to their children  
Praise their haircuts  
Love their tattoos  
It doesn't really matter  
If that's what you would do  
Like every selfie  
All of them  
Clap their songs  
Cheer them on  
You were born with a limitless  
Supply of encouragements  
Use every one of them  
Don't wait for the eulogies  
To speak out loud  
That your friends are precious  
And they make you feel proud.

—DAVID GATE

# Contents

## PART I: THE MOST IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP

A Friendship Reckoning . . . . .	3
A Personal History of Friendship . . . . .	13
Five Friendship Philosophies . . . . .	21

## PART II: THE LIFE COUNCIL

The Daily Duty Friend . . . . .	47
The Old Friend . . . . .	59
The Business Bestie . . . . .	69
The Fellow Obsessive . . . . .	79
The Battle Buddy . . . . .	87
The Yes Friend . . . . .	97
The Mentor . . . . .	105
The Password Protector . . . . .	115
The Empty Chair . . . . .	123
The New Friend . . . . .	131
The Soul Sister . . . . .	141

## PART III: WHAT I'VE LEARNED ABOUT . . .

Making Friends . . . . .	153
Being a Friend . . . . .	165
Fostering a Culture of Healthy Friendships . . . . .	179
Conclusion . . . . .	187

<i>Resources</i> . . . . .	190
<i>Acknowledgments</i> . . . . .	191
<i>Discussion Guide</i> . . . . .	197

# Five Friendship Philosophies

1. Friendship is a to-do
2. Believe the best
3. Just go
4. Like every selfie
5. Your spouse is not your best friend

We learned most of our friendship habits and ideas early in life, when caregivers plopped us on the floor and we were forced to get along with whatever sibling or playmate was on that blanket with us. We were most likely encouraged to share our toys, admonished not to hit one another, and told to stay in a general proximity. We weren't given much of a choice about when the playing began or ended, and all of this was the beginning of learning how to be in relationships with one another.

When we got to be school-age, friendship rules were explicitly spelled out and simple enough for everyone to understand.

## The Most Important Relationship

We were taught to share, take turns, be inclusive, be kind. These are great rules for relationships. But if that was the last time anyone gave you clear instructions on how to be a good friend, there have surely been bumps in the road along the way since then.

As we grew, we probably went on to experience some sort of friendship angst in our younger years: friends moved away, friends hurt our feelings, we didn't get invited to the birthday, we were targeted by mean girls—or we were the mean girls ourselves. Or perhaps we didn't experience friendship drama so much as we didn't have any friends at all. Middle school can be rough.

In the teen years, the issues were more or less the same, but the stakes were higher. Our loneliness increased or our feelings were hurt more deeply. Hopefully we received well-meaning advice from our moms or sisters or teachers or summer camp counselors, but maybe not. We will carry

**WE WILL CARRY  
WHAT WE LEARN  
ABOUT FRIENDSHIP  
IN OUR EARLIEST  
YEARS INTO THE  
REST OF OUR LIVES.**

what we learn about friendship in our earliest years into the rest of our lives.

If we don't stay attuned to how things change, we will let old hurts and insecurities rule our emotions and actions in adulthood without making the allowance that everyone else has grown up, too. Every new and old friend you will

ever have has a friendship past, just like you do, so it can be helpful to identify some general philosophies as guideposts for our friendships, especially for the seasons when we're struggling.

Time and circumstances require a little more nuance than the first friendship rules we learned in kindergarten.



## Five Friendship Philosophies

I think it's a worthy experiment to think about your friendship philosophies from a grown-up perspective. Think about the rules you were taught about being a good friend, which are likely ingrained in you, and then ask yourself if you still believe them to be true. As you do this, you'll see that we're all operating from a set of friendship philosophies, whether we've formalized them or not. Start by brainstorming what you like about certain friendships, and then brainstorm what hasn't worked so well in the past. In the final section of the book, we're going to talk about what we value in individual people, but here we're talking about overall guidelines to help us bring our best selves to our relationships. In both of these exercises, you might surprise yourself by how you define what matters (and what doesn't).

My most important friendship philosophies are these:

### **Friendship Philosophy #1: Friendship Is a To-Do**

This is a new practice for me, but it's one of the things I believe most helped my friendships over the last couple of years: Friendship is an item on your To Do list, just like cleaning the bathroom or getting your oil changed.

