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Maybe, I'll be there for you

When it comes to friendship, Hollywood has a style all its own

By **MONICA CORCORAN**

Jerry and Dino. Ovitz and Eisner. Paris and Nicole. In a town known for being “all about relationships,” bitter acrimony seems to get all of the attention. Where is the love?

“It would never have occurred to me to think of Hollywood,” says author Joseph Epstein, whose new book, “Friendship: An Exposé,” examines the history of meaningful, high-profile one-on-one alliances. “There is so much false intimacy there. Everyone calls each other ‘friend.’”

Within earshot, anyway. But such bonhomie — real or fake — is hardly the norm these days. According to a study recently published in the American Sociological Review, Americans now have fewer confidants than they did over a decade ago — down to two in 2004 from three in 1995.

Just two loyal buds? Even for those who are frugal with friendships, it seems like a pittance of pals.

“I have a gang of four guys and none of them live in this town,” says Doug Ellin, executive producer and creator of “Entourage.” “I think I have an East Coast middle-class mentality about friendship.”

Meaning, Ellin doesn't ever utter “best friend” and he allows relationships to age like Cognac before he labels them as vintage.

“Getting to know each other takes a week in Hollywood,” says manager Tom Parziale, manager and principal of Visionary Entertainment. “But in Cape Cod, where I'm from, it takes seven years to get to know someone. People are such go-getters here.”

Indeed, it's easy to spot social tumble-

weeds. They roll into parties, cozy up to the most important people in the room and collect enough business cards to wallpaper a kitchen. Such flagrant mating of friendship and enterprise accounts for that Hollywood chimera known as the “end-use friendship.”

“It's the ‘what-can-you-do-for-me?’ kind of relationship that runs rampant here,” says Sally Horchow, co-author with her father of the upcoming book, “The Art of Friendship: 70 Simple Rules for Making Meaningful Connections.” “L.A. is crazy. People mine AA meetings for contacts.”

The ASR study also found that the number of people who believe they don't have any trusted friends has more than doubled in the last decade. “Revelation of one's troubles and failures are essential elements of friendships,” says Epstein.

Here, those confessions can be unnecessary. “Losing a job is a great litmus test for friendship,” says one development exec. What's worse is that you can't completely shun faux chums; you may work with them again.

“You're never going to burn a bridge because that person could be your next boss,” says a studio exec. “If a friendship ends, you pretend it never happened.”

That's not to say that harmony can't thrive. “We started in the mail room at William Morris in 1955 and we're still best friends,” says Bernie Brillstein of he and his pals Howard West, George Shapiro and Irwin Winkler. “We meet every month to tell war stories and talk about how the business used to be nicer.” A group including Mel Brooks, Freddie Fields and Alan Ladd, Jr. meets at Orso every week, too.

And like they say, friendship has its rewards: “The best thing I have ever done for my friends?” asks Ellin. “I gave jobs to people who never would have been hired anywhere else.”



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