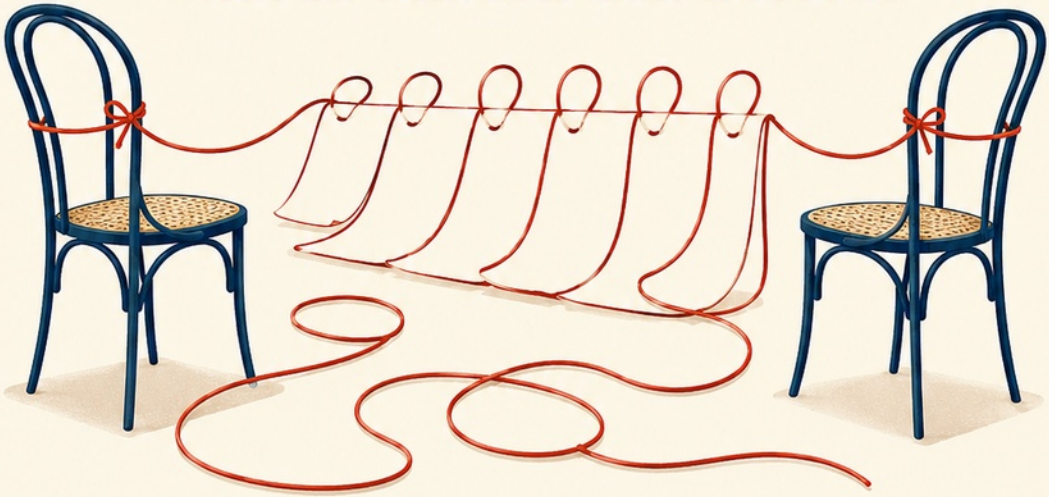
MAX PARADOX

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

Self-Help with a Sense of Humor ;)

I Have Friends, but We Always Meet "Someday"

How to Keep Friendships Alive When the Next Free Date Is in 2029



We have a problem. Relax. We can solve it—and have a laugh along the way.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRO 1

Chapter 1 - “We Really Should Meet” 9

Chapter 2 - Your Friends Are Not Avoiding You. Probably. .18

Chapter 3 - The Friendship Scheduling Trap 29

Chapter 4 - You Are Busier Than You Think. And Less Busy Than You Think..... 41

Chapter 5 - The Group Chat Is Not the Friendship..... 54

Chapter 6 - Stop Keeping Score 65

Chapter 7 - Stop Waiting for Everyone to Feel Like It 78

Chapter 8 - Friendship Should Not Require a Special Occasion..... 91

Chapter 9 - Build a Friendship Default 105

Chapter 10 - Make the Invitation Easier to Say Yes To 118

Chapter 11 - Stop Making Every Friendship Use the Same Format 132

Chapter 12 - How to Restart a Friendship Without Writing an Apology Memo 147

Chapter 13 - Remember the Next Question..... 163

Chapter 14 - Not Every Friend Needs the Same Amount of You 178

Chapter 15 - What to Do When the Plan Keeps Failing..... 194

Chapter 16 - When Nobody Has Any Energy 211

Chapter 17 - What If You Are Always the One Who Reaches Out? 226

Chapter 18 - Friendship Changes Shape.....240
Chapter 19 - Create a Friendship Recovery System.....254
Chapter 20 - Stop Saying “Someday”.....270

INTRO

You have friends. Good friends, even. People you genuinely like. People you would happily spend an evening with, assuming the evening can be scheduled sometime after the next presidential administration. Every few weeks, somebody writes, “We really need to get together!” Everyone reacts with enthusiasm. Hearts appear. Someone says, “Absolutely!” Another person adds, “It’s been way too long!” For approximately twelve minutes, the friendship feels alive, warm, and dangerously close to producing an actual plan.

Then somebody asks, “When are you free?”

Silence.

Not hostile silence. Not friendship-ending silence. Administrative silence. Everyone has opened a calendar and discovered that adulthood has apparently become a military logistics exercise. Tuesday is impossible because of work. Wednesday someone has the kids. Thursday looked promising until a dentist appointment appeared from nowhere. Friday is technically available, but nobody wants to spend their one surviving ounce of energy putting on real pants. Saturday is booked until the invention of a new Saturday. Sunday is for recovering from Saturday, even though Saturday did not actually contain anything enjoyable.

