

How to rid your life of naysayers

There are only two categories of people in your life; those that 'have' to be there, and those your 'choose' to be there. The trick to creating a network of positive support is to recognise who is in each category, and when names appear that in neither, to let them go.

The 'Have to be's' in your life

None of us are islands, we can only survive through cooperation and collaboration. The only time we thrive is when that collaboration and cooperation is to put to good use. However, sometimes we confuse what it means to be in this category;

Work-life

Work colleagues may morph into friendships over time, but be warned that these friendships might be built on shaky foundations and may not be positive. If you ask yourself 'would I have chosen this person as my friend if we hadn't been forced by circumstance in working together?' and the answer is a solid 'yes', then it is likely that this person shares at least some of your core values, believes things that are at least compatible with your beliefs, and behaves in a way that you find acceptable, even if it doesn't quite match your ideal. However, if the answer is a 'no', then what are you doing pretending that this person is your friend? To be a 'no' they must not share some core value of yours, must have some incompatible beliefs, and behave in some way that is too far away from your ideal to be acceptable, and therefore will often cast a negative shadow over your life, so why the pretence of friendship?

"I'm not suggesting you make a scene and have a row with a colleague simply because you've woken up to the fact that he or she isn't really your friend. There's no need for that, but what I am recommending you do is save yourself some grief; you already know that it's just a matter of time before this person upsets you, lets you down, or in some other way causes you pain, so cut them loose before they do. Distance is all that's required; a polite stepping back from forced friendliness, a focus on the work matters instead of drifting into areas that are not of concern, and an acceptance that this person may initially respond in a way that is uncomfortable. Don't worry, both you and they will soon get over it because you were never really friends to begin with. Your aim should be to achieve a relationship of effective collaboration and mutual cooperation. Who knows, they may be as relieved as you are that the pretence of the relationship being anything more than about work is over!"

Family

You may choose your friends but you are born into your family, that much is for certain. After that, nothing is certain at all. Some family members are going to be better for you than others; that's not to say that they don't care about you, they may even love you. However, having feelings for a family member has nothing to do with them being a positive influence in your life. Some will be, and others will not. Therefore, the key is to recognise in which category each family member resides. Inevitably, most family members will want the best for you. There will be some that are wracked with jealousy, personal insecurity, or angst, but they are almost always easy to spot and toss onto the 'unhelpful pile'. The remainder are more tricky because they confuse their own beliefs and limitations about themselves and their lives with you and yours. They are not you, nor you them. Therefore, be objective about what they say and do as you sort them into either being helpful or unhelpful. It helps to be kind and accept that they probably mean to be helpful and caring, but also to be brutal in making sure the unhelpful family members are properly sorted.

"Once they are on the unhelpful pile I'm not suggesting they are cut out of your life or ignored, far from it. Family is one of the most precious resources we have, which is why it's best to be clear what they bring to the table; the well-meaning but inevitably negative and downbeat brother, sister, aunt, uncle, or even parent isn't acting that way because they want to cause you harm, but because they want to save you from it. Once you realise that their intentions are good then it's much easier to put their comments into a mental box labelled 'caring but meaningless', and then move past their negativity without skipping a beat. The kinder you are to them, the kinder you are ultimately being to yourself."

Friends

Not all friendships are equal. If a person has more than half a dozen true friends with whom they can share almost anything, and on whom they can always rely, then they are doing well. Most people confuse the term friendship with acquaintance, often with acquaintances who share their interests, or acquaintances with whom they enjoy spending time, but they are acquaintances non-the-less. Sometimes, particularly in today's world of social-media, friendships are mistaken for connections with people with whom we barely know, or have actually never even met. 'Conversations' may take place on forums, chat-rooms, or Facebook pages that then cause one person to imagine that they value the opinion of another. In the world of friendships it is highly likely that there will be more 'chaff' than 'wheat', and that if any negative-ness from the 'chaff' is allowed to creep into decision making it'll be a mistake to allow it to shape your life.

"Peer groups are important because we become like the people we consistently hang around with. There is a scientific reason for this that goes beyond obvious influence; we are all equipped with things called 'mirror-neurons', they are nerve cells that focus outwards rather than like most that are targeted internally. These mirror-neurons are what cause us to reflect the world around us and behave in ways that end in us sometimes behaving like people we don't like, respect, or relate to, - simply because we've spent too much time with them. Therefore, make a conscious choice rather than allowing your unconscious to undermine you."

The 'Choose to be's' in your life

Work life

When you know what your own values are, when you are clear about your own beliefs, and when you can articulate clearly what you want out of your life, then you are in a position to decide who out of all of your colleagues and bosses is a good 'fit'. These people are much more likely to be supportive and positive influences in your life.

"It's perfectly possible to make great friends from the workplace if you know what you are looking for, but remember that if you allow you own needs to get in the way then you might make bad choices; for example, we all need certainty and feelings of control, but if you confuse the control you think you have over subordinates with friendship then you're only fooling yourself. Choose wisely, based on the things that matter and not the illusions that don't."

Family

Weirdly, there are less family members likely to be positive and energising influences than might be imagined, not because they don't want to be but because they confuse their own agenda with yours. Family will often want to err on the side of caution because to be supportive and then be

wrong may feel worse than simply being a naysayer and staying safe. There will be one or two members of your family that can see past their own fears and are able to put your agenda above their own; find them, nurture them, and use them to help you achieve your goals.

"Wisdom coming from elders is a common experience in all cultures. It happens because not only do some older people have valuable experience, but also because they have moved past the need to feed their own ego or agenda by the time it comes to focus on you. Not all old people are wise, neither is wisdom restricted to the accumulation of years, but what's always consistent is the ability to separate themselves from the situation, and then see things with clarity, speak about them clearly, and keep focused on your needs above all else. Which is why wisdom is always positive, even if it warns against something!"

Friends

Those few friends that can be relied on are the ones that you need not see for months or even years on end, but can still call on in times of need. They are the people who will hear you out without commenting or putting their own ideas before yours, and they are the few who will ask the questions that others dare not breach. They won't always cheer you from the rafters, but they will never be naysayers or the sake of it. If one of these people asks you to think again, then think very carefully indeed. If they wholeheartedly support you and wish you well, then accept their confidence as genuine and add it to your own. Whatever you do, make sure that you cherish these relationships and see them for the gift that they are.

"A friend in need is actually quite rare, more often than not they are friends that you actually want to come to you if they are in need rather than ones to be avoided in case they call on you to do something for them. They are rare because they care about you as much as you do about them, and as such they would never ask you for your support unless they genuinely needed it. So, if you are looking for someone to talk to before you take on the challenges of a new year, then you know who you need to be speaking to."

"Make next year one where you surround yourself with people who support you, and to whom you also want to be supportive!"

Martin Goodyer