The Tribe – When three or more gather, we are Tribe

Connection Connoisseur episode 6

Traditionally, a tribe is defined as a social division in society consisting of families or communities linked by social, economic, religious, or blood ties.  Some tribes have a common culture and dialect, and typically they have a recognized leader.  A customary tribe is a face-to-face community, relatively bound by kinship relations, reciprocal exchange, and strong ties to place.

In this episode, we will discuss what it takes to create a Tribe of life-enhancing friendships. Please click on the subscribe button to be sure to get notified of a new Tribe building episode each week!

The term Tribe should be utilized only with great respect and consideration of its origins. It is with the term’s heritage in mind that we may aspire to create that culture with our closest friends. This social division, group or pack are linked by common social patterns, interests and sometimes goals. Over time as the group connects together, they establish the Tribe’s personality, lingo, patterns and rituals.

Outsiders that socialize with these lasting friends may get annoyed because of the inside jokes and private references. This culture may not be understood by others looking in, but the members find their intimacy endearing. They are tuned in to each other and get it!

One piece I feel is important to mention in reference to the definition of Tribe above is the piece that describes a *face-to-face* community. Many of us have very important relationships that are separated by time and space. Therefore, they are not members of our Tribe.

I call these individuals our soul sisters or our Tribe once removed. We are connected for a lifetime but on different paths. We may not be able to see each other regularly, but when we do, we haven’t skipped a beat.

Tribal connections are proximal and require a consistency that is not possible when separated by time and space. Should the vicinity be re-established, one could bet that this soul sister would again become Tribe. We will talk in more detail in a future episode about the essential third circle of the friendship target - our soul sisters.

Dr. Alex Lickerman M.D wrote a column entitled “The True Meaning of Friendship” that explains there are four big things that draw people together as friends. These are common interests, history, common values, and equality. During our growing years life changes directions that make some relationships grow apart. This is natural and unavoidable.

Distance may make the heart grow fonder, but certainly does not build your connection. As time passes, three out of the four *big things* that draw people together fade quickly. Separated by five years, all you will probably share with someone is history. The point is, you need more than history to keep a friendship evolving. Growing in connection and on-going bonding moments are an essential element of Tribe.

William Rawlins, a Professor at Ohio University, conducted a set of interviews about friendship in 1994. The respondents were middle-aged Americans. Rawlins reported that “an almost tangible irony permeated these adult discussions of close or *real* friendship”. They defined friendship as being there for each other, and scheduling opportunities to spend or share some time together is essential. Although true friends stay with you no matter the distance or time that separates you, Tribe requires nearness.

Tribes are physically *there* for each other. They share times good and bad, fun and difficult, for better or worse and in the now. These friendships feed our souls. They are *your people*’ and have welcomed you into their circle. When they say *we,* it means you too. These are the people with whom you travel, celebrate, mourn, and hang out. They keep your mind and spirit healthy.

Spending time with your Tribe feeds your soul and promotes peace and counterbalance for the stress in your life. They will lift you when you're down, give you a squeeze when you need a hug, and support you with strength when you are weak. They are always behind the scenes sending you love, support and good energy.

The bond with your Tribe requires regular face-to-face contact. This regular contact creates a sense of belonging and adds *place,* enhancing the time and space of friendship. If we are to super-simplify the formula, Tribe = Friendship + Space + Place + Vulnerability. Space represents vicinity.

Your tribal place feels like home when you arrive. It is safe, encouraging, and makes you feel relevant because you are truly seen. Your Tribe cares about your opinions and what you have to say. They are proud of your talents and strengths and are not threatened by your success. Tribe will promote rather than ignore or diminish your wins like the Frienemies we discussed in episode 4. Although these close friends can be a great influence for you to be better and do better, there is no contest, you do not feel competitive with one another. The experience of finding your Tribe can be life-changing. It becomes a mirror reaffirming who you are and where you belong.

Interestingly enough, Men and women are very different when it comes to their needs and expectations of friendship. When asked to define friendship in a British study, Marin Crawford found that men and women had completely different answers. The results were incredibly consistent.

Women shared about trust and confidentiality whereas men described a friend as “someone I go out with” or “someone whose company I enjoy”. Men’s friendships revolved around activities and women’s around sharing. A man will describe “my very good friend” as a guy he sees at the annual fantasy football draft or someone he recently met over a round of golf. But are they really friends? Not by a woman’s standard.

Why are deep friendships so rare in men? Why is our definition so very different? Experts would say with certainty, its conditioning. In our society, with the exception of shaking hands, men are not even allowed to touch each other beyond a slap on the back. “Sexperts” Dick and Paula McDonald, authors of Loving Free, explain the phenomenon. “Most men have had neither practice in the art of intimacy nor role models to point the way. Little girls can walk to school hand in hand, hold each other up during skating, hug and cry and say, ‘You’re my best friend, I need you. I love you’. Little boys wouldn’t dare.”

Experts agree that most men do not have as many close friendships as would be beneficial to them. Few men have had the opportunity and upbringing to be open and vulnerable in a relationship and they are simply not aware of this immense void in their emotional lives. They haven't a clue of what they are missing. This saddens me deeply. However, because we are so different, and my passion is for girl Tribes, for the most part, we will continue to focus on women’s friendships. Maybe one day there will be a he-Tribe sequel!

Generally speaking, women long for more primitive patterns of social connection, interdependence, and cohesion. We are better at reading nuances in other’s reactions and behavior. Women are just more interested in relationships. This is even evident in newborn babies before social conditioning could have any effect. Baby girls that are even just hours old are more attracted to faces. Baby boys are more attracted to shapes and patterns. Additionally, baby girls maintain eye contact two to three times longer than baby boys. Females just bond. We don’t need sports, nick-names or funny handshakes. All we need for bonding is a couple of comfy chairs and a pot of tea.

Over the past quarter of a century, I have found, cultivated and connected my Tribe of women. I can’t say that I set out with this concept of Tribe in mind but I did bond to these special friends with intention. Every one of us leads busy lives with our families, careers and commitments. Yet we make our relationship a priority and carve out time for each other on a regular basis.

When it comes to your closest friendships, try to check in weekly via text or phone call with each of them. Schedule some one-on-one time for lunch, shopping, or a glass of wine. Create a monthly girl’s night of some sort to connect as a Tribe and extended kindred clan, a term we will explore further in a future episode. There are no rules in cultivating your Tribe other than the required tribal formula: Tribe = Friendship + Time + Space + Place + Vulnerability. The investment I have made has established one of the most rewarding segments of my life. One that honors my soul, fills me with joy and provides me with purpose.

Even Jesus chose to spend much of his time in small groups, building deep relationships with a few significant people rather than speaking to large crowds. As a species, we were created to live in small, strong, close-knit tribes or communities. Our need for social connection and tribal instinct is a deep-rooted part of human nature, programmed into the human brain by our own evolution.

Perhaps life has detoured you from connecting on a meaningful level, or maybe you are already well on your way to tribal bliss. No matter where you are with your inner circle, I am certain that together with our work ahead we can find, build, and fortify your very own Tribe.

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