

361 - The Two Missing Pieces in Conversations About Friendship

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't!

Today is episode 361 - The Two Missing Pieces in Conversations About Friendship.

Friendship is one of those topics that will never run dry. No matter your level of extroversion or introversion, your age, your life stage, or any other factor, we all need friends. We are wired for connection in some way. You might have read that longitudinal study that came out of Harvard awhile back that showed how true this is. The researchers determined with pretty much zero doubt that the most important quality to a good life is relationships. Connected, meaningful relationships. This topic is as human and as necessary as it gets.

Why am I talking about it? I tend to focus on things that are a bit more concrete I suppose, but I think that one of the reasons we struggle to find and maintain meaningful relationships is partly a logistical one. It's tough to find time, to align calendars, to create rhythms of relationship in our busy lives. And yet, finding time to connect with people is just as important if not more important than finding time to pay your bills and cook your meals and tend to your job and your home and all the things we tend to talk about here on the podcast.

So today, I want to explore two aspects that are often missing in conversations about friendship. The first is the levels of friendship and how our expectations often ignore those levels. And the first will set up the second, so we'll get to the second in a bit. Let's start with, what I see are the three levels of any friendship: meeting, connecting, and deepening. In that order.

We all want deep friendships, right? That's the third and final level: deepening. In fact, I want you to imagine what it means to have a deep friendship with someone. Maybe you're imagining a relationship you currently have, or maybe you're thinking of one you wish you had. A deep friendship is with someone who knows us, who sees us in all the good and the bad, who roots for us, who brings us food when we're in a crisis, who will grab us something at the store, who we trust to hang out with our kids, who we travel with, who we can talk to on the phone as easy as breathing. A lot of you might have grown up reading or watching Anne of Green Gables, and so you're quite familiar with the idea of a bosom friend. It's your go-to person, the person you do everything with, the person who knows you better than just about anyone.

Now, is that a beautiful relationship to have? Of course. But in our loneliness or discontentment, we often forget that you can't have a deep relationship of any kind without first meeting the person. And then over time connecting with that person. Every single deep friendship starts with a meeting. Sure, you might meet someone and know right away that you're going to get along with this person for a good long while. You might even have a chemistry with them that enables you to jump over a couple of early rounds of friendship connection, connecting on a level that

would take longer with someone else. That's normal. Chemistry and connection are real. I don't believe in love at first sight because love requires a lot more than eyeballs, but I do believe in chemistry at first sight. Connection at first sight. People are dynamic, and there is a lot happening around us that we can't see. I can't explain that eye contact with one stranger feels different than eye contact with another. It's weird to be honest. But it does happen. We've all probably experienced it, and it definitely happens with friendships. That said, you still have to meet first, then connect for a time, which enables you to grow deeper in relationship with that person.

And yet, we expect depth out the gate. We don't always see that relationships we have now are in process. Right now, you're early in level two, the connection level. You're not close to the depth at the end of the line, but you're on your way! And yet we forget. We forget about the process because we long for the end. We long for the depth we imagine.

We can also assume that every single friendship is moving toward that depth, and that's an unrealistic expectation. If the levels of friendship are real - if meeting, connecting, and deepening are the process that happens in every single relationship even though we often expect to just hit deep right away, if those levels are real, we often assume that those levels work on every single friendship. And they do not. Not every single friend you have is going to be a bosom friend. Not every single friendship you have is going to be deep.

Laura Tremaine described this so beautifully in her book, *The Life Council*. In that book, she lays out ten types of friendship and offers so much necessary and beautiful permission to not put every single relationship under the besties lens. Not every friend you have is a bestie. Some friends are what Laura calls Daily Duty friends. They're the moms you see at school pickup, they're the folks you say hi to at the gym because they go the same time that you do, they're the coworkers who go to the same meetings as you. Maybe for all of those folks, you've met and you're connected within a certain context, but you might not want or need those relationships to go any deeper. They are what they are, and they serve a beautiful purpose as they are. If we expect that every relationship is going to be deep and full of vacations and vulnerability, not only are we setting ourselves up for disappointment. We're also missing the goodness and value of those relationships as they are. We're content with them. We're content that we probably won't go out for drinks with the gym friend, but we don't have to for that friendship to count. Saying hi at the gym, sometimes walking next to each other's treadmills, knowing her kid's name or whatever, those are enough. More than enough even! And maybe that friendship might surprise by becoming more connected and even deepening for some reason, but you don't have to keep anticipating that. Just let it be what it is and enjoy what you have. Not every friendship has to be a bosom buddy friendship.

