CREATING INTENTIONAL SOCIAL CAPITAL

Bucketing / Re-Bucketing
&
Pruning

As we go through life, we make connections, cultivate relationships, and create a social capital for ourselves. I look at this as creating a garden. Every phase of our life brings with it a different set of seeds. We might plant them in our garden based on convenience, necessity, utility, aesthetics, and status they bring to our garden or the positive energy, inspiration, and hope that they would emit into our garden. In creating our social capital, we might make and hold onto connections and relationships based on fear of loneliness, logistics, practicalities, necessities, survival needs, desire, proximity, perceived and real benefits, sense of being loved and offering our love and so on.

Over time we might look into our garden of social capital and see a colorful garden filled with beautiful flowers, old and strong trees with deep roots, new sprouts and also weeds, shrubs, dried plants that need to be attended to, shifted in their space or pulled out completely for the overall health of the garden.
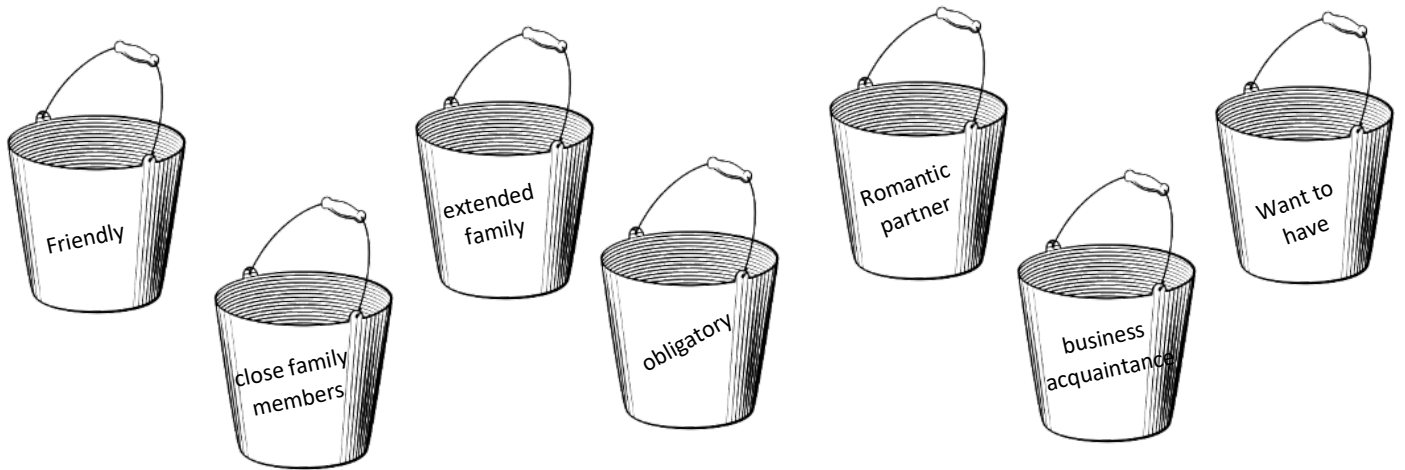
At the beginning of each year, I ask my clients to revisit their garden of social capital and create intentional buckets (be aware of what is in their garden), re-bucket (shift the ones that need to be shifted) and if necessary, prune (the ones that are not only serving their life purpose in one way or the other but they are dragging them down. This will lead to a sense of agency, more fulfilling connections, and relationships. I invite you to do the same.

Here is how you do this:

I ask you to literally put strainers, buckets, or pots around you with a bunch of post-it papers and then label each of those containers (example below). I also recommend that you put buckets for the relationships that you want to have and don't have currently so you could intentionally plan for them. You can also create circles on a sheet of paper and do the same but having actual buckets or objects alike help you visualize and memorize the emotions attached to this exercise much better. I have clients who come back after having done this exercise telling me that they felt a bit conflicted moving a person from one bucket to another (to a closer circle or a further away one).

After you have your buckets, I want you to label them with all the different types of relationships that you have. For example, friendly versus friend, family who you enjoy being with and family with whom you have to meet and mingle out of obligation or responsivity. People whom I know, and I would like to strengthen my bond with them. People who I don't know but I would like to have in my social circle or in my life (for example, see below). You get the idea.

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Friendly

close family members

extended family

obligatory

Romantic partner

business acquaintance

Want to have

Write down your connections and relationships here, then put them into categories so you can label your buckets or alike:

_____

_____

_____

I have found that doing this exercise at the beginning of each year and revisiting it throughout the year, leads to a more fulfilling life overall. You know where you stand, and you can manage your relationships and expectations around them much better. One of my clients who had a very different relationship with two friends and often was upset by the dynamic, told me that "once I saw them in their designated buckets, I realized how my expectations could be different from each based on the closeness I feel with each…this finally allowed me to let go of my hurts, accept my relationship for what is was and enjoy my friend". For many years, that friend was a source of disappointment for her because she didn't show up for my client the way that she expected her. She thought they were close friends while the other person saw my client as a social acquaintance. Putting her into the bucket of *friendly* instead of a *friend* was a pivotal shift for my client.

Another example was a client of mine who was seeing me in the process of dating. After the bucket exercise, he realized that he doesn't want a whole bucket dedicated to a romantic partner and that he is satisfied with his current social connections and put his energy elsewhere.

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Some other people know of someone that they would like to get to know for various purposes. Knowing the desired bucket for each person then allows for a sense of agency and intentional planning rather than leaving things to the hand of luck or even worse assumptions!

The reason and rationale behind this exercise is that most of the things that go wrong with our relationships and social lives is because we get mixed up in the assumptions, perceptions, and expectations that we have of our relationships. This will then lead to confusion over our roles in any given relationship which creates dissonance and rupture over time. For example, as I mentioned above, you might think that you are very good friends with somebody while the other person just sees you as a business connection or for example, you call somebody a friend while they are only friendly towards you. These clarifications around the roles that you have for people and where you would like them to be will adjust your expectations and would leave less room for hurt and allows for a stronger sense of agency and intentional planning. Creating and cultivating relationships takes a lot of time, energy, and resources. This exercise will help you channel it all for the most fulfilling outcome.

If you are a member of a couple or you're a part of a group or family, you may want to do this as a family or couple together. Through this valuable exercise, your family, partner, and you could decide who would be in which bucket when it comes to your interactions with them. You will be unified when it comes to dealing with your social connections and the amount of time, energy, and resources that you invest on each

Let me know how this goes for you!