

Anchor Relationships Learning Guide

Empower leaders to cultivate connections
that remind them of who they are.



Anchor Relationships™

The people who keep us rooted
to our virtues also help us flourish.



Introduction

Purpose of this tool

This workbook is designed to help you build your capacity for positive leadership by cultivating virtuous relationships. These special connections will help you make ethical choices throughout your life; they will sustain you during difficult times; and they're vital to your long-term well-being.

Learning Goals

- 1** Why Anchor Relationships matter for human flourishing.
How relationships influence ethical decision-making.
How positive relationships improve well-being.
- 2** Understand the components of Anchor Relationships.
Understand Aristotle's view of relationships and what he meant by Character-Friendships.
Understand Relationship Motivation Theory, a sub-theory within Self-Determination Theory.
- 3** How to build and strengthen Anchor Relationships in your own life.
Create your own personal action plan.

Procedure

- 1** Learn about the three types of relationships and why relationships are fundamental for human flourishing.
- 2** Discern the different relationships in your life and identify your Anchor Relationships.
- 3** Evaluate how much time you spend with your Anchor Relationships.
- 4** Develop skills to build new and strengthen existing Anchor Relationships.



Summary

This tool is your opportunity to become more intentional about your relationships. You'll learn why relationships matter in our lives, how they affect our choices, and how certain relationships influence us to act ethically even when we are tempted to do otherwise. These special relationships, referred to here as Anchor Relationships, are wellsprings of well-being and character affirmation. They help us make choices that reflect our true character and avoid making decisions we later regret.

The central portion of this exercise involves discernment about the people in your life. You'll distinguish between those who affirm your intrinsic virtues and those who are less central to your well-being. Then, you'll assess how much time you spend with your Anchors and how you can prioritize them in your life. If you're concerned that you may not have an Anchor Relationship, don't worry, you'll find advice for forming new connections that can grow to become Anchor Relationships.

By learning how relationships shape the trajectory of your life and how to identify and strengthen Anchor Relationships, you gain powerful awareness and knowledge for staying true to yourself—even under difficult circumstances.

Quotations, stories, and other information in this workbook are intended to facilitate discussion and to help people identify and strengthen Anchor Relationships in their own lives—not to illustrate effective or ineffective handling of a particular situation.

What are Anchor Relationships?

Anchor Relationships are special connections that remind people of who they are and what matters most to them. But not all relationships are Anchor Relationships.

The three types of relationships

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle said people form three types of relationships, which he referred to as friends of utility, friends of pleasure, and friends of character. Note: In ancient Greece, the term “friend” encompassed family members including spouses, children, and siblings in addition to business associates and social relationships (Cooper, 1980).

According to Aristotle, friendships of utility and pleasure are rooted in what one gets from the other—whether that be some form of advantage or enjoyment of a shared pleasure.

Friendships of character, however, enjoy each other’s character or innate virtue and want to see each other flourish. Aristotle referred to these relationships as the “friendship of good people similar in virtue; for they wish goods in the same way to each other” (Yoder, 2019, p. 209).

FRIENDS OF UTILITY

A friend who is appreciated for what someone gains.
Example: professional networking relationships.
The friendship is sustained for personal benefit.

FRIENDS OF PLEASURE

A friend who is appreciated as a source of wit, humor, or other pleasure. Example: someone with shared activities like skiing or golf. The friendship is sustained for personal benefit.

FRIENDS OF CHARACTER

A friend who is appreciated for who they are.
Example: how a parent feels about their child.
The friendship is sustained for the enjoyment of shared goodness and a mutual desire to see the other flourish. These relationships may encompass utility and pleasure.

Anchor Relationships also promote thriving

In addition to being reciprocal and rooted in virtue, an Anchor Relationship also promotes psychological well-being, because each person respects the autonomy and competence of the other person. Competence refers to each person feeling confident and acknowledged for their strengths and capabilities. Autonomy is felt when each person supports the other's choices, especially regarding the relationship (when to get together, what to do together, etc.). These principles of Relationship Motivation Theory, a sub-theory within Self-Determination Theory, are fundamental for flourishing friendships (Deci and Ryan, 2014).



Defining Anchor Relationships

In addition to the relatedness of moral goodness, Anchor Relationships reflect Aristotle's vision of Character-Friendships while also adhering to the principles of autonomy and competence within Self Determination Theory.

AN ANCHOR IS

- + Someone who wants the best for you for your own sake, not for their benefit.
- + Someone who prioritizes honesty and integrity in their own life.
- + Someone who expects you to stay true to your own virtues.

