"It Seems to Me....."

by Steve H Kehoe

I don't believe in throwing people away

. Often, however, despite our best efforts to the contrary, we have to look in to the "refrigerator of our mind" and determine whether that once-juicy piece of steak that we had been saving for a special occasion, has spoiled. Such is the way, sadly, with "good friends". We know that having good friends—persons we can rely on, who will be honest with us to the point of verbal—and sometimes physical—jousting matches—is the most desirable of all human traits, and justifiable longings. They give us support, and keep us "connected"; They help us bear stress and they energize us to new endeavors. The greatest compliment that can be paid to anyone is that their advice and wise counsel is sought out by others. But sometimes, because of either some peoples' actions, or ours—we have to look at them as jars of mayonnaise with an "expiration date"—meaning that to keep them any longer imperils our health. First of all, let us acknowledge and operate from the premise that not all "friends" are good for us; Moreover, not all "friends" are truly our friends. Some—nay—MOST are insincere and motivated by a desire to create misery in others. We may think they are sincere, and maybe they truly are—for a time—but we sometimes are victims of our own delusions. We want so badly to believe that, because we are interested in them—their pleasures, their thoughts, their habits—and so covet their company—sometimes to the exclusion of all others—that we are willing to place ourselves on the railroad tracks and face the oncoming train, which we know is going to mow us down—at least emotionally, if not physically and psychologically. We live dangerously in choosing true friends.

A truly good friend can be honest

without being vindictive or cruel. He/she is reliable: Promises are kept, phone calls, text messages are returned. Conversations last sometimes for hours, without either party showing signs of "how can I get myself out of this?" A true friend is empathetic without being judgmental. He or she is a good listener as well as a talker, and fun to be around, in most any venue, public or private. Why then do we keep "toxic (so-called) friends"? Two reasons I offer here: First, it takes time for one's "true colors" to emerge. We cling desperately to the belief, when it comes to
someone we like or are attracted to, that we have made a wise choice in friends. Secondly, some people, unhappy with their own life and their own choices, get pleasure in dragging down the lives of those who they grudgingly admire. Friendships are fluid because people change, but true friendships are built on bedrocks of trust and supportive feelings and actions. Learn to recognize at the earliest light the negative attributes by which "toxic friends" are known, then have the courage to eliminate these people from our daily lives. Herewith are some examples:
The Promise Breaker: He or she cancels plans with you at the last minute, usually because he/she has received "a better offer"—an alternate plan that to them has more appeal than being with you. This type is pervasive in our instantaneous, pleasure-driven society, especially among the young. Fight back by placing less reliance on this person, and by having alternate plans of your own. Sounds hypocritical, until one realizes that each of us largely controls our own circumstances, for good or for ill. Be in charge. What did Sinatra sing? "You can either be read to or be the reader!"

The Competitor

: Competition between true friends is healthy; but if your "friend" refuses to celebrate your triumphs along with his own, or belittles your successes, run like hell the other direction—quickly, and don't look back. He or she loves you not. The Interloper

: Tries to "control" your life by "getting behind the scenes". Will do things like promote (or demote) you in conversations with mutual friends, inquire about your work performance—or even more personal! Such behavior violates privacy and boundaries, and is usually the mark of a toxic friend. Next, is the "Therapist"; They listen sympathetically to your problems, then tells you why you acted as you did; Their unique knowledge of everyone's hidden motives leads up to giving you unwanted advice. The Therapist gives every indication of having a normal, well-ordered life, but you know better, if you have had them for a friend for very long!
The Self-Absorbed: This toxic "friend' dominates every conversation with talk about he or she has "been there, done that", even "got the tee-shirt". The S.A. also tells everyone on the phone, in person, or on Facebook that she or he has been somewhere, or done something, that is so superior to what you may have done....and even acts as if he or she is the only person in the world who has ever had that experience. He gives you credit for nothing, and thinks you are just ready to lavish praise on them for their experiences.

The Rejector: Doesn't want anyone getting close, but doesn't mind giving out advice at every opportunity. He or she becomes critical very easily, misinterprets any remark you make, and turns on you as swiftly as a puma on a sheep. The "Rejector" has a fear of people become too familiar with them, perhaps trying to make up for their youth.
Usually these are the kind of insincere people that the dogs won't even bite.

The Downer

Closely-related to the Rejector. He or She is always so negative that they tend to pull you down the drain with them. Only that will make them happy. The old saying "misery loves company" was probably invented to describe these people. So, then, how do you end a "friendship" with any of the above types? Try to act with class, and avoid any confrontation, especially in public. Suddenly become unavailable when plans are offered. Don't bad-mouth the person; their own actions will betray them to others without any help needed from you. Remember the words of Howard Smith: "Fools do not have to be planted...they grow wild everywhere!" Finally, if you do have to speak to that person, make it clear that you are not rejecting them per se; You are rejecting their corrosive behavior. Some friendships, like old cars, can usually be repaired to look as good as new! Some.

It is always better to be known for one's character than for one's reputation.

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