

Simplicity



Simple Social Skills & Relationships

BY HENRIK EDBERG

Introduction.....	3
1. On value.....	5
2. How to Improve Your Conversational Skills.....	9
3. How to Improve Your Listening Skills.....	22
4. The Importance of How Your Body Talks.....	26
5. How to Reduce Social Nervousness and Shyness.....	30
6. On Dating.....	33
7. Do You Make These 5 Common Relationship Mistakes?.....	39
8. Four Final Thoughts on Simpler Relationships.....	45

Copyright Henrik Edberg, 2011. You do not have the right to sell, share or claim the ownership of the content of this eBook.

This book is for informational purposes only and it contains my opinions based on my experience. You should always find the advice of a professional before taking action on something I have published.

Introduction

Perhaps the most popular area of personal development that I have written about on my blog is how to improve your social skills and relationships.

I totally understand that. The relationships we want and form are maybe the most important things in life. So I guess just about anyone would like to improve their social skills and relationship skills a bit at least.

This is also an area that I feel strongly about. Today I have good confidence in my social skills, I have overcome shyness and I am in a wonderful relationship with my awesome girlfriend.

But as I mentioned at the start of this course: things weren't always like that. Years ago my social skills were poor. I didn't understand much about social interactions and relationships. I was shy and nervous. I hadn't had a date in years.

In this module I will share the most effective and essential insights, practical tips and strategies that have helped me to improve in a huge way.

You will learn how to make improvements in a simple way and also to simplify your social life.

Key simplicity habits in this module and area of life are:

- Giving value and exploring new ways to give more value.
- Assuming rapport.
- Thinking less and instead being in the present moment.
- Being interested in and curious about other people and really listening to what they say.
- Letting go of old, complicating habits to simplify relationships.
- Balancing social time with time with solitude.

"Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value."

Albert Einstein

1. On Value

One of the most fundamental things in any relationship is value.

By value I mean what you bring to the relationship. It could be things like listening with full attention, having a positive vibe or offering a good solution for someone who needs it.

Why is value so important?

Well, because it is what we in one way or another exchange in relationships.

It is also so important to keep in mind because humans have a natural tendency to want to give back. And they tend to give back the amount they receive and treat you as you treat them.

By this I mean in practical terms that someone who genuinely smiles a lot and has positive attitude tends to get that back from the people around her. She receives a lot of smiles and people tend to interact with her in a positive, friendly and perhaps enthusiastic way. She gets what she gives. She gets what she invests in both the first interaction she has with someone and in her ongoing relationships with a partner, at work and with friends and family.

So what you give or do not give in relationships tend to determine a whole lot about them and your social life.

What value do you bring to conversations, to new relationships and to old ones? That is something essential to consider and keep in mind.

To make it easier to see how you can bring more value I will now list some of the most common and best ways to bring value to your relationships:

- **Give your undivided attention.** One of most powerful pieces of value one can give is simply to give someone to their undivided attention. To be there 100 % and listen and be interested in the other person.
- **Bring a positive vibe.** When you bring a positive vibe with you then you make any interaction or relationship more fun and enjoyable. You give positive feelings and that is also what people will tend to give back to you. By being a source of positive emotions you become valuable for people and someone they want to have some kind of relationship with.
- **Take the lead and be assertive.** Create a fun situation for your friends such as a picnic or a night out on the town. It's easier to just tag along of course than to plan something but people appreciate that you made the effort and will feel like doing the same for you in the future.
- **Smile more.** This is a part of bringing a positive vibe I suppose. But it doesn't hurt to highlight a little extra how this very simple thing can improve any interaction. So smile more.
- **Give a genuine compliment.** Compliments are awesome. But make it a genuine one. Make sure you really mean it or it may have the opposite effect as your insincerity shines through.
- **Give more hugs.** A hug is, just like smiling, a simple physical thing that can make anyone feel a little better.

- **Encourage or cheer someone up.** There is much discouragement in the world. Be an exception and encourage people in small or big ways to believe in themselves and what they want to do.
- **Empathy.** Instead of just listening also acknowledge verbally that you have heard how someone feels. People don't just want someone to listen, they want to be and feel heard and understood too.
- **Help someone out in practical way.** Maybe it's not just encouragement or empathy that is needed. Sometimes the most important thing is a practical solution. So lend someone a hand when they are moving. Or give them a ride in your car. Or if they need information, try to find a solution via Google or by asking the people you know.
- **Help to put things into perspective.** It's easy to get wrapped up in a problem and make a mountain out of a molehill. But you can help out by adding your perspective. The two of you can talk about it, perhaps laugh about it and even find the hidden opportunity within the problem that in one person's head may have almost seemed like the sky was falling.
- **Be genuine and authentic.** Just being yourself fully is a way to bring value that people love and because you are being authentic and genuine they will feel like they can be that with you too and people love that freedom. Being yourself with people and making them feel like they can just be themselves too is a great way to bring value to relationships and conversations.

These are some of the most common ways to give value in relationships and conversations.

