

Book Review

A Celebrated Trilogy on Friendship

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The concept and the nature of friendship have been discussed for centuries. Aristotle, Cicero, St. Augustine, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Aelred are only a few of the classic thinkers who explored the theme. In our contemporary world, friendships become more and more important as human populations grow in number, in mobility, and in communication resources, making human encounters more frequent and intense. My purpose here is to present a joint review of three books on friendship written by the same author (Yager, 1999, 2002, 2004). Although these books have already been published some time ago, I believe that this review will be useful for readers all over the world as a number of translations into several different languages have appeared recently.

1) *Friendshifts: The Power of Friendship and How It Shapes Our Lives* (Yager, 1999) is divided in five parts. In the first part (That's what friends are for) the author discusses the power and perspectives on friendships, the definition of a friend and an acquaintance, and friendship patterns. The second part is devoted to the analysis of how friendship changes throughout life (friendshifts) from childhood to adult life. The following part presents tips to be a better friend, to maintain and improve a friendship, to prevent a friendship from ending and to handle those that end. The fourth item analyses work and friendship, particularly how friendship enhances one's career, and work friendships with the opposite-sex. Finally, the last part explores the friendship factor in everyday life, providing some hints to make friendship a priority and to make friends and keep them for life.

In this book, the author shows the impact friends have on how long one lives and how successful one is during one's lifetime. The book is based on 20 years of study, interviews and surveys, showing how friends are important in one's life. According to the author, healthy friendships can help self-esteem, reduce stress and improve the quality of life while harmful friends may be a dangerous companion. The author indicates how to recognize and deal with harmful friendships and she also offers guidance on being a better

friend, distinguishing causal, close and best friends. The book covers friendship patterns including the formative years, how and why friendships begin and are maintained, coping with various kinds of endings, work and friendship, divorce and friendship, and friendship principles that also help family. Friendship skills benefit all key relationships: with spouse, boss, children, siblings, as well as work associates. She demonstrates how friends can improve the quality of our lives, enhance our self-esteem, provide encouragement, and compensate for family defects.

2) *When Friendship Hurts: How to deal with friends who betray, abandon, or wound you* (Yager, 2002) is divided in five parts covering: (a) the basics of friendships, including the definition of friendship and the importance of detecting harmful people before friendship; (b) why friends hurt friends; (c) how to cope with friendship problems and if friendships can be saved or when and how to end it; (d) friendships at work and their particularities; (e) how to find good friends.

The book also provides practical advice to understand and cope with problematic friendships. Based on original research, it demonstrates why and how to avoid bad friends as well as how to develop positive friendships that enrich our lives. She focuses on identifying and handling their negative aspects, such as betrayals, abandonment, and any other type of behavior that hurts. As the author points out, developing meaningful friendships can be difficult, especially when dealing with the hurts and disappointments of past relationships. The book provides a guide for dealing with problems and improving friendships.

The author distinguishes between positive friendships (which are mutually beneficial to both friends and that can last a lifetime) and negative (destructive, or unhealthy) friendships. She gives readers the tool to detect and cope with friendships that are harmful, provides insight into why certain friendships have ended or should end, and suggests ways for choosing good friends. She considers three categories of friend: casual, close and best friendships and considers the impact of early relationships with parents or siblings, and how these relationships affect friendships choices and interactions. Trust, empathy, honesty, confidentiality, and commonality are presented as important friendship qualities. On the other side, the book identifies 21 types of potentially negative friends, including the promise breaker, the cheat, the discloser, the interloper, the rival, and others.

3) *Who's That Sitting at My Desk? How to succeed by mastering work relationships* (Yager, 2004). Based on a survey of 400 men and women and more than a hundred interviews, the book explores relationships with friends and foes at work and how to connect with friends and deal more effectively with foes. A "workship" is proposed as the essential work relationship, which is more than an acquaintance but less than a friendship, although some workships do become friendships. The book discusses the role of friends and foes in the workplace and how to identify them. The benefits and possible negative consequences of

workplace friends are exposed. It identifies different types of workplace relationships with a co-worker, boss, subordinate/employee, client or customer and vendors or suppliers. In practical terms, it advises on (a) how to start, and maintain, a relationship at work; (b) how to turn a workship into a friendship; (c) how to recognize a workship and its benefits; (d) how to handle a friendship with a boss or an employee; (e) how to deal with unfriendly people at work; (f) how to manage opposite-sex business friendships; (g) how to deal with conflicts; (h) how to maintain workships or friendships after a job or career change.

The author also addresses other aspects of work and friendship: the power of relationships; cultural concerns (race, religion, alternative lifestyle); coping with endings, kinds of potential foes at work and how to deal with them; how workships and friendships help or hinder getting a job or growing a business; and personality traits. She offers a clear roadmap for developing and strengthening workplace relationships, exploring the impact of positive and negative relationships on workplaces and careers. In sum, the book brings several suggestions for getting along with others at the workplace.

4) *In sum*, all three books bring a vivid contribution to all those interested in friendships, in business and everyday life. The three books are based on data from surveys and interviews, what provides a rich and vivid descriptive and narrative basis: dozens of illustrative examples from the many people interviewed, and stories from people describing their own experiences enable a powerful communication with readers, connecting writer and reader, in a wide range of everyday situations which are familiar even for those living and working in other countries. The storytelling technique provides several identification situations for readers to get involved in the reading. The language is straightforward and accessible and the style is pleasant. The books serve as guides for developing healthy relationships with a lot of practical advice. This practical and prescriptive character attracts the reader who feels that it may make a difference in his or her life. The book also raises several points which deserve more specific and extensive investigation. In sum, the trilogy deals with significant relationships for everyone, in a practical manner, based on extensive empirical basis, resulting in a accessible, pleasant, and useful reading.

5) *The Author* - Jan Yager has a Ph.D. in sociology from City University in New York (1983) and acted as an assistant professor at the Department of Behavioral Sciences at New York Institute of Technology and as a visiting assistant professor at Penn State. She has also taught at the University of Connecticut, St. John's University, Temple University and The New School. She is a member of the National Speakers Association and the International Association for Relationship Research. She is author of more than twenty books published by different companies (Scribner's, Wiley, Doubleday, Facts on File, Simon & Schuster, Hannacroix Creek Books, and Prentice-Hall) and regularly quoted in the media (the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, Self, Dallas Morning News, USA Today, etc.) and

interviewed on TV/cable and radio programs (The Oprah Winfrey Show, The Today Show, Good Morning, America, The View, CBS News' Sunday Morning Show, National Public Radio, BBC radio, and others). Her books have been translated into numerous languages including Spanish, Italian, French, Dutch, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Indonesian, Russian, Arabic, Turkish, Greek, Hebrew, German, Portuguese and Czech.

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