Eventually someone writes, “Maybe next month?”

Perfect. Next month is where all wonderful things live.

This is how modern friendships often fade without anybody deciding to end them. There is no argument, betrayal, dramatic unfollowing, or scene in a restaurant where someone says, “I think we’ve grown apart,” while carefully avoiding eye contact with the bread basket. Instead, the

friendship slowly becomes a collection of good intentions. You still care. You still think about each other. You still send birthday messages, memes, photos of ridiculous products, and occasional updates beginning with “You will not believe what happened.” But actually seeing one another starts to feel like organizing an international summit involving four governments and one friend who works shifts.

The strange part is that nobody wanted this.

You did not wake up one morning and decide, “I would like my social life to become a quarterly newsletter.” Your friends did not secretly vote to reduce contact to three reels, one Christmas message, and a vague promise involving brunch. Life simply filled up. Jobs became more demanding. Relationships arrived. Children arrived. Commutes got longer. Energy got shorter. Parents needed help. Homes required maintenance. People moved. Some began working weekends. Others began guarding weekends like emergency oxygen supplies. The free time that used to appear automatically now has to be negotiated with the precision of a moon landing.

And because friendship rarely screams for attention, it loses.

Work has deadlines. Bills have due dates. Kids have school pickups. The dentist sends reminders with the persistence of a debt collector. Your friendship with Chris does not send a notification saying, “WARNING: You have not had a real conversation in 137 days. Relationship maintenance recommended.” There is no red badge on your home screen showing “3 neglected friendships.” Nobody charges a late fee.

Friendship is polite like that.

Unfortunately, polite things are very easy to postpone.

The result is a peculiar adult problem: you can have people in your life and still feel like you never see them. You may even feel guilty about it. You remember that you have not called someone, decide you should call them, then wait until you have enough time for a "proper conversation." Naturally, the perfect ninety-minute window does not arrive. Three weeks pass. Now calling feels slightly awkward because it has been too long, so you postpone it again until you can explain why you postponed it. Congratulations. You have created paperwork for a phone call.

The same thing happens with meeting in person. We imagine friendship requires a proper event: dinner, drinks, a full Saturday, a weekend away, maybe matching luggage and a photographer. If we cannot provide the premium friendship package, we provide nothing. We reject a quick coffee because it seems too small. We do not suggest a twenty-minute walk because it feels insufficient. We wait for the magical evening when everyone is free, rested, cheerful, financially comfortable, and interested in leaving the house at the same time.

That evening is currently scheduled for May 14, 2029.

At 7:30.

One of you will cancel.

The problem is not that you do not care enough. Usually, the problem is that friendship is being managed with rules that made sense when your time was cheaper. At sixteen, spending five hours with someone could happen because you both existed in roughly the same building and had not yet been asked to compare mortgage rates. In college, you might see friends simply because everybody was nearby. In your

early twenties, plans could begin with “Want to grab a drink?” and somehow happen that same day, an organizational achievement now regarded with the same awe as ancient Roman engineering.

Adult friendship needs more intention, but the word “intention” is dangerous because self-help has done terrible things to it. I am not going to ask you to build a friendship vision board, create a color-coded relationship dashboard, or wake up every morning and say, “Today I choose connection” while sunlight lands perfectly on your face. You have enough responsibilities. Your friends are not another project to optimize.

They are also not houseplants.

Although, to be fair, both suffer when you remember them once every four months.

What you need is a simpler way to keep friendships alive when everyone is busy, tired, geographically inconvenient, overbooked, under-rested, and occasionally unwilling to participate in society after 6:00 p.m. That means replacing the fantasy of perfect availability with smaller, repeatable contact. It means learning which friendships need regular maintenance and which can survive happily on less frequent contact. It means making plans that are easier to say yes to, stopping the endless “we should meet” loop, and understanding that a short conversation now is often more valuable than an imaginary three-hour dinner later.