So one missing piece in many conversations about friendship is that there are levels to any relationship. You have to meet first. Then you connect. Then you deepen. You don't get deep right away. Sometimes it takes years. Not only that, not every relationship has to be deep in the way that you imagine. Different friendships have different purposes, and while they all follow that path of meet, connect, and deepen, the particularities of those three steps will look different

depending on the context and purpose of the friendship. So that's the first missing piece. It's one that most of you have probably thought about, but this next one is a little more surprising. Let's get into it.

Before we get into the second missing piece in conversations about friendship, I want us to do a little exercise to help us get there. The problems around friendship often feel pretty big, so one of the points of this exercise is to take how you feel about your current friendship situation and make it smaller. When you think about your friendships, you might think in broad strokes. You might say, "Well, I have friends, but I don't have a lot of them." Or I don't have a lot of deep friendships. Or I'm really lonely in this new place and I miss my friends. Those are all real statements possibly true for you today as you're listening. But if you are hoping to move forward in developing friendships on whatever level, that's kind of a big problem to solve. And what do we know about big problems? They're hard to solve. It's easier to solve smaller ones. So let's make your friendship situation smaller as set the stage for this second missing piece.

Do this in your head or on a piece of paper or whatever, but let's do a little friendship audit. Write down who you would say your deep friends are. Who is the closest to that imagined idea of a deep friendship? Who do you call with good news and bad? Who do you feel like you can be your truest self with? Who are your deepest friends? That's one column.

The next column is who are your contextually deep friends? Borrowing Laura's fabulous model of the *The Life Council*, who are people that you trust and feel deeply connected to but only a certain context? Maybe there's a work friend who is your first call when something with work is happening but not if your kid gets really sick or if you need bananas at the store. Some friendships are deep in a particular context but not universally. And that's normal. So who are your universally deep friendships, and then who are your contextually deep friendships?

I'm going to give you a slightly strange but relevant personal example. One person who I would say I have a contextually deep friendship with is Nora McInerney. Nora is a podcaster and author and hilarious and poignant and smart and all kinds of things. We connected on Instagram as one does, and over the last couple of years, we have connected more and more. Today, I'd say we have a contextually deep friendship. I trust her. I have called her a couple of times with work problems I wanted her input on. She has done the same to me. We connected very quickly and easily, so we jumped over some of those awkward early stage relationship hurdles, but we both feel like ourselves with the other and experience a depth because of that. But am I going to call Nora if my kid breaks his leg? No. Am I going to call Nora if I get really sick? Not for awhile and only if it's really bad. But will I call Nora if something super cool happens with a book? Probably. Would she do the same for me? Maybe. Would either of us hold it against the other if we did not? Not at all. Because there is a very specific context to the depth of our relationship.

You have those people, too. And those relationships matter. Just because someone doesn't know everything about you doesn't mean their friendship isn't significant. It really and truly is, and we need to normalize that.

So who are your deepest friends? Who are your contextually deep friends? Next, who do you feel connected to? Maybe you're not deep yet, but you know each other's names and at least a few things about each other where you'd say that you are indeed friends and not just acquaintances and you look forward to seeing them. Who is that person? Who are those people?

Here's where we're going to start getting into the second missing piece.

Usually when we are connected with someone, we are connected to them through a particular place or group. Your neighborhood or apartment building or dorm, work, church, clubs, civic or professional groups, school whether yours or your kids. Maybe you're connected because of history you share whether at an old job or church or college or summer camp or whatever. When I went through my own friends and named who is on the level of connecting but not really deepening, it was all context-based. It was all about place mostly, whether a place I'm in now or a place I was in before.

Why does this matter? If we go to the first level of friendship which is meeting (meeting, connecting, deepening), it makes sense that we meet people in particular places. We meet people in the neighborhood, at work, at church, in a group we belong to, at our school or our kids' school. We meet people in places. Sometimes we meet people on the Internet, but usually that is also through the context of a technological place, like an online community or a shared mutual friend in the person that you both follow.

So if all that is true, if we meet people in our places and we continue to connect with those people in our places, places matter, right? This is where the second missing piece finally comes in.

I wrote about this in my next book, *The PLAN*, out October 8th, but I'll mention it here because it matters deeply to this conversation. I read Oliver Burkeman's book *Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals* and loved it so much. It's basically a philosophical survey of how time management has messed us up because we forget that we're going to die. We forget our own finitude, and the productivity industry encourages that forgetfulness because it wants us to think we can control more than we actually can. More control means more needed resources means more money. The book is great, but in it, he writes about relationships and connection and the part they play in our time management. And I'm just going to read this to you because when I read it, it blew my mind. It is the second missing piece in conversations about friendship. That's why I included it in my own book because Oliver illuminated something vital to this conversation that no one really talks about. This is a long quote, but it's worth reading. Here's what he says.

