

We can all be better friends

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Recently, I was fortunate enough to reconnect with my old friend, Jace. We became very good friends years ago in college. However, since we graduated, it had gotten to the point where we hadn't seen each other in over four years. We would briefly speak to each other a little bit through Facebook every now and then. Through one of these FB interactions, Jace asked me if I wanted to get together and catch up in person. We both feel quite a lot of shame for things getting to this point. Nevertheless, for the first time since graduation day in 2017, Jace and I got to spend some time together and talk face to face. I could never have anticipated how awesome it would feel to see a close friend after so much time had passed.

Really, it felt like no time had passed. Jace suggested a local coffee shop, which I thought was pretty funny since I'm not a coffee drinker, and he isn't much of one either. We ended up talking and catching up for a little over an hour and a half, but that time flew by pretty quickly. We never even began to talk about video games, which is the biggest hobby that we share. We talked about many aspects of our lives and vented a little bit about things both personal, as well as what we see in society. Despite those times when we had talked through FB or through Messenger, one thing really stuck out. It was not the same thing as sitting across from someone and talking to them in the flesh.

I'm not the biggest fan of social media, but I'm not a hater of it either. I really appreciate how I can talk and connect with friends or family that I can't see in person. Social media does HELP bridge that gap, but it doesn't do so completely by any stretch. We spent time talking about different issues in the world, and how during the pandemic everything that is flawed has come to the surface in a more profound way. In short, the pandemic has not brought out the best side of humanity, at least in many ways. One of the big takeaways that we shared was that it seems like (I know this is a blanket statement) these days, everything gets so politicized in the worst way. It feels like so many people just want to associate themselves with people that believe everything they do. No one wants their opinions to be questioned or challenged. Politicizing everything just seems like a major way for us to continue alienating ourselves from everyone around us.

Jace and I spoke to each other about one of the most talked about and politically-driven topics of the entire pandemic. Jace and I both made a different decision on this topic, and came to our own conclusions. It's the sort of thing you literally see people argue about online every single day. Once Jace and I established that we felt slightly differently about our decision, you might wonder what came next. I'm trying to speak for the both of us here. Our blood-pressure didn't skyrocket, neither one of us called the other a moron or a sheep (common insults now). We stated how we were both at piece with our decision and said as much in a very calm demeanor. There was no thought afterwards where I questioned if I can associate with this person again.

Jace and I both shared our frustration that the way we politicize everything combined with only associating with "our side" leads to these stalemates you see all the time. Both sides are telling the other that they're stupid and are buying into a bunch of bullshit. We didn't understand how this type of approach is ever going to convince someone that what they believe is incorrect or the wrong approach. It's human nature that when someone tells you you're being stupid and insulting you, you're going to dig in your heels even deeper. You're not going to have a "see the light" moment where you convert to their side. Being treated that way is going to piss you off and even further alienate from those that are making you so upset. Talk to someone with respect and understand that you can disagree with something someone does while still respecting that person. It doesn't have to be as simple as knowing you're right and they're wrong.

A big positive from our get-together is that for all the benefits of social media, it gives us all (I'm guilty of this too) a guidebook on how to be a lazy friend. Especially during a period such as this pandemic, it's more important than ever to be around people you enjoy. There are of course instances where you can't see someone in person for valid reasons. Jace and I live close enough to each other that this excuse didn't hold water. If you can see a friend face to face, try to do so. Give yourself that important reminder that any and all social media pales in comparison to actually spending time with someone. If you can't see someone in person, maybe start texting with them or try to arrange an agreeable time for a phone or video call. That 90 minutes that Jace and I spent laughing, talking seriously, and sharing stories, was the equivalent of about 10 years worth of likes, emojis, shared posts, or retweets.