I do not want this to be true. I want to be a person who does friendship organically and wholeheartedly, a person who is generous and loving and known for her strong relational priorities. Alas, I'm actually an anxious, introverted working mother with a screen addiction and a tendency toward procrastination. The in-person, fun part of friendship comes naturally to me. The mundane work of it does not.

The truth is, friendship *is* work. People don't talk about

## The Most Important Relationship

that enough. We hear about how marriage is work and parent-hood is work, but somehow, maintaining healthy relations with our friends is supposed to be effortless, but I

**THE TRUTH IS,  
FRIENDSHIP  
IS WORK.**

don't find that to be true. I *want* to remember that my friend is up for a promotion or that she's having a minor surgery next Tuesday or that her beloved cat just died, and I *want*

to send flowers or a note or a text for all of these things, but without reminders, I will not. Maintaining care for the best friends in my life is emotional labor. Sometimes it's physical labor. It's not all margaritas and memories.

Oh yes, I've seen the memes that float around the internet about being (or wanting) a low-maintenance friend. And there are definitely seasons when you have to give all you can to your family or your job, and the work of friendship isn't something you can take on. I also see the value in having a decidedly low-maintenance friend with low expectations all around. But that's not going to go the distance. Someone is going to hit a rough patch. Someone is going to lose their job or get a divorce and need a shoulder and a hand. Someone is going to get a diagnosis. That someone might be you.

The work of friendship turns out to be worth it. When I started thinking about my closest friendships as part of my to-do list—not as a chore, but as a priority that needed to be attended to—my friendships changed. And my friends noticed.

I use a notepad for my daily To Do lists and on each page I have three sections: personal, work, and connection. The personal and work sections are self-explanatory, but the connection section usually has items listed like:

## Five Friendship Philosophies

Text Yasmin

Vox Bri

Check Sarah's IG feed

Something like “Buy Ashley a birthday present” would be on my personal to-do list because that’s a tangible to-do item and not really about connection in the same way.

I add people to the connection to-do list when they pop into my mind, or as a reminder to reach out for a specific reason. There’s a circle of friends with whom I check in regularly (at least once a week), and then long-term or long-distance friends who hear from me once a month or so, and then a handful of people in my life whom I love dearly, but realistically, we only interact a few times a year. If they weren’t on my to-do list, it might dwindle to even less than that.

In one of my recent friendship struggles, I had a good friend tell me candidly that being on my to-do list hurt her feelings. She wanted me to think of her instinctively, to reach out without prompting and not because I set an alarm in my calendar (something I’m also known to do). I was taken aback by her response because, if anything, I hope a friend would feel flattered that I am making an effort where I previously have so often dropped the ball, but she took it as a reduction of our spiritual bond.

I got defensive at first (of course), but then I sat with it and tried to understand where she was coming from. She wanted to feel like one of my best friends (which she is) and not simply someone on a list, which can feel like a drudgery. I wanted to stop feeling so flaky and had made some adjustments in my day and mindset in order to prioritize close relationships with

## The Most Important Relationship

people who do not live in my house. It was an impasse. We love one another dearly, but we think about life and relationships in very different ways. By the end of our thorny conversation, I believe we came to an understanding of each other's hearts in the matter, even if we still didn't completely grasp each other's point of view. She agreed to try to see my new tactics as an act of love and not a chore, and I agreed to make my check-ins with her seem less scheduled.

Your approach to the work of friendship might look different from mine, just like any item on your to-do list will look different from mine. But if we can give ourselves the tools to succeed in our most important relationships—including treating them by our actions with the same reverence with which we hold them emotionally—our friendships will be stronger and more deeply woven into the fabric of our lives.

### **Friendship Philosophy #2: Believe the Best**

I believe all relationships go more smoothly when we assume positive intentions. I'm not trying to be unrealistically positive in the face of friendship complications, but when we jump to negative conclusions about a friend's behavior, we are often wrong and create a rift where there wasn't one. When something seems off with a friend—maybe they're not returning our texts or maybe they forgot our birthday or maybe we were on the receiving end of a casually snide remark—what if, instead of assuming that they're mad at us, that they no longer like us, that they're secretly out to get us, we assign neutral intent? It doesn't mean you're being naive or gullible if you decide that they're busy or that a comment wasn't personal.