“The question is, what kind of freedom do we really want when it comes to time? On the one hand, there’s the culturally celebrated goal of individual time sovereignty - the freedom to set your own schedule, to make your own choices, to be free from other people’s intrusions into your precious four thousand weeks. On the other hand, there’s the profound sense of meaning that comes from being willing to fall in with the rhythms of the rest of the world: to be free to engage in all the worthwhile collaborative endeavors that require at least some sacrifice of your sole control over what you do and when. Strategies for achieving this first kind of freedom are the sort of thing that fills books of productivity advice: ideal morning routines, strict personal schedules, and tactics for limiting how long you spend answering email each day, plus homilies on the importance of learning to say no - all of them functioning as bulwarks against the risk that other people might exert too much influence over how your time gets used. And undoubtedly these have a role to play: we do need to set firm boundaries so that bullying bosses, exploitative employment arrangements, narcissistic spouses, or a guilty tendency toward people-pleasing don’t end up dictating the course of every day.

And yet the trouble with this kind of individualist freedom is that a society in thrall to it, as ours is, ends up desynchronizing itself. We live less and less of our lives in the same temporal grooves as one another. The unbridled reign of this individualist ethos, fueled by the demands of the market economy, has overwhelmed our traditional ways of organizing time, meaning that the hours in which we rest, work, and socialize are becoming ever more uncoordinated. It’s harder than ever to find time for a leisurely family dinner, a spontaneous visit to friends, or any collective project - nurturing a community garden, playing in an amateur rock band - that takes place in a setting other than the workplace.

For the least privileged, the dominance of this kind of freedom translates into no freedom at all: it means unpredictable gig-economy jobs and “on demand scheduling” in which the big box retailer you work for might call you into work at any moment, its labor needs calculated algorithmically from hour to hour based on sales volume - making it all but impossible to plan childcare or essential visits to the doctor, let alone a night out with friends. But even for those of us who genuinely do have much more personal control over when we work than previous generations ever did, the result is that work seeps through life like water, filling every cranny with more to-dos. The reason it’s so hard for my wife and me to find an hour in the week for a serious conversation, or for me and my three closest friends to meet for a beer, isn’t usually that we don’t have the time in the strict sense of that phrase, though that’s what we may tell ourselves. It’s that we do have the time - but that there’s almost no likelihood of it being the same portion of time for everyone involved. Free to pursue our own entirely personal schedules, yet still yoked to our jobs, we’ve constructed lives that can’t be made to mesh.”

That’s the end of the quote, and hopefully you understand why I read the entire thing. Y’all. Is that not the most mind-blowing thing? And also so deeply obvious? This is the second thing that is missing when we talk about friendships. We work so hard to create more time for ourselves and maybe we are occasionally successful at it, but if that time is not aligned with the time of our people or with the places where we would meet those people, what good is the free time? What good is all this work we’re doing to manage our time and our lives? Very little. That’s why the

places and the contexts within which you meet people and connect with them matter so much. We need to meet people in order to connect with them and develop deeper friendships, but if your life does not offer space for you to engage in places and contexts, whether already created without you or created by you, your friendships will struggle to take off. You'll struggle to even meet people. But if you're in a certain group, at a certain place, or living in a certain area, and your contexts match up, you are more likely to meet people there because their free time is likely aligned with yours. Your neighbors have the same trash schedule and mail delivery time as you, so you might connect outside if you live in the suburbs. Your coworkers are at work the same time as you are, so you can meet and connect there. The other adults at school pickup are on the same timeline that you are, getting their kids and likely off to do homework and snacks like you so why not do them together today? If you go to a club or a group meeting, you're aligned with people who have prioritized the same time to enjoy this particular thing that you have.

Do you see it? Places, groups, tangible contextual environments are one of the most helpful ways, not only to meet people and connect with them, perhaps with the eventual results of deepening your friendships, but those contextual environments have already done the work of aligning the time of you and others. You don't have to ask all of your friends and acquaintances from church to figure out when you'll all get together this week. It's already Sunday at 10am. It's when church happens. You don't have to ask all of these people in your community when they're available to run or do yoga or go to the gym. The class times are set already. This is when yoga class is. Our places matter. They help us align our time with other people without a lot of effort. Or at least with less if we were to start from scratch.

Now let's talk about starting from scratch for a second. It's hard to do, but that's why some of the most successful versions of relational connection happen because a plan is made and not messed with again. You get drinks with these friends on the third Thursday of every month. You call your sister every Tuesday at lunch time. You go for a walk with a friend every Saturday morning. Things are rhythmic and reliable, much like a church service or workout class.

Now, like Oliver Burkeman said in that quote I read, that kind of scheduling luxury isn't available to everyone. If you have a job with varied hours from week to week, Deciding Once is rarely an option for you... or at least it's more challenging. But if you're looking to start from scratch in connecting with people, consider the place and the context, and then decide when you'll connect. You have to align your time consistently and rhythmically because the way our lives generally work is independent of everyone else's. Our time autonomy is great... until it prevents us from enjoying our time in the first place because our time is not aligned with anyone else's.

