

FREE SAMPLE
CHAPTERS ONE AND TWO

I had friends... or so I thought

ARE THEY REALLY MY FRIENDS?

— ◆ —
Words are easy. Actions reveal the truth.



— ◆ —
DR. MICHAEL COHEN

Devoted to the Art of Being Human

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To my friends, who have walked beside me the entire way.

I dedicate this book with profound gratitude to everyone who served as my **rescue team** during the hardest stretches of my life. To the true friends who walked beside me, and through whom I had the privilege of learning what it means to live a life of truth. They are the ones who, more than once, opened my eyes to things that were obvious to everyone but me. Thank you for your wisdom, for the room you gave me to say what I felt without judgment, and for believing in my path. Because of you I learned the hardest art of all: to be honest and true with myself.

This book is dedicated to you because you helped me understand that while we were born as “**Human Beings,**” our true destiny is to excel at “**Being a Human.**” Thank you for teaching me that true friendship is not a passive status, but an active, daily choice in the humanity of one’s actions.

In a way that may surprise some readers, I choose, with total integrity, to also thank those who have hurt me. To those who exploited my willingness and failed to respect my presence during the dark periods of their lives. It was precisely from you that I learned the most important lesson of all: the essence of friendship and the moral obligation to no longer compromise on “**default**” friendships.

I thank those who received a supportive hand from me but knew only how to offer “thanks” as lip service, as if settling a burdensome debt rather than expressing appreciation from the depths of the heart. Thank you to those who failed to appreciate emotional intelligence and viewed me only as a “**function**”; those who complained in messages

and spread baseless rumors behind my back while smiling to my face.

Thank you, those of you who were unable to show support, and especially to those who took my soul for their personal needs and turned me into a temporary anchor. Because of you, I understood what happens when a need is met: once you no longer required me, you disappeared over the horizon. I learned from you that interest-based friendship is an **optical illusion**, and that my value does not depend on your ability to appreciate it.

I do not mention your names, as there is no need. Each of you knows exactly who you are to me. As I often say to you with a direct gaze: you are the beating heart of my life, whether you were there to build, or there to teach me how not to be built the wrong way again.

“I have learned from all my teachers, but from my friends most of all.”

Dr. Michael Cohen, A lover of humanity in all its forms



PART ONE

Before the Code

*Why some friendships drain you, and the question that
starts the work*



CHAPTER 1

The Heart's Sieve

When Quantity Blurs Quality



1.1 The Moment of Awakening: When the Noise Leaves Us Thirsty

There is a moment when you stop and look around in quiet surprise. The house is full of guests. The phone keeps lighting up with messages. And in the middle of all that noise, your heart is still thirsty.

That is the moment of awakening. The mask slips, and you see that some of the people you have been calling friends are simply **draining you**.

They are not there to challenge you, to celebrate your good news, or to help you grow. They are there to take the light you keep offering. Some arrive wearing closeness. Others are simply still around after twenty years. The result is the same: you walk away emptier than you arrived. To build a circle worth having, you need a **Heart's Sieve**, and you need to learn who walks beside you and who is only leaning on you.

1.2 The Battery Test

FOUNDATION STONE 1

At this moment, now that the encounter has ended, do I feel that my emotional battery has been recharged, or did someone simply leave me at zero percent?

Before we start filtering, take one simple tool with you. Use it for the rest of this book, and for the rest of your life. It is a quick, honest check at the end of any encounter: a short call, a long dinner, a thread of messages. Stop and ask yourself plainly: *did that person add to me, or take*

from me?

1.3 Friendship as an Existential Need: Repairing the Sieve

That is not a selfish question. It is a question of survival. Real friendship works like a shared power station: both people leave it stronger. If you keep coming home empty, your Heart's Sieve has cracked, and it is time to repair it. This book will show you how to rebuild it, and how to protect what matters most: your peace, and your ability to give it to people who deserve it.

1.4 The Roadmap to Filtering: Three Masquerades of Energy Drainers

To catch the ones slipping through the cracks, you have to recognize the costumes they wear. Most of them mean no harm. They simply cannot see what they are doing. The damage is real anyway.

1.4.1 The Time Thieves: Full Throttle in Neutral

Some friends are, above all, thieves of time. They fill your hours with talk that runs at **full throttle in neutral**: a great deal of engine noise, a constant sense of urgency, and no movement toward anything real. They hold on and will not let go. Every meeting becomes a marathon of nothing, where you nod politely and look for the exit. You leave exhausted, as though their engine burned your fuel without moving either of you an inch closer.

