

Superhuman Social Skills: A Guide to Being Likeable, Winning Friends, and Building Your Social Circle

Tynan

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Dedicated to my friends, of course.

Introduction

Few would argue against the idea that the group of people you surround yourself with will dictate the course of your life more than any other factor. This is true not just for extroverts, but for introverts as well. Regardless of the amount of time we choose to share with others, that connection has an outsized impact on our lives.

Think back to your most positive memories. How many didn't involve other people? Few or none, most likely. How about the periods of your life where you grew the most as a person? Weren't friends or mentors guiding or supporting you? Even the hardest times in your life were most likely made better because of others.

This book is based on a simple principle, that the people and friendships in our lives are important. They're important enough to think about social skills consciously, and to put effort into improving them. They're important enough to justify doing hard work to make ourselves better friends and family members.

The people you interact with could be slotted into three categories. There are acquaintances, friends, and members of your close friend group. Each of these categories requires you to share a different part of yourself, and brings a critical benefit into your life.

Through reading this book, you should be able to make strangers into acquaintances that like you. You'll learn the art of conversation and how to share the best parts of you in an honest and authentic way. You'll learn how to make new friends, and how to be the kind of friend that people want to have. And, last, you'll learn how to build a group of friends with whom you'll share support, quality time, and love.

If you don't understand why you don't have more friends, or if the process of making them frustrates you, you'll be able to start from scratch and build a completely new social life. If you have good social skills but find certain social situations puzzling, this book should eliminate that confusion. And even if you have great friends and have no problems making new ones, I hope that you'll learn a few things to make those relationships even better. Some friendships you'll have for life, so even a small improvement can be important.

Few people excel at any skill without thoughtful consideration and practice, and social skills are no exception. I went from being an introvert who was too shy to interact with friends-of-friends, to someone with amazing friends all over the world, and a core group of close friends with whom I share much of my life. By understanding the skills and principles that underpin social interaction, whether with strangers or best friends, you can break out of any mold you may find yourself in, and build superhuman social skills.

Social Skills are Skills

If you were bad at, say, badminton, you'd probably do something about it. You wouldn't feel bad about yourself, but you'd take steps to improve. Maybe you'd read books, watch some videos, ask friends for help, or take lessons. No matter which path you took, you'd practice. You would analyze your progress and the results of your practice, and you'd make course corrections.

When you finally got good at badminton, you might share the story of how you improved, and would expect that people would generally look favorably on your course of actions. You identified an area of your life that needed improvement, you came up with steps to turn it into a strength, you executed on that plan, and you succeeded.

Although we use the phrase "social skill", we treat social skills more like a mystic inborn force than an actual practicable skill. We act as if social skills are genetically predetermined, like hair color or eye color. If we have poor social skills, or inconsistent social skills, we generally accept that that's our lot in life.

Maybe this comes from the idea that learning badminton isn't changing oneself, but learning social skills is. The way we interact with others is so core to our experience in life that we equate it to who we are. And there's some truth to that, too. How we portray ourselves to others will define their experience of who we are. The same person is considered a jerk and a saint to two different people, not because he actually is either of those things, but because of how he treats them.

Generally speaking, change is scary, especially for friends of the person who is changing. Insecurities surface, as do questions of motives. Why is he trying to become someone he's not? Why can't he just be himself?

But what is self-improvement if it's not actually transforming us into better versions of ourselves? We keep the good things about ourselves, maybe even make them better, but we also attack our weaknesses and reduce or eliminate them. We all have deficiencies and can be better.

It's about time social skills were treated like skills, and any stigma associated with improving them was left behind. We should encourage people who take the brave step of admitting that something so core to their being needs improvement, even when that person is ourself. Yes, we'll become different people, but we were going to do that anyway. We change all the time, usually in imperceptible increments, so why not guide that change?

A Word on Manipulation

I gave a speech at a university once, followed by a Q&A. The questions from the students were sharp, leading to interesting discussion. Near the end a professor asked, in a rather accusatory way, if practicing social skills wasn't just manipulating and lying to people.