Use ways of giving value from this list that you haven't used much before and improve on the ways you are already using. Don't try to improve it all at once though. Use the workbook for this module and choose just one or at most two ways of giving value.

Make them habits by using the tips from the chapter on habits from module #2. If you can, integrate habits such as for example giving a positive vibe to people around you into your morning ritual or listening with your full attention into an evening ritual. This will make it easier to make the change stick, to start and end your day better socially and to positively affect that whole day and your week.

In the next few chapters I will go deeper and more practically into how you can improve how much value you give and the quality of that value.

"The royal road to a man's heart is to talk to him about the things he treasures most."

Dale Carnegie

2. How to Improve Your Conversational Skills

So the value you bring to your relationships, to the new and old ones is extremely important. Go in with a positive vibe and energy and you will usually get a response that is similar. Go in with a negative, tired and bored energy and you get that thrown back at you.

You get what you give. And improving your relationships and social skills starts with you making the effort and giving more value. Don't wait for others to do so to you. Then you will be waiting for a long time. You have to change you own ways first and then they will most often respond in kind.

This is the basic foundation of improving your social skills. Just by improving your general vibe and attitude things will change. So be sure to go over and apply the advice from the chapter on becoming an optimist from module 3.

Now we will take a look at some specific tips that will help you to improve your conversational skills.

The first tip is this: keep things simple. Just like with the other areas of this course, it is important to keep things simple to improve your interactions. If you have your head stuffed full with info that you try to use all at the same time you will get confused and

think too much. Try to instead just practice on and improving one or two concepts at a time.

The second tip is: Do one thing at a time and be here right now.

Yes, two of the foundational principles of this course can vastly improve your social life. How? Well, when you are doing just one thing at a time and for example just listening then you are there fully to 100 percent. And giving such attention to someone is rare in a world where people have too many things going on at once in their minds.

By being present and here in the now you are also being here fully without much thought in your mind. This is a great social headspace in my experience. It makes you more witty and funny, it makes you creative, it makes you appreciate and get more out of social interactions. When you are in the now with someone else the conversations tend to flow easily and be very good.

So this is another very good reason to form a habit of being present more of the time in your regular day.

Those two tips above have made a huge difference for me and my social skills. In this chapter I will also go into more specific and concrete tips that have helped me to improve my conversational skills.

The Easy Way to Make a Great First Impression

How do you make a great first impression? Well, the simplest way to do this that I have found is to assume rapport.

This one can work quickly. That is, if you can suspend your disbelief for while and keep your mind open. It won't work if you don't think it will work.

So, what is assuming rapport?

Basically, instead of going into a conversation or meeting nervously and thinking "how will this go?" you take different approach. You assume that you and the person(s) will establish a good connection (rapport).

How do you do that? Just before the meeting, you just think/pretend that you'll be meeting a good friend. Then you'll naturally slip into a more comfortable, confident and enjoyable emotional state and frame of mind. In this state of mind the conversation tends to flow more naturally too, without much thinking. Just like with your friends.

I have used this small tip many dozens of times by now and have found it surprisingly useful and easy to implement. It's a sort of variation of acting as you would like to feel.

This tip also helps you and the other people to set a good frame for the interaction. A frame is always set at the start of an interaction. It might be a nervous and stiff frame, a formal and let's-get-to-the-point kind of frame or perhaps a super relaxed one. The thing

is that the frame that is set in the beginning of the conversation is often one that may stay on for a while. First impressions can last for quite some time.

Now, meeting your best friend might not always be the best thing to think about before a meeting at school or at work. In that case you may want to try to imagine a similar meeting that went well and your interactions with the people there.

But what if you come off as a weird person? Well, that is always a risk in the beginning when you start using this tip. But I believe that most of the time such thoughts are only in your head. No one likes awkward and uncomfortable interactions. So if you just assume rapport immediately then most people that may have been nervous or felt awkward will adapt to your more comfortable and relaxed frame.

This is also a quick way to reconnect with the mental and emotional state your friends might be referring to when they give you the classic advice to “just be yourself”.

By assuming rapport you will automatically access a mental and emotional state where you give value in forms like: bringing a positive, open and confident vibe, smiling a lot and being relaxed. And your mind will be less likely to go blank because of nervousness.

All in all, this will help you make a great first impression on anyone and let you display your best self rather than a nervous or guarded self for example.

How to start a conversation

So assuming rapport will help you to get into the right headspace to make a good first impression. You can of course use this tip as much as you like in other interactions too.

Often this will help your mind to just relax so that you can start a conversation in a simple and natural way. If that doesn't work then here are a few concrete tips for getting a conversation going.

1. Say Hi!

Yes, it doesn't have to be something witty or awesome to start a conversation. Just say: "Hi! How are you tonight/today?"

That will work well.

2. Observe your surroundings and ask a question

See what is happening around you and another person right now. Then just ask an open-ended question as a way to break the ice.

If there is for example an aquarium there, then ask: Do you know what these fishes are called?