1.4.2 The Unloading Station

Others treat your heart as an **unloading station**. Without asking, they appoint you their private psychologist. They set down the whole weight of their world in front of you and use you to feel lighter. It runs one way. The moment the relief arrives, they are gone. And when you need a shoulder, you find the station closed. They have moved on, and you are left holding what they set down.

1.4.3 The Inflated Ego: Oppressive Transparency

Then there is the **inflated ego**. These are the people who need you smaller so they can feel larger. They use the friendship as a stage. You leave feeling see-through. Your presence is not wanted for itself; it is wanted as a mirror.

1.5 Filtering as an Act of Soul Protection

This book opens with one essential action: **Filtering**. To make room for those truly worthy of your heart, you must dare to part ways with those who fill your life while draining your spirit. This is not coldness or arrogance; it is self-compassion, and a necessary protection of the soul.

The Cry of Awakening

*I had friends, or so I thought
I labored and gave, I believed and I wrought
I thought it was a bond, deep and secure
Unaware of how fragile my heart had to endure.*

*I had a friend, arrogant, knowing it all
Beside him I vanished, returning home small
He smiled a fake smile, I failed to see
The start of an error, unfolding in me.*

*I had a friend, clinging, unable to let go
As if my heart were a station for his sorrow to flow
And a friend who asked favors, again and again
While I kept on giving, ignoring the strain.*

*I had a friend, cold as ice, feeling no part
No warmth and no hug, just a silence that smarts
And one who used my time, from morning till late
While I kept my heart open, tempting my fate.*

*So, I took a sieve, of time and of pain
And passed them all through, in the heart's quiet rain
Who remains when the night is cold and the way is dim?
Who stands by my side, when the chances are slim?
And at the bottom of the vessel, like gold refined and bright
Remain three whose hearts are pure, filled with light
No title or status, no condition or fee
Just a shared heart, remaining with me.*

*And then I knew truly, the lesson I've learned
Better three who are real, than thirty unearned
And I understood then, three diamonds so rare
Are the quiet light, restoring my worth in their care.*

**Dr. Michael Cohen, A lover of humanity in its human
essence**

The Illusion of Friends

True Friendship is a Choice

1.6 When the Ground Shakes and the Phones Fall Silent

This book was born out of a painful moment of sobering reality and a total refusal to continue nodding along to the false assumption that friendship is something natural that “just happens” to us along the way, between youth movements, the military, or the workplace. For many years, I was surrounded by many people, but deep down, I felt that something fundamental was simply missing.

I discovered that we hardly dare to ask the truly frightening question: **“Why are you really my friend?”** This question does not stem from a need for social approval or politeness, but from a fierce desire to touch the depth and intention hidden beneath the surface. There, in the echoing silence following that question, I found my truth.

I write these words from open wounds, having experienced searing disappointments from people I called friends. I saw them disappear exactly when the ground beneath me shook and I needed a supportive hand, and I felt how they disparaged the values that are my very lifeblood. The trust I built with my heart’s blood cracked and broke time and again.

It is both astonishing and agonizing to discover that what I thought was a stable friendship was actually built on

shaky foundations of gossip, envy, competition, or an interest hidden beneath the surface. The moment I fell into a real crisis and waited for someone to reach out, I discovered that the phones had gone completely silent. Suddenly, everyone vanished as if they had never been there for me.

1.7 The Illusion of “Togetherness” and the Roadmap of Truth

How many times have you felt that you were only a “default option” for them, that they only called when they were bored, when there was no better plan on the horizon, or when they suddenly needed something from you? We cling to clichés and worn-out slogans to protect our hearts from the cold truth; it is our way of glossing over the fact that most connections in our lives remain empty of content.

To distinguish between truth and illusion, we must look at this roadmap:

Feature	Default Friendship	True Friendship
Basis of Connection	Chance (Work, Military, Habit)	Conscious choice and a decision of the heart
During Crisis	Phones go silent, people vanish	A “rescue team” and a supportive hand
Internal Feeling	Feeling “exploited” or filling a void	Self-worth, security, and respect
Depth of Conversation	Gossip, interests, and idle talk	Sincerity, depth, and unconditional love

1.8 Friendship as an Emotional Skill

True friendship is born when you stop looking for the stage and start illuminating the other.

In the end, most of us discover the bitter truth: true friendships can be counted on the fingers of one hand. We must be honest and ask: how many times have friends insulted you in front of everyone just to win a demeaning laugh? Or how many times did you discover they spoke about you behind your back?