Many people think that consciously improving one's social skills is manipulative, deceptive, or disingenuous. If you're anything like that professor, it's unlikely anything I can say will change your mind. This reaction, as best I can tell, is borne from insecurity that can't be erased through a few paragraphs of explanation.

I see learning social skills as the exact opposite. To me, it's the practice of becoming the very best person you can be, maximizing what you have to offer others. It's about communicating who you are as clearly as possible, and removing barriers preventing you from understanding others with that same clarity. It's about really understanding what others are looking for in a conversation or in a friend, and working to give them that very thing, if you are so capable. We do things all the time with the intention of eliciting a result from someone else. That alone is not manipulation. I might tell a joke to make a friend laugh. Technically I have taken an action to precipitate a reaction from him, but few would call that manipulative.

Manipulation has a connotation of ulterior motives. It implies that we can get someone to do something against their will or better interests by cajoling them or presenting a false impression of ourselves.

That's not at all the goal of building social skills. The goal is to understand better what other people really want, to identify where that intersects with what you want, and to have the social tools required to get both people what they're hoping for. It's also about understanding where there isn't an intersection, and moving on.

The tools we use to do this are self-awareness, situational awareness, good communication skills, and an understanding of humor, empathy, and social dynamics. Some will dismiss this practice as manipulation, but I think that's a pretty big stretch.

Maybe the litmus test most easily comprehended on an emotional level is this: if a stranger worked hard to be a better conversationalist, would you hold it against him when you had a great conversation with him? If you found out that one of your best friends worked hard to be the best friend they could be, would you be offended, or would you be flattered?

In this book, I will be unabashedly analytical, examining and quantifying aspects of social skills that are usually not spoken about. We'll talk about power dynamics, our value as friends, opportunity cost, and efficient use of time. Whether or not we acknowledge these, and other, factors, they underpin our social interactions and play an enormous role in the quality of relationships in our lives. Some find these topics unpalatable, or even offensive, but it's hard to make a better sausage if you don't take a look at what's going inside the factory.

Goals Of This Book

We have a social problem in our society. Our social time is being siphoned from real life into cyberspace. We may have hundreds of Facebook friends whose every move we follow, but with whom we never have a meaningful conversation. So many of our conversations are electronic that we've dulled some of those skills that are only useful in real life: timing, yielding, listening, and perceiving facial expressions and body language.

Maybe you feel the effects of this degradation. You have tons of friends, but few or none whom you could really rely upon, and fewer who really understand you. When you do spend time with your friends, it's not as satisfying of an experience as you remember from your childhood.

The remedy for this problem, on an individual basis, is to build up certain social skills to a baseline level. Before we get into the how of building these social skills, I'd like to give you an idea of the goals we'll be working towards, and why they are important.

1. Be Comfortable With All Strata of Society

A socially skilled person is able to get along with people across all strata of society. Not necessarily every person, but every type of person. This is a useful skill and it's also a very important benchmark. You could rely on commonality with a clone of yourself, but must truly exercise your social skills when trying to relate to someone with whom you have little in common. If you cannot do that, then you may be skilled at relating to people with whom you are compatible with, but not be socially skilled.

Commonality is a shortcut to rapport, and a good one to use if it's available. But sometimes the most interesting conversations and friendships happen between people with little commonality. After all, by definition, if you have less in common there's more new territory to explore.

Building this skill requires travel outside of one's comfort zone, as well as grappling with hidden insecurity. On one end of the spectrum it's possible to feel inferior to people you admire, as though you don't have any value to add to the relationship. On both ends, lack of commonality can be a hard barrier to cross, especially if it's apparent that you're from different backgrounds and the other person is intimidated by it.

Someone who is comfortable interacting and befriending people in all strata of society will feel comfortable in nearly every situation, confident in his ability to add to any interaction of which he's a part. He'll have more opportunities to share what he knows with others, as well as the ability to learn from experiences that he may never have personally.

