

Getting By: It's About Having Friends

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What would you think if I sang out of tune,
Would you stand up and walk out on me?
Lend me your ears and I'll sing you a song,
And I'll try not to sing out of key.

- - from "With a Little Help from My Friends" by John Lennon and Paul McCartney
from *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, The Beatles

Late last year, I asked my students at Manhattan School of Music if any had seen *Ray*, a movie portraying the life of Ray Charles. Not a single hand went up. I sensed a deeper issue and continued my query. "How many of you have *time* to go to a movie with friends?" As scant half the students raised their hands, one said with self-deprecation, "What friends?" Young people today are programmed to believe they must spend every waking hour on the "what you know," for this, they are told, is the key to a successful life. However, with precious little time spent on the "who you know," an entire generation has emerged unequipped even for just getting by.

Don't be fooled by reality-TV melodramas entitled "Survivor." If the attention-starved backbiters begging to wallow in their low self-esteem on network television were actually stranded on some desert island, they would realize the recklessness of kicking crewmembers off. Indeed, the greedy two-faced and cutthroat methods popularized by these shows greatly *reduce* one's actual chances for survival in the real world. Since when did the idea of friendship become nothing more than entering into an agreement of *quid pro quo*: you do something for me and I'll do something for you? This most shallow of alliances is based largely on control, where one party "owes" the other something in return, without any sense of mutual respect or admiration.

Today, as always, the critical survival skill is *listening*. Let's face it: few people are good listeners. The reasons for this are many, including the self-absorbed desire to always be right, the hierarchical view that makes one disregard the thoughts and opinions of others (often the very young and very old or those less "educated"), as well as the myriad distractions of our overworked gadget-oriented society. By really *listening* to what Lennon and McCartney are saying (and Starr is singing), one discerns a common concern: I'm afraid that if my faults are revealed, you won't be my friend; Risking rejection, I hope you'll accept me for who I am..... please, give me a chance! This begs the question: Who is listening you *your* song? And, better yet: *Are you listening to the songs those around you are singing, no matter how "out of tune" they may be?*

Remember: to have friends, you must be a friend, and much of the time all anyone is asking for is someone who will listen with acceptance.

I get by with a little help from my friends,
I get high with a little help from my friends.
Going to try with a little help from my friends.

Do not be deceived by the apparent modesty of these rewards, for those with good friends enjoy a lifetime of fulfillment. Lend me your ears!