The feeling that someone is diminishing you to make themselves feel superior is a stinging one. I found myself investing in relationships that did not return security, closeness, or respect. I felt close and yet alone at the same time, until the liberating realization arrived: **Friendship is not just an emotion, but primarily a skill.**

1.9 Learning the Language of Truth

True friendship is no accident; it is a conscious decision to build a home in another's soul.

The truth I discovered through the pain is that it is not necessarily because people are “bad,” but simply because no one ever taught us what true friendship is. We grew up into accidental connections, but no one gave us tools for the big questions.

This book was born to fill that void, and to teach the language of true friendship. It exposes the gap between a “mock friendship” built on convenience and image, and a true one that is not a transaction but a choice.



CHAPTER 2

Why Friendship Is Not Optional

From Personal Pain to Proven Necessity



In the previous chapter, we felt together the pain that sometimes comes with being a friend, and in the following chapters, we will deeply understand why you felt hurt along the way. Many facts you were afraid to admit will suddenly surface, and you will feel it in your gut as a positive, healing sign. This is a clear signal that someone is finally saying out loud what we all feel regarding the painful complexity of human friendship.

We will walk together to understand how to build a friendship that is a **fortress of fairness and trust**, rather than just a default of occasional convenience. This book serves as a personal coach that will lead you through six central and practical axes:

2.1 The Barrier: Why Do We Stay “Stuck”?

Before we can walk these axes, we must understand what keeps you currently inside interest-based friendships or default connections. The barrier is built of four heavy bricks:

- **The “Seniority Trap”:** Loyalty to friendships of many years (30 years or more) that creates a commitment to history instead of to your self-worth today.
- **Acceptance of the Status Quo:** The quiet despair that says “this is just how it is” and that there is no friendship better than the current one.
- **Fear of the Void:** The terror of the loneliness that will be created if we filter out the “drainers.”
- **Blurred Boundaries:** The absence of a healthy “No,” which turns you into a permanent “unloading station.”

2.2 The Three Levels to Success: From Understanding to Transformation

To stop settling for what exists and move from default friendship to true friendship, you must pass through three essential **levels**. This is the wisdom of moving from an internal position to behavior that changes the quality of life.

Level 1: **Willingness** (*The Heart*) The “Why”

This is your emotional stance. The moment you stop accepting a draining reality and realize you deserve more.

- **The Gut Question:** *Am I truly tired of default friendships that do not serve my soul?*
- **The Goal:** Breaking the stagnation and ending the denial.

Level 2: **Readiness** (*The Head*) The “What”

This is the mental stance. Here you activate your “Xray vision.”

- **The Head Question:** *Do I dare to see clearly who the people are that drain my light?*
- **The Goal:** Achieving clarity and awareness, and planning the “sieve.”

Level 3: **Capability** (*The Feet*) The “How”

This is the actual transformation. Here, the will becomes action.

- **The Feet Question:** *Am I ready to take real steps, filter out the unnecessary, and expand my high-quality network?*

- **The Goal:** Clearing the “noise” in favor of building the **Heart’s Network**.

2.3 Transition to Practical Learning

True wisdom is not just knowing the problem, but daring to make the transformation that improves your life. If you have found that you have default friends, if you have felt them drain you, and if you feel a fierce desire to filter out the toxic and fill your world with people who grant you light, you are in the right place.

FOUNDATION STONE 2

True friendship begins with clearing space in the heart for those worthy of it.

To begin that change, turn now to **Appendix 7: The Staircase of Change**, which holds the **Three-Level Assessment**, a quick diagnostic tool that shows exactly where you stand on the axis of capability.

The Soul’s Insurance Policy

True Friendship: The Proven Recipe for Longevity and Quality of Life

In the previous chapters, we presented the goals of our shared journey, but before we dive into the methods, we must understand the solid foundation upon which everything rests. Friendship is not a passing psychological trend; it is etched into our genetic and spiritual code. To

understand its power, we will examine it through two lenses: the ancient wisdom of generations and the forefront of modern scientific research.

2.4 Ancient Voices: The Wisdom of Generations as a Foundation for Resilience

Even before friendship was defined as a variable in laboratories, it was carved into our cultural infrastructure. Ancient sources identified with great precision the very mechanisms we study today. True friendship has always been perceived as the existential pillar during times of crisis, as stated in Proverbs: **“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity” (Proverbs 17:17).**

In moments of darkness, a friend is not an external figure; they become part of our soul’s survival. Beyond support, friendship is the tool for refining one’s character: **“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17).** True friendship is the soul’s primary “gym”, a place where we sharpen our wisdom through fruitful friction with the “Other.” The sources emphasize: quality triumphs over quantity. **“There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24),** one refined diamond is worth more than a broad but shallow network.