## Five Friendship Philosophies

We can actively choose to believe our friends have the best of intentions, just as we hope they would *believe the best* about us.

This doesn't mean we should always let these kinds of slights slide. By all means, we have every right to expect a friend to call us back and to not say hurtful things even if they're teasing. But unless it's a pattern in their behavior or character (which warrants a deeper look at continuing the friendship at all), believing the best in someone takes less energy than assuming the worst.

Trauma and past unhealthy situations may very well give us reason to be suspicious or defensive in our friendships. I'm sure we can all think of someone who has given us plenty of reason not to *believe the best* of them—or of anyone. I get it. But after my periods of not being the greatest friend myself, I'm grateful for those who gave me grace along the way. They knew I was simply overwhelmed when I had to cancel plans or exhausted when I spoke too sharply. Sometimes I was called out; sometimes I realized the mistake and corrected it myself; sometimes my behavior was just ignored. But my close friends always came from a place of believing I was a good person with a good heart, and if they'd believed anything else, I'm not sure we could have overcome the offense.

My anxious brain defaults to assuming that someone is mad at me or that they're seconds away from being mad at me. When I was younger and much more judgmental of others, I thought everyone else was sitting in judgment too, and this made me do a constant tap dance of justification of my own actions and demand explanations for theirs. I used to

**BELIEVING  
THE BEST IN  
SOMEONE TAKES  
LESS ENERGY  
THAN ASSUMING  
THE WORST.**

## The Most Important Relationship

keep score and wouldn't call, text, or email someone back if it was their turn. I didn't want to go to their birthday dinner if they'd blown off mine. I slowly grew out of the need for such strangling control over the people in my life, and that maturity was freedom. The next obvious step was to start continually believing in the best of intentions from those I wanted to assume good intentions from me.

Obviously, we don't want a friendship to be a one-way street, but sweating the small stuff in friendship is often a recipe for disappointment. I can't keep score with the people I love. It won't always be an even exchange. But in a healthy friendship, it all seems to shake out. If it doesn't? Well, that's worth further examination.

Sometimes our own insecurities cause us to be suspicious, territorial, and controlling. Deciding to *believe the best* in my friends and expecting them to *believe the best* in me has infused my relationships with love.

### **Friendship Philosophy #3: Just Go**

This is a personal directive that has shifted over the years depending on my life circumstances, but I noticed decades ago that I rarely regret going to dinner or on the trip or to the party. And often, I do regret *not* going.

There are always reasons not to go: finances or a breast-feeding baby or a calendar conflict are legitimate excuses to bow out of anything. And sometimes we may need the self-care that comes with not going. But when we do go—even if it costs us some sleep or some money or is inconvenient—our very

## Five Friendship Philosophies

presence opens the door to connection and memory-making and being known as a person who shows up.

Because we cannot replace face-to-face time. Technology has given us a million ways to stay in touch and post photos and make video calls, which is better than not connecting at all. But *nothing* beats a hug, an in-person congratulations, or a shared conversation with every nuance of body language, laughter, and eye contact.

I put a high priority on the milestones in life, like weddings and funerals and other major events. I've decided that I must *just go* to those things, and unless there's a glaring reason to do so, I will not weigh the pros and cons or agonize over that decision. If it's within my ability to be there, I will. When I was growing up, this was a given. You go to people's big events. I'm not sure when it became optional. Maybe because events got more extravagant, therefore requiring more of the attendees' time, money, or effort, or because we've somehow decided that certain things don't matter anymore—but our presence *does* matter. There is a spiritual communion among friends when you show up for the big moments.

A few years ago, I made the effort to attend my high school reunion in Oklahoma, and I was shocked at who came and who didn't. People who were still local to our hometown didn't even attempt to swing by, while those of us

who lived hundreds of miles away arrived with bells on. I know many people have no desire to attend reunions, but that weekend I reconnected with classmates I hadn't talked to in twenty

**THERE IS A  
SPIRITUAL  
COMMUNION  
AMONG FRIENDS  
WHEN YOU SHOW  
UP FOR THE BIG  
MOMENTS.**

## The Most Important Relationship

years. Sure, we were Facebook friends. I already knew where they lived and how many kids they had, but the in-person energy could never be replicated through a screen. Stories came to the surface that never would have if we hadn't been sitting together, feeding off one another's collective memories. I flew back to California with a full heart and an even better understanding of my childhood.