If there is a playlist on Spotify or iTunes with music, then ask: What song would you like to hear next?

If there is a strange fruit in the fruit bowl, ask: “what is this fruit? I have never seen it before.”

3. Observe your surroundings and make a statement

Again, see what is going on around you.

Then if there is an aquarium you can say: I like these blue ones, they look happy.

If there is music running you can say: I love the beat in this. And perhaps follow up with: do you know who the artist is?

And so on.

Whatever you say to break the ice **remember that is just there to get you two into a conversation**. So it does not have to be the best thing anyone has ever said.

Just **remember to smile**, say hi or say something and things will get started.

What to talk about in a conversation

You have broken the ice. What now? Well, you may just get into a conversation about fishes or music in a natural way.

If that does not happen or the conversation dries up or if your mind goes blank try to do some association based on your surroundings again – or based on a previous conversation

topic - to find a new topic or conversation path. Or try a few of following suggestions for good conversation topics.

Them

For many the favourite subject to talk about is themselves. Be curious about people and who they are. As Dale Carnegie once said:

“You can make more friends in two months by becoming really interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you. Which is just another way of saying that the way to make a friend is to be one.”

Figure out what the other person does besides work. What s/he really likes, passions and things that bring out the enthusiasm. Ask and use open-ended questions so s/he can't just answer with a one-word answer. If you just get hmms and vague answers out of open-ended questions try leading questions. And try to actually listen instead of just waiting for your turn to talk.

Be sure to mix in statements too so you are having a conversation where you both give and take and you don't get stuck in a job-interview mode where you pepper the other person with a barrage of questions. They can find that boring and to be something of an energy drain because then they have to provide most of the energy in the conversation as you stick to a sentence from time to time.

You can quickly make a question into a statement by starting a sentence with one of these four starter phrases: “I want.. I think... I feel... I believe.”

And so, “Do you like ice-cream?” can become “I think ice-cream is one of the most delicious things on this planet.”

And don’t be worried about making a statement the other person may not agree with. That’s OK, they won’t get mad. Instead they probably like that you are being proactive and open and are sharing what you really think instead of putting up a front to avoid a confrontation and to get them to like you.

And don’t worry about getting stuck in listening-mode. Most people will be glad to reciprocate and be interested in you if you are interested in them.

If not, then make statements relating to what they said and to your life – like: You have been to Brasil? I’d love to go there. I have been to Mexico though, that is probably my favorite country... – so you can move the focus gently towards you. And share your favorite things and passions too. This allows you to become excited, become positive and you’ll have fun. It allows people to meet the real and best you. Because those are the things that make you come alive.

If that doesn’t work either, and the other person does not reciprocate then consider talking to someone else. Total self-centeredness is not an appealing quality and there are plenty more people in the world.

Current news and water cooler topics

It’s often good to reduce the media input to improve how you are influenced. But it can also be helpful to at least keep an eye on the papers, there is always something interesting

there to bring up in conversations. I myself usually check out the homepage of one of the biggest Swedish papers a couple of times a week.

Likes and dislikes

A classic. People always like to discuss their likes and dislikes. Some examples:

- Favourite songs/albums.
- Favourite movies/TV-shows.
- The nastiest tasting piece of candy/food you have ever eaten.
- Best/worst GTD software.
- The best vacation ever vs. the worst one.

Relatable emotions and experiences

In a way, this is another way to look at some of the topics mentioned on the previous pages. I think it's a useful perspective to keep in mind though.

What I mean by this is what you share in the conversation are not just the facts. What you share are experiences and emotions. **The underlying excitement and the emotions that we all share regardless of what we do.**

One example might be how you discover that the other person loves travelling. So you ask: what is it about travelling that you like so much? She or he might say the excitement of discovering something new, something she or he has never seen before. And maybe

you have similar feelings about travelling too. So you might say something like: Yeah, I know, it's great when you have that fresh, totally new experience.

But you don't have to be an enthusiastic traveller to relate. Perhaps you love books or movies. And then you can relate to how each time you discover a new author or great movie it's like travelling into a totally new and exciting world where you never know what you will find.

So you can share similar feelings and experiences even though you might not seem similar as people. You may seem very different to one another and live different lives. But there are often emotional connections to be made between you.

Conversation topics to not bring up

A few topics can really break a pleasant, exciting or open vibe in a conversation. A few examples of such topics are:

- **Illness.** No-one wants to hear too much about illness and bad health. It's a downer.
- **Your crappy boss, job etc.** It's no fun hearing someone harp on and on about how unfair their boss is or how much their job sucks. Complaining becomes draining to listen to rather quickly.
- **Your boring job.** If it's a fascinating job then it might be interesting to talk and hear about. If you're enthusiastic about your job and really love it then it can be fascinating to talk and hear about it. If it's just a job you're not too fond of or a boring one try to limit the time you talk about it. If you like it but people don't seem to be interested either drop it or find a way to improve **how** -you talk about your job

(bring the enthusiasm, make easier to relate to etc.). No one wants to listen for too long to a topic they have no interest in.

