Chapter 10: Interpersonal Relationships

Stages and Communication in Friendship Development

*Initial Contact and Acquaintanceship*

The first stage of friendship development is obviously an initial meeting of some kind. This does not mean that what has happened prior to the encounter is unimportant—quite the contrary. In fact, your prior history of friendships, your personal needs, and your readiness for friendship development are extremely important in determining whether the relationship will develop.

At the initial stage, the characteristics of effective interpersonal communication are usually present to only a small degree. You’re guarded rather than open or expressive, lest you reveal aspects of yourself that might be viewed negatively. Because you don’t yet know the other person, your ability to empathize with or to orient yourself significantly to the other is limited, and the “relationship”—at this stage, at least—is probably viewed as too temporary to be worth the effort. Because the other person is not well-known to you, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality would all be difficult to manifest in any meaningful sense. The characteristics demonstrated are probably more the result of politeness than any genuine expression of positive regard.

At this stage, there is little genuine immediacy; the people see themselves as separate and distinct rather than as a unit. The confidence that is demonstrated is probably more a function of the individual personalities than of the relationship. Because the relationship is so new and because the people don’t know each other very well, the interaction is often characterized by awkwardness—for example, overlong pauses, uncertainty over the topics to be discussed, and ineffective exchanges of speaker and
listener roles.