It also means accepting something mildly irritating: spontaneity gets harder with age. You can complain about this, resist it, and keep pretending that real friendship should “just happen,” or you can work with reality. Scheduling a friend does not make the friendship less genuine. You

schedule vacations, concerts, haircuts, workouts, medical appointments, and meetings about meetings. Putting someone you love on the calendar is not proof that the relationship has become corporate. It is proof that your calendar has become aggressive.

This book will show you how to protect friendships without turning them into obligations. You will learn how to make plans that actually happen, how to stay connected between meetings, how to stop confusing frequency with closeness, how to handle friends with completely different schedules, and what to do when you are always the one initiating. We will deal with canceled plans, group chats that produce eighteen jokes and zero dates, long-distance friendships, mismatched effort, social exhaustion, and the dangerous sentence, “Let’s find a weekend when everyone is free.”

We will also talk about what not to do. You do not need to guilt people into seeing you. You do not need to keep every friendship at exactly the same intensity forever. You do not need to interpret every delayed reply as evidence that someone no longer cares. And you definitely do not need to create a twelve-person scheduling poll containing thirty-seven possible dates unless you have developed a personal hatred of peace.

The goal is not to become more social.

The goal is to stop losing good people to logistics.

Because most friendships do not need dramatic rescue missions. They need small signs of life. A message sent before you have the perfect words. A coffee that lasts forty minutes instead of waiting six months for dinner. A recurring plan that removes the need to negotiate civilization from scratch every time. A phone call while you are driving

somewhere. A walk. A voice message. A simple, specific invitation.

Nothing heroic.

Just enough contact to stop “someday” from becoming “remember when we used to hang out?”

And ideally, sometime before 2029.

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Chapter 1 - “We Really Should Meet”

The message usually arrives at a moment when nobody is prepared to do anything about it.

Maybe someone posts an old photo in the group chat. Four people are standing in a bar, looking younger, better rested, and apparently capable of staying awake after 10:30 p.m. Someone replies, “We really need to do this again.” Another person adds, “Yes! It’s been forever.” Then come the hearts, the laughing faces, and the ritual declaration:

“We HAVE to meet soon.”

Everybody agrees.

Nobody suggests a date.

This is the adult friendship equivalent of putting something in your online shopping cart and feeling as though you already own it. The intention creates a tiny emotional reward. You have acknowledged the friendship. You have publicly confirmed that everybody still matters. For a moment, this feels like progress.

It is not progress.

It is affectionate administration.

“We should meet soon” is one of the nicest useless sentences in the English language. It sounds warm, sociable, and hopeful. It also contains no time, no place, no decision, and no person responsible for doing anything next. It is basically a motivational poster wearing a jacket.

The sentence is not the problem by itself. The problem is what it allows us to believe. We interpret mutual enthusiasm as evidence that the friendship is being maintained. Everybody wants to meet, therefore everything is fine. But

wanting and doing occupy different departments of the brain, and those departments apparently stopped speaking after college.

If you want to understand why friendships begin drifting into "someday," start here: vague intention feels almost as satisfying as concrete action, but costs far less.

That is dangerous.

Imagine you text a friend, "We should grab dinner soon." They respond, "Definitely!" Your brain records a positive social interaction. Good. Friendship confirmed. No rejection. No awkwardness. No calendar conflict. No need to choose between Tuesday and Thursday. You received most of the emotional reward without doing the irritating logistical part.

Then life resumes.

Two weeks later, you still have not had dinner.

The same mechanism appears everywhere. "I need to start exercising." "I should sort out my finances." "I really need to clean that closet." "We should take a trip." These statements create the comforting sensation that a plan exists when what actually exists is a sentence.

Friendships are especially vulnerable because there is rarely an immediate consequence. Skip the gym for three months and your body may file a complaint. Ignore your electricity bill and the utility company has systems. Ignore a friend for three months and they will probably not send a formal notice titled FINAL REMINDER: FRIENDSHIP ACCOUNT OVERDUE.

So the gap between intention and action can grow quietly.

The first thing to fix is therefore surprisingly simple: stop treating expressions of affection as plans.