- **Hard to relate to hobbies and similar subjects.** Well, actually getting technical and talking too much about the content of the hobby rather than what excites you about it. Try to avoid technical jargon, acronyms and details that only you and other enthusiasts understand. Try to keep it simple and understandable instead. Try to talk about your hobby with **relatable emotions and experiences** as described a couple of pages back instead. Try to relate what excites you about your bicycling or recycling instead of getting lost in facts and details.
- **Politics, religion and how much someone makes.** These may not be topics too avoid but it may be wise to be a bit careful with them. Especially before you get to know someone better. People can be touchy about these things and topics like these can lead to unnecessary conflicts and awkwardness.
- **Serial killers and other creepy subjects.** An obvious one. Just like talking about illness talking about Jeffrey Dahmer, stalkers and similar subjects can make people really uncomfortable.

Also, in more general terms, avoid being negative and whiny.

Now, it's normal to have a bad day or just to be in bad or whiny mood from time to time. But if you do it a lot or pretty much all the time, if you spend most of your time in that headspace then simply put people will probably not just be bored. They will start to avoid hanging out with/talking to you.

We all have a lot going on today. And as I grow older it seems to me that people simply don't have time or patience to listen to that negative stuff. They have more exciting things to do and more positive people that they will choose to hang out with and talk to instead.

As I mentioned in the beginning of this module, I think that one of the big things people want in any relationships are positive emotions. On a fundamental level people simply want to create a flow back and forth with people where all of you exchange positive emotions and feel good.

How to Give a Genuine Compliment

One good way to spread the positive emotions and show people that you are interested in them and appreciate them is to give them compliments.

I have found that there are some things you can do to make your compliments extra special and to sharpen this little social skill.

Make sure the compliment is genuine

Otherwise you are just trying to take something from the one you are complimenting. And that will not work so well. Your insincerity and that you just want something from the other person will often shine through.

A compliment delivered with positive words but with a body language and voice tonality – two of the most important parts of interpersonal communication – that aren't saying the same thing may often not go over so well. And the rule that you get what you give still applies.

What you feel when you deliver the compliment will come through. So make sure that there is a genuine feeling behind the words.

Cultivate a habit of appreciation

This will let you discover all the genuinely nice things about people. With this filter closed it will be harder to see the positive things in people and to give compliments that are actually totally genuine. Try to appreciate the things around you – your home, friends, family, co-workers, computer, weather, food etc. – a few minutes a day to build this habit.

Compliment on something the other person feels is important to him/her

It may be – at least in some cases – a good practice to not compliment on something that the other person doesn't have much control over. Or something that he or she has been complimented on a thousand times before. Looks and other more superficial stuff like possessions are examples of such things.

A compliment that is kinda expected will not be that powerful. And even though your compliment is genuine it may just be lumped together with all those other similar and not so genuine compliments the person has received.

Instead, observe what makes this person tick. What are his/her passions, qualities, interests and proudest achievements? What is a positive behavior this person has, like a great curiousness about music or an open attitude towards life? What can you genuinely appreciate about those things?

Use these tips and try, for example, to give 3 genuine compliments each day.

"The less you speak, the more you will hear."

Alexander Solshenitsen

3. How to Improve Your Listening Skills

Ernest Hemingway once said:

"I like to listen. I have learned a great deal from listening carefully. Most people never listen."

When you are in the stressed headspace where you fly off to the future and the past in your mind constantly and as you try to do everything by multitasking you become distracted. Unfocused. In this frame of mind it becomes hard to listen properly to someone else. You are probably just thinking about what you have to do later on today and you are just listening a little. Or you are waiting for the other person to stop talking so you can say what you want.

This is not uncommon. It's also not helpful to build good and deep relationships and have involving conversations.

When you aren't fully there and are actually listening to what the other person is saying he or she will notice that and probably become annoyed. And for each time this happens the two of you do not move closer together but drift apart.

It's essential to improve your listening skills if you find that you are lacking in this department. Not just, as Hemingway said, to learn a great deal. But also to build your relationships and social skills.

Here is what you can do to improve.

Be present and just listen

First, be there. By practicing just doing one thing at a time during your whole day no matter what you do and practicing being present it becomes a lot easier to stay there in a conversation and just listen.

By just being there fully and listening you can draw someone else in to your present state too and for example calm them down or pull them up out of sadness with your open and optimistic energy.

By being present you can connect fully and understand where they are coming from and how they think. And this may be all that is needed so don't just blurt out solutions to someone's problems in every such conversation.

If you have a solution and it feels like they need practical help try asking: Would you like to hear what I would do in this situation? And if you get a yes, then share your possible solution.

As you are fully there they can also feel how you are fully focused on them and understanding them. This can be a first step to create a good connection between the two of you. And the beginning to step two too as he or she will feel like giving back to you what you have given him/her.

With listening what you give is what you get still applies. To get people to really listen to you and try to understand you start by doing that to them.

Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes

It's easy to stick to your point of view. But you can gain powerful insights about the other person and yourself too by trying to understand their point of view. By doing so and opening up it becomes easier to really listen and to fully understand.

This also tends to make it easier to reach an understanding where both parties feel more satisfied with the solution.

Show that you are listening

You can show that you are really there and engaged by for example:

- **Nodding and making small hmms. ahas and yeses.**
- **By keeping eye-contact.** You don't have to keep eye-contact all the time but by doing it the majority of the time you improve the connection between the two of you. One small tip that has made it easier for me to keep eye-contact is to simply focus your eyes on one of his or her eyes instead of both.
- **Paraphrasing what they said back to them.** If they for example talk a little about how much pressure they are under from the boss at work then put yourself in their shoes. Try to understand what they may be going through and then you can say

something like: "I understand that it must be frustrating to be put in this situation". By paraphrasing back what they have said as you listen you become more empathetic and engaged and I find that I listen better too when I do this. And it lets the other person know that you are really hearing them and how they feel and think. And if you have misunderstood it also becomes easier for them to correct you as you have told them your interpretation of what they said.

"I speak two languages, English and Body."
Mae West

4. The Importance of How Your Body Talks

So far I have gone through how to for example improve your social skills by using your words.

I have also mentioned that the vibe you send out, positive or negative for instance, is vital to be able to give value and start and maintain good relationships. So we need to not just look at our words but also how our body talks.

According to research done by Albert Mehrabian, currently Professor Emeritus of psychology at UCLA, words are only 7 percent of your communication.

The rest is your voice tonality (38 percent) and your body language at 55 percent.

These numbers may vary depending upon the topic, situation and how something is communicated (for instance, talking over the phone is obviously different from talking face to face) but body language is any case a very important part of communication.

So by improving your body language you can improve your communication skills. By improving your body language you can also:

- **Increase your attractiveness.** It's not what you say, it's how you say it. A better posture and a more enthusiastic and focused body language will make anyone more

attractive. And not just in a dating kind of way but also when talking to new friends or in job interviews and business meetings.

- **Gain better control of your emotions.** Emotions work backwards too. If you feel good you'll smile. If you force yourself to smile you'll feel good too. If you feel tired or down you might sit slumped down. If you sit slumped down you'll feel more tired and negative. Just try to sit straight up for 5 minutes and feel the difference in energy from when you were half-lying in your chair.

Now, how do you go about improving how your body talks in a simple way?

Improve your life and how you feel about it

It seems to me like the biggest part of your body language is how you feel. When you feel open, positive and confident that will come through in your body language. You'll smile and laugh more and gesture confidently and openly. Keeping eye-contact in a conversation and nodding along when someone is telling you something will seem more natural.

So to naturally improve your body language in a consistent way in your day to day life the major part consists of improving your life. For example to sleep enough, to eat right, to work out and to do the things you want to get done.

When you live the life you want to live, when are going about your daily life being your "best self" then you tend to feel good or great. And that comes through in your body language.

As expected, no quick fixes will solve your problem. They can help though.

You can for instance change how you feel temporarily and then build on that feeling by acting as you would like to feel. The tips about sitting up straight as if you were alert and smiling when you feel neutral or a bit down are two already mentioned examples of that.

As you act and use your body like someone would who already feels like you would like to feel you often start feel that way for real too after a few minutes.

Keep your posture in mind

From time to time that is. You shouldn't get obsessed with it. But sitting or standing up straight in a relaxed manner with your head up have a few benefits:

- **It creates positive emotions** such as alertness and feeling focused.
- **It can help you with first impressions** as it makes you seem more interesting/attractive.
- **It can help you avoid pain** in your back, shoulders etc.

If you feel your posture isn't that good, try using your white board or another external reminder tool and write down something like: "Sit up straight in a relaxed way". This can help you to keep this in mind and after a while adopt new posture habits.

Minimize the distance

Certain ways that your body talks can both signal and create a distance between you and the other person. Ways like:

- **Crossing your arms and legs.**
- **Holding something between you and the other person.** Common objects in this case are books, cups and drinks.

Keep your body language open and friendly by avoiding doing such things as best you can.

"The way you overcome shyness is to become so wrapped up in something that you forget to be afraid"

Claudia Lady Bird Johnson

5. How to Reduce Social Nervousness and Shyness

One of the biggest problems I used to have socially was that I got nervous in social situations and that I was shy. Although these things may pop up once in a while they are pretty much all gone now.

I think that this is not an uncommon problem and if you are extra interested in this module then it may be because just like I did you feel nervous, anxious or shy in social situations. So let me tell you how I got a handle on this problem.

Flow with the presence

Yes. I will tell you one more reason why it is essential to form a habit of being present to simplify and improve your life.

Social nervousness and shyness did in my case mostly come from thinking too much about what may happen or remembering what happened in the past. I remember and imagined negative scenarios and was afraid that this would come true in this interaction too. So I became nervous. Or I avoided such situations.