2. Be A Net Addition

Beyond just getting along with people in all strata of society, you want to generally be a net positive to any social situation in which you're placed. If someone was eating alone, and you were to join them, that should make their lunch better. If a few friends are having tea together, and you get invited, your presence should make everyone have a better time. And if you go to a large party or event, even though your impact will be proportionally smaller due to the size, those you interact with should be glad that you were at the party.

Being a net addition is different than just not being a net negative. Being simply neutral is often a negative, as you are taking up an attendance slot that could have been used by someone else who could have been an addition. It's important to proactively add to social situations.

Most social circles are actually series of concentric circles. There's the small inner nucleus of people who organize and get invited to everything, and without whom events wouldn't even

happen. Then there's the next ring of people who are always welcome, but would never displace a member of the nucleus. Outside those two circles are people who usually get invited, but only if space permits. Or maybe they have certain personality quirks that make them incompatible with others in that circle, meaning the core group must choose who gets invited and who doesn't.

The nucleus is comprised of the people who are net additions, and who orchestrate events. The next circle is those who are also net additions. The circle further out are people who are "not negative". Sometimes they add, sometimes they're neutral. They're nice to have around, but not a sure enough thing to make sure they come to every event. Beyond those rings are people who are sometimes or always net negatives.

By ensuring that you're always a net addition, even if you're not a huge one, you will dramatically increase the number of events to which you are invited. Besides being fun and valuable, these invitations will provide you with events at which you can practice your social skills, creating a virtuous cycle.

3. Build A Quality Friend Group

With the possible exception of your daily habits, nothing will influence your life so much as your core friend group. Whether you're aware of it or not, you are constantly molded and influenced by those closest to you. You'll receive advice from them, absorb their mannerisms and habits, and even subconsciously adopt some of their opinions.

Most people's friend groups are the product of happenstance and momentum. With so much on the line, choosing those closest to you should be a very deliberate decision. The opportunity and ability to methodically build a social circle will improve your life as well as the lives of those in the circle.

The goal is to build a social circle that will both challenge and support you, depending on what you need at the time. The right friend group will be a case of the sum being greater than the parts, all friends advancing more easily through life, enjoying the ride more, and learning more.

4. Establish Emotional Independence From Acquaintances and Strangers

We all need emotional support from time to time. Whether it's someone to sit down and empathize with you during a tough time or someone to cheer you up when you're in a bad

mood. However, it's important to get that support from the right people, and not to impose that need on others who aren't prepared to satisfy it.

A friendship is like a bank account. The more you put in, the more you can take out. I have friends who could be miserable and intolerable for weeks, and I'd let them stay at my place and do my best to help them get back to a good mental place. I wouldn't do that for strangers. With my friends I have a long and positive history, with so many good memories, experiences, and emotions, that they could draw from me for quite a while before I'd feel any sort of imposition.

And, of course, I feel the same way about my friends being there for me. I do my best to require little from others, but I have a group of close friends who would happily give me whatever support I needed if a situation arose.

But what happens when someone needs external support but doesn't have close friendships? If he can't solve the problem himself, he ends up imposing on acquaintances. This is undesirable not just because it creates an imposition on the acquaintance, but also because it damages that relationship and decreases the likelihood of it growing into a meaningful friendship.

Reaching this goal requires a two-pronged approach: becoming self-reliant enough to only impose when necessary, and building such a sufficiently robust group of close friends that it's virtually impossible to overdraw on the friendship bank.

A person who is emotionally independent from acquaintances is most likely minimizing the impositions he creates on his friends, but is also making it very easy for new people to become his friends, since he asks nothing from them in the early stages of the friendship.

6. Be Able to Handle Oneself Socially in Any Situation

Similar to being able to relate to people across all social strata, it's also important to be able to handle oneself in any social situation that may arise. A good litmus test is to ask whether someone would feel comfortable introducing you to any of his friends or inviting you to any event.

