

CREATING INTENTIONAL SOCIAL CAPITAL



Bucketing / Re-Bucketing & Pruning



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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 instill into our garden.

In creating our social capital, we might make and hold on to 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 social capital garden and see a colorful vista 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.

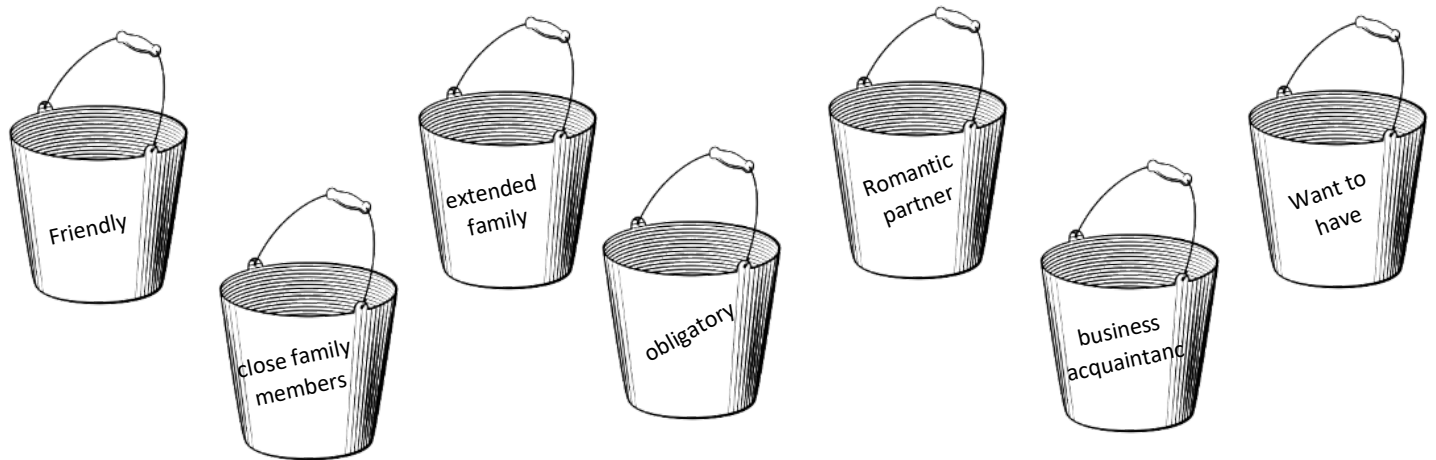
At the beginning of each year, I would like to revisit my social capital garden and create intentional buckets (be aware of what is in my garden), re-bucket (shift the ones that need to be shifted) and if necessary, prune (the ones that are no longer relevant in my garden and are more like weeds and not good for the health of the garden in general). This will lead to a sense of agency, more fulfilling connections and thriving relationships. I invite you to do the same!

Here is how you do this:

I ask you to literally put strainers or 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 reciprocity. 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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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 overall life. 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 it was and enjoy my friend”. That friend for many years was a source of disappointment for my client because she didn’t show up for her the way that she expected. She thought they were close friends while the other person saw my client as a social acquaintance. Putting her into the buckets of friendly instead of a friend was a pivotal shift for my client.

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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.

Some other people know of someone whom they 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!

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 a very good friend 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. 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, there is huge value in doing this together as well, so that both of 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 in each bucket.

Let me know how this goes for you!