AN ANCHOR IS NOT

- Someone who never disagrees with you.
- Someone who shares all your likes and dislikes.
- Only people who vote like you.
- Only people who share your faith/religion.

Why do Anchor Relationships Matter?

Anchor Relationships are a source of moral motivation

According to Aristotle, human flourishing is best experienced in Character-Friendships, which are relationships in which people feel valued for their very best qualities. Aristotle believed that the experience of Character-Friendship is so precious that the desire to sustain these friendships is the chief reason why people act ethically. In this way, our most virtuous relationships motivate us to behave ethically (Jacquette, 2001).

A 2019 study of moral exemplars found that Anchor Relationships act as a moral “reinforcing mechanism,” reminding exemplars of their moral values when confronted with a difficult choice (Cummings, 2019).

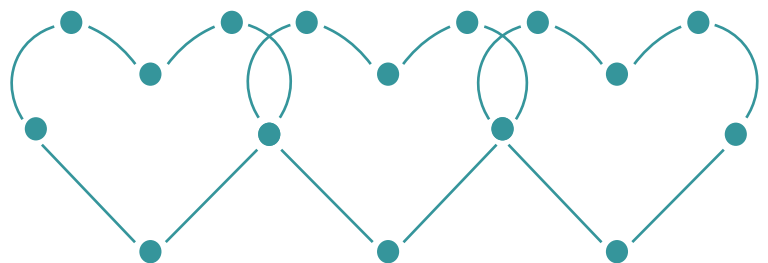
Anchor Relationships increase resilience and self-efficacy

During interviews, organizational leaders explained how their Anchors sustained them in moments of crisis and difficulty. These leaders shared stories of professional and personal challenge so significant that they questioned their own abilities. Support from their Anchor helped them overcome and grow from these precarious situations while remaining true to themselves. Read highlights from these interviews on the next page.

Anchor Relationships are vital to well-being

Self Determination Theory proposes that while people need to feel valued and cared for, only relationships that honor each person’s autonomy and competence can lead to fulfillment. In fact, there must be mutuality of support for each person’s autonomy or self-determined choices in the relationship for the connection to be truly fulfilling (Deci and Ryan, 2014).

According to Dr. Robert Waldinger, director of The Harvard Study of Adult Development, “Close, positive relationships are what keep people happy and physically healthy throughout their lives. Strong ties with people who elevate your well-being are better predictors of well-being than social class, IQ, money, fame, or genes.”





How Anchor Relationships Improve People's Lives

In interviews, organizational leaders described how their Anchors supported them.

“My Anchor provided clarity for me during a time when I was struggling. She gave me an a-hah moment that was like ‘yes,’ and then I realized how I wanted to handle that situation.”

“Early in my career, I was doing something I loved but working with someone who wasn’t honest and was taking a lot of short-cuts. I was worried that if I pushed back, things would fall apart. I found my voice with the support of my Anchor who helped me realize that I don’t have to endure indignity. I can draw hard lines, and I can handle it.”

“[When I was young, I traveled to Germany just after the Second World War. We were in a town that was destroyed from bombing, and people were struggling to get by. I befriended a young German boy while I was there and on the day we were leaving, he gave me his most prized possession, a hand-carved sling shot.] That’s the most important event of my life. I realized on that day that we’re all alike. We are all just trying to be decent and participate in life. Because of my Anchor, I believe that we’re all the same, and it’s just prejudice that separates us.”

“[There was a time when I was leading organizational change and a lot of people were angry about the changes I was enacting.] My Anchor said to me: ‘you cannot take this so personally.’ She also helped me capitalize on an opportunity for transformative conversation with the protagonist and talk about the issue that we need to solve together. I might have left the job without a helping hand.”

“[I dealt with a long and painful work conflict for a number of years.] My Anchor helped me examine the issue and separate out what was me and what was real, or to see the difference between what was subjective and what was objective. Then I could deal with the emotions more consciously.”

“[At one point in my career, I had to leave a workplace that had become toxic.] I was internalizing the stress and developing extreme apathy. My Anchor gave me strength and support to get some daylight between myself and my job. He gave me the freedom to heal, to get perspective from a traumatizing experience. I ended up being a healthier person and was able to grow from this experience. Now I have a very different way of showing up for work.”

“My Anchor said something that was life-changing for me and made me re-evaluate how I approach life in general.”



Identify the Anchors in Your Life

Take a fresh look at your relationships

Now it's time to identify the Anchors in your life. Here are some simple steps for auditing your relationships.