For example, can you fend for yourself if you're dropped into a party? Can you strike up conversations with strangers and be a net positive without your friend introducing you and having to make sure that you're taken care of?

What if you're stuck talking with someone you don't really like? Can you be relied upon to be civil, not alienate them, and maybe even be a net positive to them? What if everyone in the party decides to go to a restaurant, and it's not the kind of food you want to eat? Will you go along and make the best of it?

This is so crucial because it directly affects the quality and quantity of introductions you receive, which will likely be a primary input into your social life. If the introducer can put you into any situation and expect that you will be an asset, even if you don't make a connection with the person he's introducing you to, you will get a lot more introductions.

Additionally, if you don't have to worry about the context of your interactions, only being comfortable in certain environments, that's one level of anxiety that won't be getting in between you and the people with whom you socialize.

7. Make People Like You More The Longer They Know You

First impressions are important, and we'll talk about them in detail, but it's your enduring impact that will determine how deep your friendships become. To have excellent friendships, and to maximize the opportunities for casual friends to turn into good friends, you must be the kind of person who becomes even better with more time.

We all know people who are the opposite. They're fun to have in big groups, because you can talk with them for a few minutes, but two hours with them would drive you crazy. It's tragic to see people like this sometimes, because you know that they're good people with good intentions and a lot to offer, but their social skills alienate others.

Ideally you want to feel as though anyone would like you, given enough time with you. This shouldn't really even be a reach-- it's a first step. Build up your social strengths, cut out weaknesses, and you're there.

If you do not have this now, you'll want to pay special attention to the sections of the book on eliminating social weaknesses. If you're a good person with some unique life experience, which I'm assuming you are, you're likable in the long term. If you find that people don't eagerly go the distance to become friends with you, it's probably because you're making some easily-correctable social mistakes that push them away.

Levels of Communication

The cable that comes into your home for TV has only two wires running through it. The cable itself is a rudimentary piece of technology that can be understood by anyone. But through this

simple medium, hundreds of channels as well as access to the entire internet are transmitted. A lot is happening simultaneously.

This is very similar to how we communicate. Our words may seem very simple, but there are actually several different channels of communication being transmitted at the same time. To master social skills, you must be aware of these channels, be able to communicate effectively on them, and be able to understand what is being transmitted to you over them.

There are four main channels being communicated on at all times: content, meta, emotion, and status.

Content is what we think of when we talk about communication superficially. If you tell me that you're going to the store, the content channel is simply telling me that you are going to travel to the store.

The meta channel is the undercurrent of the conversation. It's the meaning behind the meaning-- the implication. If we had just been talking about how I wanted to eat brownies, and you're going to the store, the meta channel communication is that you're going to go get ingredients to make me brownies. Sometimes meta can be read in isolation, but it usually requires context.

The emotion channel is more of a passive signal than an active channel. Those of us who are not expert poker players are constantly leaking out our emotions as we speak. You could say, "I'm going to the store" in any number of tones and cadences. You could indicate that you were going to the store in resignation, because I wouldn't stop hounding you about making me brownies. You could indicate that you loved me, and that's why you were going to get ingredients to make me brownies. You could also reveal that you were frustrated, nervous, excited, or any other number of emotions.

And last, the status channel is constantly sending out clues about our relative status. If I were your boss and told you to go make brownies, you could say, "I'm going to the store" as an affirmation that you understood my command and were going to comply with it. You could also say it in a patronizing tone that indicates that you're going to do it because I'm so far below you that I'm incapable of doing such a basic task myself.

I'm going to the store. Five basic words, chosen at random, that could mean just about anything, even though the content doesn't change. If you weren't already awed at the power of communication, this just might do it. It's incredible how much can be conveyed simultaneously.