So what does this mean practically? I think it means a couple of things. First, I hope that you are encouraged by the acknowledgement of the levels of friendship and that you might be in the meeting and connecting phase with a lot of your friendships with few deep ones. Hang tight. All of them take time. Think of one person you feel reasonably connected with or maybe just met and consider one thing you can do to connect with them this week. One thing with one person. That's where it all starts anyway. The levels help you see where you are and can give you

encouragement that it doesn't all have to look the same with everyone or that all the depth has to happen right now.

The other practical thing I want you to take from this is to look at your places. Where are you already? To borrow the phrasing from Emily P. Freeman's latest book *How to Walk Into a Room*, what rooms are you already in? Look around those rooms and notice how at least this part of your life is aligned with theirs. That's a gift because time alignment is hard to come by. Look at the places where you already have it. Look at the places where you already are, where you can either seek out people who are also there or invite someone new to that place with you.

Start thinking about how you can get to your places more consistently, what place you might want to add in order to meet and connect with people, and prioritize that place. Prioritize that place for the potential relationships but also because that place already offers time alignment. It lines up your free time or leisure time or connection time with other people who are interested in or doing the same things. Look around your places and see if there's someone new to meet. See if there's someone you've already met but could do a little something to connect with them, even if it's just saying hi and confirming their name and asking them if they like the book you saw them reading the other day or whatever.

This is how we start small, you guys, but it's also how we pursue meaningful, connected relationships. We pay attention to these two things that we don't talk about enough. First, we pay attention to the levels of friendship and stop expecting that everyone is in the same place at the same time or will even get there at all. We notice that some relationships are deep or connected only in a certain context, and we don't see that as a loss but as a gain. Second, we pay attention to how we can align our time with other people. We can notice when we are so stuck on our own autonomy and control that we are unknowingly preventing ourselves from connecting with others because we don't want to be at the mercy of a place that tells us when to be there. Embrace that time if you can. See it as a gift since you don't have to plan the thing yourself. See your places as the first level of friendship, as places to meet people because you have to meet people in order to connect with them.

It's too big to say that friendship is hard or you don't have any deep friends or you're having trouble meeting people. All of those can be true, but they are not solvable. These two missing pieces can help make them smaller and therefore more solvable. I hope they help encourage you in the direction of more meaningful, consistent friendships.

Okay, before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week, it's Leah Ross, and I find this particular message a beautiful match to today's episode topic. Because when we talk about friendships and when I get fiery about things and this is one of them, it can come possibly as you need to be hanging out with people all the time! And that's just not true. But rather than offering that disclaimer on its own, let's do it through Leah's message as our Lazy Genius of the Week. Leah writes this: "Hi Kendra! I've been a Lazy Genius since 2018 and just, THANK YOU for helping me put words on so many things that I want my home and family life to BE and FEEL like. I want to share one thing that is freeing me up big time right now: embracing the Live In

Your Season principle. I have four kids, and most of them are extroverts, but my 3rd born who is in 4-day a week preschool right now is a major introvert and homebody. School is hard for him sometimes for that reason. SO...while I am very tempted to do the play dates and see the friends on the one day he's home in the morning, I've surrendered to that's just not what this season needs. Because that's not what my child needs to be his best self. This child needs a day a week at home, in pjs, free to play legos or lay around and look at a book, just whatever solitary activity feels right. My child is SO SO much more regulated on the other days and does better in school drop off when his bucket is filled with an at-home day. Would I rather be doing ALL THE FUN THINGS when he's home with me? Yes. But I see the season for what it is, I know it's a relatively short one (he'll go to elementary school soon!) and so I'm embracing this season. Instead of play dates, I use our Introvert's Day for meal prep, laundry and whatever else I can do from home to set myself up for success the rest of the week! Thank you again for putting words to the things I needed to hear to get set free and love my kid well. You're the best!"

I love this, Leah, and I hope that all of you listening who might feel like you're in a season like this, whether it's a kid or yourself. Sometimes we need solitude. We need rest. Connection isn't just about others. It's also about you. You can connect to yourself and allow the same for those you live with by being alone. So take that message from Leah as permission. We're not all or nothing here. Yes, we want deep friendships, but we also want deep care for ourselves, and sometimes that means an Introverts Day. So thank you for sharing, Leah, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

This episode is hosted by me, Kendra Adachi, and executive produced by Kendra Adachi, Jenna Fischer, and Angela Kinsey. The Lazy Genius Podcast is enthusiastically part of the Office Ladies Network. Special thanks to Leah Jarvis for weekly production.

Thanks, y'all, for listening, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week!