

Ways To Improve Your Social Prospects Before You Try Meeting Anyone

When it comes to getting a social circle together, there's a leap that takes place between not hanging around with any body and having a friend or two. For some this leap is quick and simple. They get out there and start meeting people. For others it's not as easy. They may be anxious about putting themselves out there or not particularly motivated to make friends. They could be stuck in a rut, comfortable or otherwise.

In these cases (and I'd consider myself in this category) every little bit helps. Here are some suggestions to help you gear yourself up towards going after a social life:

Get out of the house and be in the presence of people more often

Even if you don't talk to anyone, being in the presence of other people provides you with a small, vicarious amount of exposure to the social world. It helps your brain fall into that rhythm. It reminds you that a larger social realm does exist out there. Sometimes by just being somewhere alongside other people, you can get a sense of belonging and social connectedness.

Hm, that sounds a bit vague and spacey. I guess it is in a way, but I've noticed this effect in my own life. If I just stay in my apartment all the time and play video games and browse the web, I get too caught up in my own head or alternative little universes such as cliquish discussion board. When I start doing things like seeing a band or attending a fair on my own, my perspective gets pulled outwards and I start thinking of myself as a factor in a larger whole. My concerns start to shift to how I'm doing in the real world, as opposed to the imaginary ones from my Wii.

I'll be the first to admit this affect is subtle, but every little bit can count. Of course there's always a chance getting out more will make you feel even more lonely and cut off from everyone. Also, when I say 'get out of the house', I mean more than running errands such as taking five minutes to return your movies.

And there's always the chance that by getting out you'll end up meeting someone. The points below, besides from being useful for their own sake, will give you some reasons to leave your place.

Explore your city or town and learn what's fun to do

When you have friends you do things with them. That's really obvious...but at the same time it's something I used to not quite grasp. I spent so much time hanging around by myself in front of a TV/computer/book that I knew very little about the area I lived in. Yeah, I was knowledgeable about the basic landmarks, but I wasn't thinking in terms of, "This is a cool neighborhood", or "This is a good place to eat", or "The Open Mike Night is fun at this place on Wednesdays" or "If I knew someone who mountain bikes, I should tell them about this trail". Once or twice I wouldn't be able to make plans with someone because we couldn't figure out anything to do after having to rule out the simple options of seeing a movie or hanging out at one of our places.

People who have friends naturally know these things. They know cheap places to eat after a late night out. They know about neat, obscure festivals that pass through town. They know when a cool little band is playing at a hole in the wall bar. They know about quirky little coffee houses or days when you can get cheap tickets to sporting events.

Take some time to learn all this stuff for yourself. It'll come in handy when you start hanging around people. You'll easily be able to suggest things to do, instead of being relatively clueless. You'll also likely become a more interesting person in the process of learning about all this stuff.

Follow along with popular events in the world

This is another way you can vicariously be part of a larger group without really knowing anyone. It helps unconsciously tune your mind into the bigger social world. Again, the effect is subtle.

Instead of totally doing your own thing and essentially living in your own world, take some time to follow along with popular events in the outside world. 'Popular' doesn't have to mean 'Lowest Common Denominator Fleeting Trends' either. Keep up with important news stories. Be aware of what's going on in locally relevant sports. Keep up with popular TV shows, the kind everyone at the office talks about the next day. Be up to

speed on developments in niches and subcultures that you're interested in.

Sometimes you can feel noble for completely eschewing the outside world, like you're a better person for ignoring the whims of the masses. True in way. But you can get too cut off. People are social and need to be connected to each other. Following the same events as they do helps you meet this requirement in a way. However, for some readers doing this may make them feel even more alienated. They may feel they can't fit in and that they're different from everyone else. Following this point may reinforce that belief...