I also have a group of far-flung friends I met on the internet—the same women who were there when Chris Ann taught us about Life Councils—who have played an enormous role in how I've approached friendship over the last ten years. Our troop started when we were all online blogging all day every day, and a decade later, our lives don't look like that anymore. It's been harder and harder to keep up as careers and kids keep us busier and busier, and some have abandoned social media altogether. But regardless of our internet habits, one thing we've maintained is an annual retreat weekend. We spend three days together with absolutely no agenda—just talking and eating and resting and laughing and catching up on all the things. I wait the whole year for that weekend to deeply connect with those women who mean so much to me. Sometimes I miss how it was in the beginning, when we all chatted through our screens every single day, but the yearly retreat goes a long way in keeping us close. The group is large enough that it's tough to nurture every individual relationship within it, so instead, I prioritize the in-person gathering. I'm committed to attending that weekend every year that I'm able because this is part of my *just go* philosophy.

The big stuff is a given: *Just go*.

What about the smaller stuff? Grabbing coffee, a last-minute double date, a dinner or a walk or a football game



## Five Friendship Philosophies

watch party? Sometimes I think we wait for the “perfect” opportunity to be joyfully spontaneous, but that’s just not going to happen. When a casual plan starts to come together, you may not love the choice of restaurant or everyone else who is invited or the last-minute timing. You have to decide for yourself if it works for you, but don’t overthink it. Ask yourself if you’ll regret not going, and be honest about how much your attendance or absence will affect your relationships.

I’m not suggesting you sacrifice your schedule, sleep, and bank account for every little thing, but attendance is part of cultivating relationships. We cannot complain about our loneliness when we’re picky about when we’ll bless others with our presence. It’s also true that the consistency of being together builds deeper friendships, much more so than infrequent meetups.

*Just go! Err on the side of relationship.*

### **Friendship Philosophy #4: Like Every Selfie**

This phrase is taken from the poem by David Gate that opens this book, and while the whole piece has become a guiding beacon for me in the last two years with my friendships, these lines in particular make up the core of this philosophy:

Like every selfie  
All of them  
Clap their songs  
Cheer them on  
You were born with a limitless  
Supply of encouragements  
Use every one of them

## The Most Important Relationship

When I first read this poem on Instagram, not only did it touch my soul, it also gave me an immediate directive. *Like every selfie. All of them.*

Look, I understand that cheering on our friends isn't always as simple as that. Sometimes we have resentments or jealousies or secondhand embarrassment about the way friends act (or post online). Sometimes we don't want to encourage them in the wrong direction if it seems like the new career or romance or hairstyle isn't in their best interest. It can be exhausting to fulfill an obligation to "like every selfie." It can feel inauthentic when you don't *really* like whatever it is they're putting out.

But does it matter? Are we culture critics who need to reserve our five-star reviews? Our honest and thoughtful reputations are not in danger when we tell a friend they look fabulous regardless of our actual opinion. There's a time and place for intervention—like when we become truly concerned about a friend's decisions—but most of our daily lives include hundreds of little ways to encourage someone. "Likes" and high fives and quick text emojis are a low bar for all of us to feel generous and for others to feel like we care (because we do). Not to mention that withholding such generosity can feel like poison.

In one of my informal Instagram polls, my messages exploded when I posed the question, "Do you notice when friends don't like, comment, or react to your posts?" The responses were all over the place—a fair mix between not caring at all and lengthy stories of how hurtful it feels when friends and family (who are otherwise active online) refuse to react to what we share on social media. In all of the various conversations I host on the internet, this one had the widest

## Five Friendship Philosophies

range of shame and vitriol spilling from the comments. It was fascinating to read all the rules and walls and justifications we've constructed around online behavior.

Since we can all agree that social media interactions cannot replace in-person relationships, and also that within years, these trends and platforms will be completely obsolete, you'd think none of it should carry much weight in our friendships. And yet here I am, making it one of my five friendship philosophies.