A master of communication must be able to have two major conversations (content and meta), while maintaining two minor conversations (emotion and status). This is no exaggeration. If someone were to transcribe the meta conversation between you and another person, it should be totally coherent. Same with the other two. If that conversation did not flow as smoothly as the content channel, you'd find that the conversation was frustrating to one or both of you, even if you couldn't identify why.

Each channel has its own strengths and weaknesses, so when it's important to convey something, you need to choose the right channel to focus on. I'll spare you a discussion on the content channel, since you're clearly able to understand it if you're able to read this book, but the other three channels deserve individual attention, especially since the most important aspects of conversation happen in the channels hidden behind the content channel.

Meta

The meta channel may be the most important of the four. It's where real discussions happen. In fact, sometimes you intentionally communicate incorrect information on the content channel, through sarcasm or joking, allowing your real message to come through on meta.

The key thing to understand about the meta channel is that it's running all the time. Nothing you say will be taken entirely at face value. People you speak with will always be wondering what you really mean.

Let's say that you suggested that a group go eat pizza. A couple people agree to do so, and then another person says, "I guess I could do pizza". What he's really communicating on the meta channel is that he is willing to conform to group consensus and go eat pizza, but that he'd rather eat somewhere else.

Now people answering after him can take that information into account when forming their own responses. If the next person says, "Pizza sounds good", he's actually communicating a strong preference for pizza. He's ignoring the meta message from the previous person. If he were less interested in pizza, the meta communication from the previous person gave him the opportunity to begin shifting opinion. He could have said, "I could do pizza, or something else."

Once everyone answers, you have a good idea of how everyone in the group feels about it, but you still have options. If people hesitantly agreed and communicated on the meta channel that they'd rather go somewhere else, you could have switched plans.

You might wonder what the point of this all is, especially if you're a very logical person. Certainly it would be easier to just communicate facts in the content channel and have no meta channel.

The point of the meta channel is that it allows for shades of gray not afforded by the content channel. If the content channel is a lecture, the meta channel is a dance. It's pushing and pulling, circling and parrying. Imagine if someone said, "I'll eat at the pizza place, but I'd rather go somewhere else." That's exactly what our first person communicated on meta, but when it's in the content channel, it actually means something different. It's a much stronger disagreement, and is the beginning of a disharmonious decision-making process.

Communicating on the meta channel also allows people to save face. Let's say you met someone and really liked them. They said that they want to go see a Vermeer exhibit at a local museum. Their meta channel is a bit unclear. Maybe they're inviting you, or maybe they're not. You reply that you've also been wanting to see that same exhibit. Now you're communicating that you're not sure if it's an invitation, but that you'd like to go. If they aren't crazy about you, they can just start talking about Vermeer, and thus communicate that they don't want to go with you. You can continue to have a civil conversation and not feel insulted.

If you instead focus on the content channel and say, "Hmm... I'm not sure if you're inviting me or not, but I'd like to go," you put them in a very awkward position. This is the exact type of conversation that should happen over the meta channel so that neither person is made to feel bad.

Once you are really tuned into the meta channel, you might feel as though you are in the matrix. Even when people aren't intending to communicate on the meta channel, you can infer their subcommunications. You understand not just the "what" of people are saying, but also the why, and you gain the power to have two complete conversations at the same time.

The first step to communicating on the meta channel is to constantly ask yourself why people are saying the things they say. Why did he choose that exact phrasing? Why didn't she say something else instead? Why share that information now? Come up with some ideas in your head, and check them later when you have more information. By making predictions and checking their accuracy later, you'll begin to calibrate your brain. When a prediction was off its mark, take the time to analyze and think about it.

Once you understand meta communication, you want to start shaping your own meta communication. What we say can be interpreted in many different ways, so you have to really craft what you say for the specific person you're with whom you're talking. Try to create

a simulator in your brain where, as you consider what to say, you predict how the listener will react, and what meaning they'll assign to it. Think about what you'd like to communicate, and decide whether it's better to do it on the content channel or the meta channel. Which will make the other person feel more comfortable? Which will give you more options? Which gives them more options?