But by being able to reconnect with this present moment when needed and spend a fair amount of time each day and in interactions in this headspace the past and possible future stopped to matter. I was free. I was free to say what I wanted and to just let my natural

social ability guide the direction. That natural social ability that I think is in varying degree in all of us but we can put up inner obstacles in the way of.

Becoming a more present person will let you shake off your fears of rejection and making a fool of yourself. It will let you just be in this moment with another person and flow freely.

Don't put such a high value on an interaction

Why do you get a bit anxious or nervous in an interaction? As mentioned above it may be because you are in the past or future in your mind instead of here. It may also be because you put a too high value on this interaction. You think to yourself that if this job interview, date or conversation doesn't go well then I will be jobless, alone and simply don't have fun. Or you think that the other person is better than you in one or more ways.

These are terrible frames of mind to be in to have a good or great interaction of any kind.

You become nervous and anxious and your mind may go blank as you get the "I don't know what to say" syndrome. You may feel like not even getting started with this interaction at all.

You need to free yourself from that mindset. Realize how much such thinking hurts you and simply don't put such a high value on that interaction when you are in it. Relax instead.

You may think: "Well, this is important, of course I have the right to be nervous or anxious!"

That's true. But you will get the best results if you don't cling to such thoughts. To maximize the likelihood of a positive outcome you have to not think so much about the outcome to be able to relax and be your best self.

So tell yourself that you will not die if this interaction doesn't go perfect. There are still many more opportunities out there. Tell yourself that this person in front of you is just a person, with good sides and flaws just like you and like anyone else. No matter how she or he looks, acts or in what position he or she is in (like for example a boss at a job). People are people so don't put him or her on a pedestal.

And reconnect with the present moment to alleviate fears even more. If you haven't made being present a habit yet – it can take a while – then simply assume rapport to tap into your best self and reduce nervousness and shyness.

This is basically how I did this. I established a habit of being present. I learned to not put such a high value on interactions and people to be able to relax and perform well consistently. I assumed rapport so many times that I could change my headspace very quickly and easily.

By practicing these things over and over in interactions my shyness and social nervousness just seemed to float away. My beliefs about myself and the world changed because I found ways that worked and gathered enough new experiences.

"Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within."

James Arthur Baldwin

6. On Dating

Since I used to have pretty poor social skills and negative mindsets I wasn't that good at dating. I got nervous or shy. I didn't know what to say as my mind went blank. I behaved in a pretty unconfident and stiff way.

Now, I am not a dating expert today. But I have vastly improved my social and dating skills in the past few years. And I have celebrated my one-year anniversary with my awesome girlfriend a couple of months ago.

This would not have been possible in 2004.

I have already mentioned many of the social strategies I have also used to improve my dating life. Things like adding more value to any interaction, assuming rapport and becoming a more present/mindful person. And I improved my self-esteem – I explained how I did this in module #3 – to truly feel deep down that deserved that women would like me and that I deserved to be with an awesome woman.

Also pay close attention to the tips in the previous chapter such as not putting a too high value on any one interaction.

In this chapter I will explore a few more ideas that have helped me to improve my dating life. Since I'm a guy these tips will be from a male perspective but I think that many of the things – just like tips I mentioned above – will help anyone to improve.

Even more social benefits of being present

I am guessing that you may still think that being present or mindful seems a bit woo-woo or strange. I did too. But it may be just what you need to spruce up your dating life if you are a guy. Or if you are a very logical person who likes facts for instance.

Because being present does not only alleviate fears and social nervousness. It also can enable you to be flexible in social situations, to be light on your feet which is important because human interactions do not strictly follow guidelines or rules. Being present can allow you to just say what is on your mind and go with your gut. Instead of holding in your jokes, a flirty comment or a genuine compliment because your fear of being rejected you can just let it out.

Yes, sometimes it will fall flat. Such is life. But most of the time when you go with your gut and just say what is on your mind you get big belly laughs, a flirty comment back or a giggle or simple someone being deeply touched by what you said.

Because people love people when they are genuine. Especially in the dating context.

Playing it too safe – sure, some common sense does not hurt – is boring. And boring is not attractive.

So be here. Be genuine. Get genuine back. Be your best self and realize and accept that you cannot control the rest anyway.

Where should you go on your first date?

Everyone, I guess, have different preferences for this. I liked low-pressure places and situations. By that I mean going for a cup of coffee or drinking a beer or two in a pub. Something simple and relaxed.

If you go to a fancy restaurant for example then that can add too much pressure and make things stiff and filled with too many expectations which can ruin the good mood and flow between the two of you. I recommend keeping it simple and fairly laidback.

By doing things this way you also don't come across as someone who needs to impress. Trying to impress someone in any social situation often leads to looking like you need their approval. If it feels like you need approval too much from people in social situations then that can look needy or like you think that they are better than you.

Another preference of mine was to do the date in the evening. I preferred evenings because in the day time people have places to go and things to think and to worry about. In the evening they tend to relax after their day and that is a much better headspace for a making a good connection between the two of you.