Of course, it's not really about the "likes" or the selfies. It's about the big and small ways we can cheer on one another without getting into an

emotional tangle about it. It's a reminder to myself that not everything has to be so overanalyzed and that, in fact, this analysis is killing our instinctive connections.

So now, I do not waste one second of my life with my finger hovering over the like button (metaphorically or literally) when it comes to my friends. If there's a chance to cheer them on, I take it.

**IT'S ABOUT THE BIG  
AND SMALL WAYS  
WE CAN CHEER ON  
ONE ANOTHER.**

### **Friendship Philosophy #5: Your Spouse Is Not Your Best Friend**

I developed this philosophy after expecting Jeff to be my everything early on in our marriage led to some intense loneliness. I remind myself of this tenet whenever I've gone too long without catching up with a friend or going out for a girls' dinner or when some sappy social media post has me in my feelings about the way other couples exist in their marriages.

Whenever I share that my spouse is not my best friend, I

## The Most Important Relationship

get either a chorus of *amens* or people who secretly think my marriage is in trouble. In the end, this may just be a difference in marriage dynamics and labels, but I like to talk about this topic as a way to release the cultural idea that your life partner *should* be your best friend. There's nothing wrong if your marriage has an entirely separate energy than your friendships. My husband, Jeff, is not my best friend, and our marriage got better once I identified that.

Now, when someone declares they've "married their best friend," I inwardly cringe. We all know what they mean. They married the person they feel closest to in the world. Maybe it even has a double meaning, in that they were friends before they were lovers. That's my love story with Jeff: we were close friends for two years before anything romantic transpired between us.

And yet, Jeff is still not my best friend. We've been married for fifteen years, and he is the most important person in my life. He's my first call with good or bad news. He's my most trusted sounding board. He's my partner. But he is not my best friend. Maybe this is all semantics. Maybe it hinges on how one defines a "best friend" (and whether they find it romantic to marry one's best friend). I feel strongly on this issue because, in the first years of our marriage, I fell into the trap of wanting Jeff to be my "best" friend (after all, our relationship was built on those previous years of friendship), but I quickly found out that expecting one person to fulfill all of the most important roles of adult relationships left us both frustrated. It was unfair for him and lonely for me.

The best friends I've had throughout my lifetime—at any age—fill my cup in a way my husband does not. I am a distinctive version of myself with my friends, and our conversations

## Five Friendship Philosophies

together are wildly different from those with any romantic partner. Jeff doesn't understand four-hour dinners that include crying and belly laughing and long stories with too many tangents. He doesn't want to engage in the hours of analysis my friends and I spend covering the minutiae of our childhoods or whether we should cut bangs. (One of the great benefits of my best friends is that our discussions can vacillate between our traumas and our current style choices with ease.) For what it's worth, I'm not interested in most of the conversations he has or activities he engages in with his best friends, either.

This also isn't completely gender-specific. My oldest friend, Drew, was a groomsman in my wedding. We grew up in the same small town. Drew is now a scientist in New York City. He's been the other half of my marathon gab sessions since he started to walk me home in the third grade, and we have a verbal shorthand that moves too quickly for Jeff to catch. He is one of my best friends, and he is not my husband.

So maybe the difference here is about romantic friendships versus platonic ones. With my husband, there's a constant underlying attraction that becomes sexual chemistry, and then there are also the day-to-day, mundane parts of our life that include co-parenting, household duties, and crafting a future together. It's a partnership that has different complexities than a friendship.

Friendships have their own sets of obligations, but those usually don't demand major decision-making together. My friends and I may try to keep things fair by splitting the check or divvying up the task list for a trip or party, but we're not looking at the big picture of money or family or lifetime dynamics. Time with friends mostly nets fun, while time with my spouse is so ongoing that it just *is*.

## The Most Important Relationship

Our marriage worked a lot better when I realized I needed to have best friends outside of my marriage. I needed to talk and laugh and connect and spend time with people who didn't share a bathroom with me. I appreciated my marriage more when I had other important people in my life who knew me on a soul level.

**I APPRECIATED  
MY MARRIAGE  
MORE WHEN I HAD  
OTHER IMPORTANT  
PEOPLE IN MY LIFE  
WHO KNEW ME ON  
A SOUL LEVEL.**

Jeff and I fought less when he wasn't my whole world. The pressure I put on both of us during my lonely years could have sunk us both. And believe me, Jeff is relieved I have people who will chatter on with me for hours. I feel lucky that I can do the chattering and then return home to crawl into bed with the person I've created a life with.