Sometimes when I read a non-fiction book, I decide that no matter what, I'm going to at least make one change as a result. I hope for a big breakthrough, but even a small tip can make a book worth reading. If you were to decide to do that with this book, I'd recommend having that change be focused on communicating more through the meta channel.

Emotion

A lot of conversing is taking the other person on an emotional journey. You think about where they are emotionally, as well as where they want to be, and you use the emotional channel to guide them there, or keep them there if they want to stay in the same place.

For example, let's say you meet someone at a concert. They're excited and having fun, which is exactly why they are at the concert, so they want to maintain that state. If you initiate a serious talk about business, you are grossly miscommunicating on the emotional channel. Even if they really enjoy business and being serious, it's so inappropriate in this context that they'll retreat from the conversation.

On the other hand, you could probably talk about business in a really excited tone, and they'd engage with the conversation. The exact context would dictate whether it would work or not, but it's clear that it's a lot better than trying to be serious.

Consider someone who had a bad day and is frustrated. They probably want to shift to being happy and calm. You can slowly lead them in that direction by making the conversation increasingly positive. Maybe you'd start by matching their tone and asking them questions about the day, and then slowly bring some optimism to the conversation.

On the other hand, if someone were upset because they had a death in the family, though, they probably don't want to be happy. It just feels wrong. Maybe they want to feel understood and supported. You could communicate those things emotionally by listening, asking questions, and offering to do things to help.

Not every conversation is spiked with emotion, but there's usually some emotion there. If it's boredom, you've got to change that as soon as you can. If you're just getting to know someone, maybe you'd want to emotionally communicate a little bit of mystery about yourself as well as

excitement about getting to know them. Be aware of the emotional tone of conversation and think about the directions you could move that emotion.

Status

There is an invisible hierarchy in every group of people from two on up. If a decision had to be made, who would make it? If there were a crisis, to whom would people in the group turn to solve it? Who has to be more careful about what they say?

Humans are hierarchical creatures. We want to know where we stand, not for vanity, but to inform how we speak and act.

I could propose any combination of your friends, and you could probably sketch out a hierarchy. Maybe it would be totally flat, everyone being a peer, but more likely there would be a leader or two who get spoken to with just a tiny bit more deference and take more responsibility for the group. Whatever the hierarchy, everyone in the group would probably unconsciously agree to it and act and speak accordingly.

When you join a new friend group, you want to understand the hierarchy. As an outsider, it's important to maintain the harmony of the group, and not disturb it. If you understand how the members relate to each other, that will be a lot easier to do. Even one on one, status is important. Understanding someone's status is understanding how they view their place in the world.

And, of course, you want to communicate your own status. Some people will treat everyone with respect, but others only treat people with respect if they demand it. So your default outgoing communication on the status channel with someone new should usually be that you deserve respect and are worth getting to know.

A lot of status is communicated nonverbally with body language and eye contact. Direct eye contact conveys high status universally. Taking up a lot of space with your body also conveys high status.

Talking about how high-status you are actually conveys low status. So does doing almost anything that is inappropriate in context. If you take up a lot of space where there's space to spare, you will appear to be high-status. If you take up a lot of space on a train where there are people who want to sit down, you just look insecure and try-hard.

Vocal tone also communicates a lot about status. Someone who talks slightly louder than average and with clarity will appear to be more important.

Instinctively reading status from the way people act and speak is consistent and accurate, which indicates that it's extremely difficult to fake. If you feel like someone is high status, they probably are. If you think they're overreaching and are trying to convince you that they're high status, they probably are faking.

For this reason, it's dangerous to try to fake your own status through body language and tonality. As you become more comfortable and confident, these aspects of communication will naturally change in a positive way.

However, much of status is about what you will and won't accept from yourself and others. That can't be faked, but it can be changed.