And avoid places where you can't get to know each other like the movies. I think a recipe for a good first date is where you do something fun together (like going bowling or flying a kite) or to have a great conversation or a combination of the two of them.

The biggest mistake I made in my dating life

This is something that I guess quite a few guys have a problem with just like I did.

Out of the women I went on first dates with I asked them and made the date happen most of the time (maybe 80% of the time). Out of the women I have kissed I can just remember one that kissed me first.

My observation has been that women like guys that can lead, guys that can take the next step.

For some time, I hoped that women would do this, but they very rarely did.

So if you are a guy I highly recommend developing a habit of being the one who can take the next step and not just sit around waiting. Ask the woman she is available for a date on Friday night. Go for the kiss.

This not only make things happen. It also lets the woman see that you can be a confident man of action. Not a boy that waits for things to happen magically somehow. This is of course an attractive trait.

Hint: It becomes easier to develop this habit if you do it while being present. Then you will take the next step more confidently without being fearful of rejection. This does also make it more likely that the other person will like it. Something done without apparent fear usually goes over well.

When should you go for the kiss?

At the end of the date? I don't think you have to wait for that long or build it up into this huge thing. That can again cause nervousness etc. and hold you back. Instead try going for it sometime during the date when it feels right.

When it feels right is usually when the conversation is going really well, when the two of you are holding strong eye-contact a lot and laughing. After that highpoint there is usually a silence as you look at each other. That is a good place to simply lean over rather slowly and go for a kiss.

A part of this has also been for me at least to be a more physical person than I used to. Touching is powerful when dating and in many other social interactions too. So become more of a hugger. Touch someone on the arm when making a point for example. Make touching other people natural for you – but again use common sense of course – and it will be a lot closer to your comfort zone to go for kisses naturally in dating situations too.

Keep it simple. Don't overthink things.

One last piece of dating advice. Keep it simple. If you overthink things or try to keep too many ideas in your head at once you will get self-conscious and stuck in your head.

Just try to keep a few things in mind like giving value, being present as best you can and to assume rapport. And if you are a guy that usually doesn't take the lead then remember to take the next step.

Things will not happen perfectly every time. Just like with everything else. That is no reason to stop meeting people. With time your social skills and dating skills will improve. And sooner or later you find someone you really click with on many levels.

Then you will be happy that you have made the effort to improve those skills so you can help to create things the way the both of you want them.

"Never idealize others. They will never live up to your expectations. Don't over-analyse your relationships. Stop playing games. A growing relationship can only be nurtured by genuineness."
Leo F. Buscaglia

7. Do You Make These 5 Common Relationship Mistakes?

We all have some bad habits. We all make mistakes from time to time. In this chapter I will take a look at five common mistakes that people make – and I have made – and that make relationships with a partner, at work, with friends and family unnecessarily complicated.

Get a handle on these things and your relationships should become simpler and more enjoyable.

You create drama and conflicts

Conflicts are unavoidable. Lots of drama and many conflicts are however preventable. If you feel you have a lot of drama or are getting into many conflicts maybe it's time for a change.

What to do instead:

Don't taking everything so seriously. Realize that you can say stop to yourself and choose your emotional responses and that you can for example walk away instead of turning situations into big conflicts or fights.

Stop making mountains out of molehills to get attention and sympathy from other people. Examine your own life and see if you are perhaps understimulated. Does nothing much fun or exciting happen in your daily life? If not, don't fill your life with drama. Start filling it with fun stuff and goals that you are really excited to work towards.

Remain aware in your daily life so that when you are creating drama you can tell yourself that such thinking and behavior is silly and will just make everything seem bigger than it is and thereby make it harder to take positive action. And the less you accept drama from yourself, the less you will accept or be rattled by drama from other people.

By doing that you will realize that things are often simpler than you may think and that few things are that big of a deal. You'll be cooler and more levelheaded than you used to and you'll focus on working on what is important for you.

It also greatly helps to really listen and put yourself in the other person's shoes – as mentioned in the chapter on becoming a better listener – to avoid creating unnecessary arguments and conflicts.

You critique too much or in the wrong way

Constructive criticism has its place. But being overly critical, being critical without being constructive or simply nagging on and on won't help anyone.

What to do instead:

Criticize but make sure you have constructive advice to give before you open your mouth. If you feel you are nagging or going on and on you also have to accept that you can perhaps nudge people in a direction but not control them.

Trying to control someone just leads to conflicts and resentment as that person tries to distance himself or herself from you. You can have a large influence over yourself but if you want to have better relationships you have let other people think and act for themselves too.

Also, criticism can hurt someone's self-esteem. Encouragement on the other hand lifts their spirits, makes them feel important and you can encourage them about what they are doing well and should do more of and focus more on. This both strengthens the relationship and lets you have a positive influence.

You become needy

If you become needy in any kind of relationship then that is a turn off. People shy away from needy people and try to create distance.

What to do instead:

Check the balance in your life. Perhaps you are focusing too much on one friend or a partner and become needy for the attention and company. Instead of going further on that path work on getting a life.

