

A Little Friendship Pruning



“**H**ow callous!” This was my initial reaction upon learning of Deborah Szekely’s philosophy on simplifying her life. Now I think, “How wise!” Every decade, this 80-something founder of the Rancho La Puerta Spa evaluates all of her friendships and decides who is going to accompany her into the next decade. “Time is so precious,” she says. “I only want to be with people who think youthfully, are engaged in life learning and who can enhance my life.” She’s right. Who we spend time with, and what we say yes to, require us to have our own goals and be selective. I became acutely aware of the passage of time when I blew out 50 candles on my cake. For many of us, starting in our forties we experience a growing awareness of our need for physical, emotional and spiritual well being, and renewal. In the strainer of life, we begin to sift out the lumps that clog up our karma—people who drain our energy, and obligations that no longer make sense.

“At 50,” declared Penny Shore, “I now can choose how I want to live my life. Time is such a valuable resource. I just don’t want to waste it on people and things that don’t matter.” Hope Sealy, 62, feels the same way. “I stopped inviting people I felt

obliged to entertain, especially if I felt the motivation was only a dry courtesy. I found it easier to choose how I wanted to live.”

So how do you choose which friendships remain and which ones get cut? Take a deep breath, and let your heart reflect on whether you feel this way with any of your friends:

- I hope their voice mail is on when I call them.
- I can’t bring myself to readily pick up the phone when their name appears on call display.
- My mind wanders with disinterest during our conversations.
- My energy is drained after communicating with this person.
- I have little patience or compassion when listening to their worries or problems.
- Whatever brought us together initially is no longer relevant for my life journey.
- Are they life-enhancing or life-diminishing?

If this list triggered a sensitive spot (or two), it may be time to change the nature of the relationship. Are you ready to minimize contact or let them go—gently or directly? It’s your choice.

Sometimes we maintain a friendship more from habit than from heartfelt connection. Or perhaps we share a childhood history. Pam White, 63, is thankful (even relieved), that her

cousin

now lives in another city. “Although we grew up together – almost like sisters—I can’t stand to be with her for more than an hour. We have absolutely nothing in common anymore, yet I’m so aware of my dwindling family that I still want to keep in touch with her.”

What would make your life simpler, more joyful, and less stressful? Would a little relationship pruning be in order? Here is some final wisdom from author Helen Weinzweig, 83. “There are no returns on time spent, so I’ve become very greedy about how, and with whom, I spend my time. We all have a choice, but we often subscribe to what everyone will approve of. If you can stand up to disapproval, to non-acceptance, to being isolated—this is freedom and being true to yourself.”

This article was adapted, with permission, from the book, *Use The Good Dishes—Finding Joy in Everyday Life*. Dr. Elaine Dembe is a keynote speaker, media personality, best selling author and international authority on stress resiliency and motivation. www.ElaineDembe.com