For example, many people will agree with higher status people as a blanket policy. Your boss says that he thinks the food at a restaurant is terrible, and you agree with him even though you think it's great. The "cool guy" at a party loves a song, and suddenly everyone likes it, too. This is a low status behavior that invites disrespect.

Disagreeing with everything is even worse, but expressing your own opinion in a clear and appropriate way conveys that you have the ability to think for yourself, even in the presence of strong outside influence. You will be given respect for doing this.

Another major changeable status indicator is whether you take responsibility or not. If you're at a restaurant and someone needs to speak to the waiter about moving some tables together, are you the one who does so? When a conversation is flagging, do you take the initiative and revive it? Ever-so-surprisingly, actually being a leader indicates to others that you are, in fact, a leader.

Be aware of what others are communicating on the status channel, and avoid mannerisms or habits that accidentally convey lower status. In general you should be communicating that you are a peer to people with whom you want to become friends. If you feel like someone is making an effort to appear higher status than you, it's sometimes worth taking action like speaking louder and taking up more space to place yourself a hair above them, only because they've indicated that status is important to them and that they respond to higher status.

Conveying Value Early And Fast

When you are introduced to someone or put into a social situation where people don't know you, your first goal should be to convey as quickly as possible what makes you interesting and worth knowing. It is, of course, important to get to know others and to do your part to make the interaction more interesting and fun for everyone else, but letting them know you is your

first priority. First impressions are made quickly and endure as subconscious biases for a very long time.

People make decisions quickly, so you want to maximize your chances of them viewing you favorably. They share more of themselves with people they deem worthy of their friendship, and only on equal footing can you help improve the interaction.

The value that you convey must be true and authentic. That means that exaggerating is a bad idea. When people have few data points to judge you on, each one will be used and weighted heavily to mean more than it actually does. So if you exaggerate once or say something that doesn't really seem to jive with who you are, it will be noticed and held against you.

Worse than exaggerating is outright bragging. Any level of bragging will nullify anything positive you've managed to communicate. So the trick is to convey as much of yourself as possible without bragging.

For this reason, you'll want to focus less on what you've done and more on who you are. And you want this information to be second-order information, meaning that you want a reasonable person to infer attributes about you based on what you say.

For example, let's say you started a business and just did a million dollars in sales. That's something to be proud of, but there's no possible way to bring it up that won't make you seem like you're bragging. However, you could talk about different productivity strategies you have. People could then infer from those strategies that you're a motivated and productive person, which is a positive thing in almost any social circle.

Similarly, you wouldn't want to talk about how you travel to all sorts of exotic locations, but you could share a tip for getting seat upgrades or talk about a funny travel story you have. From those non-bragging and authentic stories, people will infer that you're adventurous and like to travel.

You can also convey value through asking questions. If someone else is an expert in an area, you could ask a question that presupposes a certain type of knowledge. If you flew airplanes, it would be inappropriate to come out and say, "Hey guys, I'm a pilot!" but you could ask someone who flew helicopters about specific differences between the two.

You'll notice that these alternatives are also more valuable to the listener. They inform, entertain, or engage, rather than just impress. If you're not sure if you're bragging or not, don't say it. Bragging is extremely detrimental, and you'll have plenty of other opportunities to convey value.

The value you're trying to convey is attributes about yourself that make you an interesting and pleasant person. You want to build intrigue without conveying arrogance, and demonstrate that you are socially adept, non-needy, and will be an asset to the person or group with whom you're interacting.

A sense of humor is a huge source of value. Not everyone is funny, and not everyone has to be, but if you are a funny person, you can convey a lot of value with humor. Every social group enjoys laughing and having a good time. There are times where joking around isn't appropriate, but those times are usually not when you're first meeting someone. Even if a person or group thinks you have no value whatsoever except that you make them laugh, they'll still probably want you around.

Consider what about you makes you valuable as a friend, and whenever you're in a new social situation, think about which of your assets will most be appreciated by that group and work on conveying them. Do it early in the interaction and then move on to getting to know everyone else.

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