2.5 From the Lab to Life: Friendship as a Biological Survival Need

Modern science now confirms what the heart has always known. The Harvard Study of Adult Development, which has spanned over 80 years, revealed a resonating truth: the quality of social relationships is the strongest predictor of physical health and emotional happiness.

It was found that a person's satisfaction with their friendships at age 50 predicted their longevity at age 80 more accurately than cholesterol levels or economic success.

Chronic loneliness is not just a regrettable feeling; it is a destructive biological state that damages the immune system similarly to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. A true friend acts as a natural **“stress regulator”**:

- **Decrease in Cortisol:** The stress hormone drops significantly in the presence of a close friend.
- **Increase in Oxytocin:** Known as the “love hormone,” it acts as a natural anti-inflammatory and protects the heart.

2.6 Soul Family: A Reason to Live

Looking back over the years, we discover a simple yet profound human truth: sometimes true friends are more than family. While family is a destiny we are born into, true friendship is our supreme choice. The knowledge that there is a person who comes from a pure place of support, who declares through their actions that they are your best friend, grants a strength that no medicine can provide.

Friendship is the most vital component of our health; it is the most powerful shock absorber against the crises of life.

FOUNDATION STONE 3

***True friendship extends life and imbues it with
profound depth and meaning.***



CHAPTER 3

The Question That Changes Everything

From the Lab to Real Life: Time for a Social Diagnosis



If scientific research unequivocally determines that friendship is our true immune system, we must ask ourselves honestly: why do we invest so many resources in vitamins and balanced nutrition, yet simultaneously completely neglect the quality of the people who penetrate our **emotional vein**? You cannot buy health at the pharmacy if the heart remains lonely or wounded within toxic relationships.

The hour has come to deeply examine our “human nutrition” and ask: are the people surrounding us **rechargers**, activating our body’s healing and growth mechanisms, or are they **drainers**, leaving us in a state of constant alertness and tension? This diagnosis is the first and necessary step to repairing our social reality.

3.1 The Shaking Question: Why are you really my friend?

Before we open our practical toolkit, we must stand courageously before the most direct question of all: Why are you really my friend?

Ask: “Why are you my friend?” The answer will reveal who your friend truly is.

This question is often perceived as frightening because it peels away all the familiar social masks. If it seems too threatening, you can open your heart gently: share the personal process you are going through and explain that you are examining what is truly important to you in friendship. Ask your friend what your shared Why is. By only presenting the question, we expose the naked truth; avoiding it does not protect you, it only leaves you in shallow connec-

tions based on nostalgia or the fear of loneliness.

3.2 The “Fun” Test: When Enjoyment is Just the Tip of the Iceberg

When the answer to the motive question is summarized in the words “Because we have fun,” we must deepen the investigation. Moving from superficial fun to a **constitutive friendship** requires breaking the experience of enjoyment into two central types:

1. **Escapist Enjoyment (The Trap):** A state of shared escape from troubles. Laughter serves as a smokescreen designed to prevent discourse on what truly hurts.
2. **Security-based Enjoyment (The Foundation):** Enjoyment resulting from feeling safe to be “yourself” within the relationship. Laughter is a byproduct of inner freedom, not an escape from reality.

Transformation occurs when we pour essence into the fun. A constitutive friendship uses moments of fun to gather emotional information and strengthen the familiarity with the other’s world. The ultimate test is the “**day after test**”, the ability of the relationship to function even when the “glue” of the fun dries up.

3.3 The Symmetry Test: Between Operational Giving and True Partnership

When a friend says they are your friend because “You are always there for me,” a warning sign flashes. This sentence may describe **operational giving**, a situation in which you are perceived as a resource or a service provider, rather than a friend. We must distinguish between two types of presence:



END OF THE FREE SAMPLE

Chapter 3 continues in the full edition.

*You have felt the sieve, and you have seen why friendship is
not optional. The diagnosis begins here.*

The full edition carries on from here: the social audit in full, and
then the FRIEND Code itself, a chapter for each pillar. Faithfulness,
Respect, Inner Depth, Empathy, Non-Judgment, Devotion.
Eighteen chapters on living the code, and a twelve-part workbook of
diagnostic tools for your own circle.

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