These two things work in harmony in more ways than one. Jeff is quick to notice if a friendship brings me joy and peace or if it's draining. My friends aren't afraid to ask what's going on in my marriage. There is a checks and balances among these relationships that can be useful for seeing what is hard to see for yourself.

Years ago, upon returning home from yet another girls' weekend where I was weepy and annoyed, Jeff gently suggested that maybe I stop going on that annual adventure. It had been awhile since I'd enjoyed it, but I wasn't willing to admit that maybe these particular women and I were growing apart. I probably would have gone on that same girls' trip every spring until the end of time and never considered that stepping away was an option, especially since Just Go! is one of my most important friendship philosophies. It took someone who saw me every day to see that the trip was defeating and not uplifting.

## Five Friendship Philosophies

Likewise, after a rough patch in our marriage, I sat on the counter in my kitchen and told three of my Life Council friends that marriage was hard, and I was done putting any effort into it. I didn't want a divorce, but I was done trying to make it better all the time. Whatever happened, happened. They listened thoughtfully and then reminded me that I was really, really tired. That winter, I was exhausted. There was a lot going on in our lives, and it felt easier to blame it on Jeff than to work on some of the hard things. My friends didn't try to convince me that my marriage venting was wrong, but in some ways, they could see the situation more clearly than I could.

My best friends grant me laughter and grace that isn't tangled up in who made the vet appointment or how messy the bedroom is, and the affirmation of those friendships allows me to function with less neediness in my marriage. This is a core friendship philosophy for me because it's a reminder that we need more than one close relationship in our lives. When I'm out of sorts with family life, I plan a dinner with my friends to spend a few hours just being *me*.

My spouse is my spouse, and my best friends are my best friends. They're not the same thing, and all of my relationships are better for it.



These are the philosophies that are most important to my friendships, and once I'd clarified them, it made many relationship decisions easier. Note that some philosophies may change over time or when you move into a new season of life. How we behave online in our friendships is a part of the conversation that didn't exist twenty years ago but is a regular part of

## The Most Important Relationship

navigating relationships now. The etiquette surrounding this changes regularly—enough to make some people give up on the “social” part of social media entirely—but in my own life, it’s something I want to pay attention to. I also had different friendship philosophies when I was single in my twenties and when I was drowning in my thirties than I have now in my forties. Sometimes it takes a little time to realize that your priorities or your own behaviors have changed.

For example, as a young adult, I cared a lot about trustworthiness. In my post-college years, as I was “finding myself,” I held a lot of secrets and discretion was a must. With more life experience, the secure knowledge that everyone has their own “stuff,” and nearly two decades of sharing myself on the internet, my ideas of privacy have definitely morphed. Of course, I still need to be able to trust my friends, but in my forties, this is more about their character than nitpicking individual actions. I am no longer suspicious of people’s trustworthiness because I rarely make friends at this stage who don’t have a trustworthy nature.

Also, the types of friendship we’re drawn to naturally shifts with life stages. During the baby and toddler years, I desperately wanted new friends, but the effort it took to get to know someone was beyond my reach during those seasons of sleepless nights. I leaned heavily on people who already knew me and whom I already knew. I wish someone had given me permission to let that be enough back then because now that my kids are older, I have more space in my life for new friendships.

Brainstorm some of your own friendship philosophies, guideposts, or principles. Think about behaviors and rules you’re already abiding by (such as always picking up when



## Five Friendship Philosophies

friends call or taking them out for a birthday lunch each year), and go from there. Being honest with yourself about personality and capacity will be more effective than trying to force yourself to fit into the box that movies and culture tell us friendship looks like. You may decide that some of your friendship habits are ready for a refresh.

Committing friendship philosophies to paper is by no means a requirement to strengthening your own relationships, but it was a helpful exercise for me. If you just have no idea where to start, pay attention to your friendships over the next few weeks or months, and notice what works well and what could use some improvement.

Now that you've learned about my friendship history, my recent friendship foibles, and the philosophies I've built for approaching my friendships, let's look at the ten types of friendships I am prioritizing, the people I've christened my Life Council.