

**F**inding  
**Friends: A Strategy.**  
WELCOME to a new school year. And the ongoing challenge of friendship.

The idea behind friendship is, of course, two-sided: One person expresses friendship, the other person responds with friendship.

So, who gets the action started? Who makes the first move?

Might as well be you.

You can't control the other person.

Try this:

■ *Reach out to the imperfect people.* I don't mean snub the popular people.

I do mean: Don't ig-

nore the lonely.

I do mean: Don't place higher standards on others than you do on yourself.

Ask yourself:

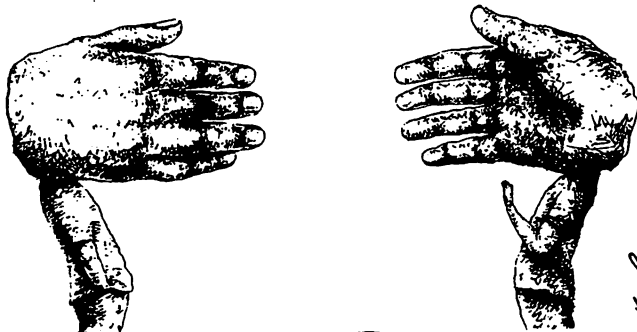
What does a person have to do to qualify for my friendship?

If the standard is sky-

high, lower it.

Which is another way of saying:

■ *Befriend people without giving them a shopping list of changes they must make.* Accept people as they are. Tolerate, even celebrate, differ-



ences in others. Listen to others. Learn from others.

What friendship is not: Friendship is not cloning others after yourself.

And as you give others permission to be themselves, do this:

■ *Be yourself.* This is the flip side of the cloning question: Friendship is not cloning yourself after others.

Relax. You do not have to remake your personality or style into someone else's image.

For example: If you do not believe in drinking, if you do not even like the taste of the stuff, why feel pressured into

drinking just to make friends?

Be yourself. Friends respect that.

Don't try to be something you're not to gain friends.

Instead:

■ *Share who you really are.* Don't hide your feelings, your disappointments, your opinions, your ideas, your dreams, your goals. Friendships are built on this kind of sharing.

But don't dump the whole load on first meeting.

"Hello."

"Hi! I'm going to be president someday. But I'm afraid of snakes. And my uncle's a

convict."

Friendships take time.

Therefore:

■ *Don't rush it.* And don't push yourself on others. Be patient. Give friendship time.

■ *Encourage others to share who they really are.* They also have feelings, disappointments, opinions, ideas, dreams, goals. Try to feel with them in their feelings and disappointments. Honor their opinions and ideas. Encourage them in their dreams and goals.

Try this:

■ *Listen!* (It's the forgotten side of talking.)

—JL