Get an outside life of your own

Building on previous points. Get out of the house for its own sake. Get out to learn about your immediate surroundings. Also, try to get an actual life going that requires you to be outside of your residence. Join a gym. Join classes. See bands. Join a sports team. Get into the habit of reading at a coffee shop instead of indoors. Participate in an activity that you can do around, and alongside other people, but without having to interact with them if you're not up to it yet. Make a plan to check out a new bar every weekend. If you hate going alone, just drop in for a couple of minutes and then leave. If you don't like bars, do it with something else like restaurants or comedy clubs.

Odds are good all of this will put you in the position to meet some new people. Even if it doesn't, you should enjoy the activities for their own sake. If nothing else, doing this should help pull you out of your rut and help stop you from seeing yourself as a loser who sits around at home all the time.

Do, learn, and experience things that will help you relate to people more easily

I'll keep this point short because I talk about this all through the site. When I had few friends I was honestly a pretty esoteric guy. I had weird, obscure interests, thoughts, and hobbies. I was out of touch with the typical person. There were things that most people did that I wasn't able to relate to them about. Once I realized this and started trying fix that problem it naturally became easier for me to talk to people. Not because I had discovered Super Secret Rapport Trick J, but because I now knew about, say, the popular bands and could naturally chat about it (and I found I legitimately liked some of those bands, and that I was sometimes eager to talk about music). Or I could have fun at a club now because I had taught myself to dance, when before I'd feel totally out of place and couldn't see why everyone seemed to enjoy such a pointless activity. Okay, enough of that.

Get other parts of your life in order that relate to socializing

An appearance that is frankly dull and unstylish? Mental baggage? You've been meaning to move out of your parent's house but have been putting it off? These things will impact how well you do socially. You can work on all of those issues before you actually try to get a social life together and you'll have one less hindrance once you start. Not that you should endlessly put off trying to make friends to 'be as ready as possible' though.

Practice certain social skills online

I'll consider doing things online not part of the "real" social world. There's some debate on how much interacting with people online can help you practice your social skills. In my experience it can help, but mainly if you try to make your online socializing as much like real world socializing as you can. It's not hard to see that the online world has it's own rules and conventions. If you stick to them you won't get as much benefit (you may still get something out of it), or you may end up teaching yourself bad habits.

Exchanging emails with people or posting on discussion boards or comment threads may help a bit, but I think chatting online with someone to practice your conversational and relationship building skills is the best thing you can do. You could do this in a chat room or while playing an online game. You can practice things like initiating and carrying on conversations, making and maintaining friendships, and even organizing group activities (e.g., a raid in an MMORPG). Like I said, when you do it, try to make the experience as much like real life as possible:

- Type out complete sentences, not short, clipped ones. Write what you'd say in real life. It's just my taste, but I try to avoid the lol, brb style abbreviations and misspelling as well. Make your brain think

this is a real world conversation.

- Try to carry your weight in the conversation. Don't answer someone else's question with "good u?" If the other person isn't speaking much then try to speak more yourself and draw them into the conversation.
- Don't give yourself much time to think out your response. Spit it out quickly.
- Avoid that online obnoxiousness if you're prone to it. You know, don't say anything you wouldn't say to someone's face.
- Don't refer to internet jokes and gags that you'd never be able to use in real life. Assume you're talking to someone who doesn't know about all that stuff. Don't use a style of humor that would only fly online, or that only works with text.
- Don't use flashy smileys or post funny images, animations, or links to pad out your conversations.
- Try to be yourself, and not play a larger than life online character. Just be normal and low key.
- Don't be more forward or brave than you would in the real world.
- Even if a certain way of interacting would work better to get somewhere with someone online, try to act like it's real life anyways. Overall, try out ways of interacting with people. It's not a perfect simulator, but I'd recommend trying it.
- I've talked about text chatting so far, but if you add voice chat and/or web cams to the mix, you can bump up the authenticity level.

I'm sure that's more detail than most people will need. You get the idea, pretend you're using 'real life' rules, even if the other person doesn't play along. One-on-one is good of course, but busy chat rooms or can also get you acquainted with the dynamics of group conversations. Don't hang back, try to get in there.