

SIMPLE PARAPHRASING EXAMPLES

The causes of modern social problems, from divorce to homelessness and obesity, are often thought to be based in areas such as poverty, stress or unhappiness. But researchers suggest we are overlooking something crucial: friendship. It would appear that our society is ignoring its importance. The philosopher Aristotle said, "In poverty and other misfortunes of life, true friends are a sure refuge. They keep the young out of mischief; they comfort and aid the old in their weakness, and they incite those in the prime of life to noble deeds." Friendships are vital for wellbeing, but they take time to develop and can't be artificially created. No wonder they are at risk of being neglected. Nevertheless, the Gallup Organization's director, Tom Rath, believes that we are all aware of the value of friendship especially during difficult times. In his book, *Vital Friends: The People You Can't Afford To Live Without*, Rath makes the point that if you ask people why they became homeless, why their marriage failed or why they overeat, they often say it is because of the poor quality, or nonexistence, of friendships. They feel outcast or unloved. Rath undertook a massive study of friendship, alongside several leading researchers. His work resulted in some surprising statistics: If your best friend eats healthily, you are five times more likely to have a healthy diet yourself. Married people say friendship is more than five times as important as physical intimacy within marriage. Those who say they have no real friends at work have only a one in 12 chance of feeling engaged in their job.

Conversely, if you have a "best friend at work", you are seven times more likely to feel engaged in your job. The book was very well-received by the business world as well as by readers who could identify with the points made about these often unexplored relationships. On its release, *Time* magazine stated, "Let friendship ring. It might look like idle chatter, but when employees find friends at work, they feel connected to their jobs."

Having a best friend at work is a strong predictor for being a happy and productive employee." The book recommends carrying out your own "friendship audit", in order to recognize which of your friendships provide you with the different things you need, then to sharpen each friendship in line with its strength. Of course, it's not always a good idea to judge friends in a detached way, or to doubt a friendship just because you can't easily identify its rewards. The closest friends like each other for who they are in themselves, not for what they deliver. In fact, Aristotle made the point that it is better to give than to receive in friendship. Aristotle also believed that friendship can only arise indirectly, like



ORIGINAL

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happiness. It comes with living what he called a good life, including strong personal values such as honesty, character and passion. Our contemporary culture, for all its benefits, tends to focus more on commerce rather than to help us live Aristotle's "good life". British writer Mark Vernon found support for this idea. He quotes the philosopher Epicurus, "The noble man is most involved with wisdom and friendship." Oscar Wilde also emphasized the altruistic aspect of true friendship when he said, "Anybody can sympathize with the sufferings of a friend, but it requires a very fine nature to sympathize with a friend's success." In his search for the essence of friendship, Vernon explored a variety of definitions from well-known personalities. For example, Ralph Emerson said, "A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere." Vernon's book, *The Philosophy of Friendship*, makes the point that we have now established that money does not buy happiness. He suggests that we take the lead from Aristotle, and spend at least a fifth of our time with our friends. "Is this not what children do in their persistent requests to play with their friends?" he asks. Vernon writes that a close friend is a mirror of your own self, someone with whom you realize that, though autonomous, you are not alone. He adds that friendship is also important in politics because it "cultivates the virtues, such as creativity and compassion, which are essential to a flourishing society". He concludes that if we cultivate friendship, we can "lift some of the burden from our apparently unhappy, isolated selves".