Find more friends, activities or hobbies so you can be stimulated by other things than this one very important person in your life. Then your life will be more fun, interesting and the neediness will dissipate.

It can also be helpful to work on the stuff mentioned in the previous module about worrying too much and overcoming that problem.

You don't compromise and accept

You want what you want. You don't want to compromise on your dreams and wants. And you think that your way is the best way and people should do the same thing as you do.

But people are different. They have different needs and wants.

What to do instead:

Accept that people are different. Try to find people that are reasonably similar to you in fundamental ways to avoid having to have 50 conflicts every single day. But learn to compromise. It's not just you in this world and you have to compromise to be able to live together in a more enjoyable and simpler way and to help each other.

Truly listening, as described earlier in this module, can help you to better understand and open up to someone else's point of view and deep wants. This makes it easier to accept differences.

You try to please and get the “nice guy/girl” syndrome

Yes, compromising is a good thing in some situations. But always folding and letting people steamroll over you will hurt your self-esteem. That in turn will lower their respect for you and they will continue to try to have their way even though you have other wishes.

What to do instead:

Teach them how to treat you. This is a very important point and something I think is perhaps often missed by people who want to improve their social lives. They may think “well, I have been so nice towards everyone for the last few months but it doesn’t seem to have changed their behaviour towards me much”.

This is the “nice guy/girl” problem. She or he is very nice but there is no assertiveness. There is no changed feeling within about how you feel you deserve to be treated. You may still be nice just to get approval from other people. You feel the craving need.

We do to a large extent choose how we want to be treated. How you expect people to treat you can have a big effect on how you allow yourself to act and how people around you view and treat you.

If you start creating a role for yourself where you always let people do what they want to you then you may create some pretty destructive and negative things.

- You may create an identity for yourself where you get used to always taking whatever anyone doles out. You create a kind of victim identity where you may look happy on the outside but don't feel so good on the inside. But since you have gotten used to it after a while you may accept it and think that: **this is just who I am.**
- You may create a concept in the minds of the people around you that it's OK to treat you this way. Either because you seem so positive despite what they are doing so they think it's OK. Or just because you aren't saying no and some people may take advantage of that.

Look, you can't please everyone. I think both Eleanor Roosevelt and Buddha have mentioned something along the lines that whatever you do there will always be people who don't like what you are doing. And that's OK. That's normal.

Going around trying to please everyone at your own expense isn't healthy though. Or even a realistic thing to attempt. It eats away at you both mentally and physically.

So be nice. Be positive. But also make sure that:

- **You raise your esteem of yourself and how you feel you deserve to be treated.** Perhaps most importantly, do the right thing to raise your sense of how you deserve to be treated by others. (see module #3 for self-esteem building habits).
- **You build the habit of being able to say no.** See the chapter Focus Your Attention on What You Want from module #2 for practical tips for that.
- **You set your own standards,** rules and limits for what you will accept or not accept from people.

"You can clutch the past so tightly to your chest that it leaves your arms too full to embrace the present."

Jan Glidewell

8. Four Final Thoughts on Simpler Relationships

In this final chapter I will share four additional thoughts on how you can create and maintain simpler and more harmonious relationships.

Relaxed relationships

You don't have to do things all the time in a relationship – of any kind – with someone. Filling your spare time to the max with activities can be a bit too much and create pressure on everyone involved. It can suck the joy out of the relationship.

Instead, just take time to watch the sunset or the ocean. Sit there and enjoy each other's company perhaps by talking or just by being there.

Find a balance between planning in and doing activities and just being with each other and doing nothing much at all.

You don't have to keep up with everyone

As I mentioned in the module #3, it is important to find time for yourself too. So practise saying no – there are practical tips for building that habit in the chapter called Focus Your Attention on What You Want in module # 2 – and other strategies from the Simple Productivity module to find time to just be with yourself and to recharge.

Do this as much or as little as you need to but if you have a very busy social life then you can simplify that - if you like - by spending a little less time with people and a little more time with yourself. It can do wonders for your inner peace and for your relationship with yourself and with the people around you.

Clean up your relationships and social commitments

As you simplify your life you change. You may not have that much in common with people who you used to be close to. Or the strong connection that once was weakens.

Your social activities may go the same way. What you used to do every week just doesn't click as well with you anymore.

So think about your relationships and social commitments. Quit some commitments or do them less frequently if that feels right for you now so that you will have more time for activities that you click with.

Spend more time with people that you click better with now. You may even want to stop socializing with some people to redirect your energy and free up time. It is your life and it is up to you.

Forgive what has been and let go

I've already addressed how to let go and how to forgive in the previous module on simple thinking. But this really is important not only to simplify your thinking and find inner

stillness. It is also essential to unburden relationships and to free yourself from the past so you can improve your social skills and keep your relationships simple and fully in the now instead of complicated by years of things you can't let go.

So if this is something you feel you may need to address – I guess most of us have at least a bit of such work to do – then go back to the end of module #3 on simple thinking to find practical tips. And use the workbook for this module to work through such challenges.