

Here's Some Friendly Retirement Advice—It's Crucial to Rebuild Your Buddy Network

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Dreamstime

I recently called a friend, Randy, whom I was close with when we both worked for the *El Paso Times* in the 1980s. While he still lives in El Paso, I haven't lived there since 1989, and we hadn't talked in a decade or more before our recent conversation.

But it was the sort of conversation we used to have back in the 1980s, when we were both young and starting out. We spent an hour or so talking about everything under the sun: our lives, our families, the state of the country, the state of the world.

"I guess we just picked up right where we left off," Randy said near the end of our call, as we agreed to see each other the next time he comes to New York City to visit his son.

One key to a successful retirement is rebuilding a network of friends to supplement the ones you had at work. I have found I must work at it, and the coronavirus crisis hasn't made it any easier. But most of the time when I reach out, people will respond.

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Yet reaching out isn't important only for long-ago, far-away friends like Randy. Before we bought a new house and made a short move in late 2018, we had become friends with our next-door neighbor, Doug, a maritime lawyer and retired Coast Guard officer

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Doug and I started going out periodically for lunch after we moved away. That's no longer possible in New Jersey as restaurants have yet to open for indoor dining and I'm still practicing social distancing, but the two of us have been talking more on the phone since the pandemic struck. I try to reach out every few weeks, and so does he.

The health crisis has also upended social lives. My wife and I have close friends whom we used to visit frequently, and now we haven't seen them since the lockdown began in March. That hurts.

But the crisis has also been a good excuse to reach out to friends from the past. You can get so busy with your career that you forget what is truly important in life: friends and family.

When you have a stimulating career, as I was lucky enough to have for nearly three decades in journalism, it's easy to take friendships for granted. Just walking around the newsroom, I would see so many people I had known for years. It was like living in a small town.

But when I retired in February 2018, I abruptly lost that. Yes, I still keep in touch with a few people but it's not the same.

The lockdown means you have to work even harder to stay in touch with friends. But it also gives you a reason to call and find out how they are doing. We may yet be able to extract something good out of an awful situation.

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