- 1** Think about the different people in your life and how you got to know them. Here are some categories to generate ideas:
 - a. *Family members, such as: siblings, parents, and spouses.*
 - b. *Neighbors and members of your community.*
 - c. *Connections from faith-based or service organizations.*
 - d. *Friends from high school, college, or other educational programs.*
 - e. *People you met doing things you enjoy like yoga, golf, tennis, or sewing.*
 - f. *Co-workers and professional connections.*
 - g. *People you met in the past who you consider "old friends."*

- 2** Now consider which connections reflect the qualities ascribed to Anchor Relationships. Use these questions to guide your reflection. Answering "yes" to every question is not critical for identifying Anchors, although it is ideal.
 - a. *Do you admire or appreciate this person's character?*
 - b. *Do you recognize your own goodness in this person?*
 - c. *Has this person ever acted in a way that truly puts your needs first?*
 - d. *Does this person want to see you flourish for your own benefit? Do you both want to see the other flourish?*
 - e. *Does this person celebrate your personal and/or professional achievements? Are you happy for them when things go well and vocal in your support?*
 - f. *Can you disagree with this person without harming the friendship? And can this person disagree with you?*
 - g. *If you have a shared activity with this person and that activity were taken away, would the relationship continue?*
 - h. *Can you turn to this person when you feel vulnerable?*

Keep in mind that Anchor Relationships are less common than other types of connections. They take longer to develop than connections based on utility or pleasure, and they honor the autonomy and competence of each person in the relationship.

Examine your Anchor Relationships

Your relationship audit

- 1 List your Anchor Relationships in the first column. (Many people only have one or two Anchors. If you don't have any, proceed to page 10 to begin building these relationships.)
- 2 Next, write a single number that reflects the amount of time you typically spend together each month (in person, on the phone/Zoom, etc.)
- 3 Then, assess how attentive you are to your Anchor. Do you ask questions that deepen the relationship? Are you actively listening and learning about them?

LIST YOUR ANCHOR RELATIONSHIPS	TIME SPENT TOGETHER (Hours/Month)	ATTENTION (assign a rating from 1-3; 1 = inattentive and 3 = very attentive)
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____



Build new Anchor Relationships

If you are concerned that you don't have any Anchor Relationships—or—if you'd like to cultivate more of these special connections, this section is for you.

1 Discover your character strengths.

Anchors admire and enjoy each other's very best qualities. To cultivate these connections, begin by deepening awareness of your own character strengths and virtues. This awareness will help you express your character more readily and will help you recognize virtue and character in others.

The website: viacharacter.org offers a free self-assessment that reveals your character strengths and related virtues. This classification of character strengths and virtues stems from research that 55 scientists conducted through analysis of cultural, social, and religious interpretations of character and virtue around the world (Niemiec, 2018).

2 Embrace the platinum rule.

Do you abide by the golden rule of treating others as you would like to be treated or by the platinum rule of treating others as they would like to be treated? When you embrace the platinum rule, you commit to learning about what matters most to others and then honoring their values. To live by the platinum rule, routinely ask people how they want to be treated—and then follow through!

3 Make Anchor Relationships a priority.

Our lives are busy and there are many reasons to postpone events with friends. But building Anchor Relationships requires effort. A useful guideline is to dedicate at least 2 hours/week for cultivating and nurturing virtuous relationships and to connect with each person who matters to you at least once every other month.

Tip: It's common to assume that relationships should materialize organically, without effort. But this isn't true. All relationships involve effort, choice, and intention. Invest in your happiness by nurturing your Anchor Relationships.

"People who were the most satisfied in their relationships at age 50 were the healthiest at age 80. People with strong social support maintained stronger mental health as they age. . . Good relationships don't just protect our bodies; they protect our brains." –Dr. Robert Waldinger, director of The Harvard Study of Adult Development



Strengthen your Anchor Relationships

Act, Discover, Respond, and Celebrate

ACT: *Increase the time and attention you devote to your Anchors.*

Your first step in building or strengthening Anchor Relationships is to embrace your responsibility to build connections that matter for your own well-being.

DISCOVER: *Ask questions that deepen your connection.*

Julien Mirivel, PhD developed a six-step method for using communication to cultivate relationships. He advises people to ask questions to discover something new by framing their questions as open-ended. His technique of “flipping questions” for greater discovery shows us how to switch from close-ended (generating simple, reflexive answers) to open-ended (generating answers that reveal someone’s character and desires).

Instead of saying: “How was your weekend?” Ask: “What did you do this weekend?”

Instead of asking “Do you need help?” Ask: “What are your hopes and dreams?”

RESPOND: *Look for ways to help someone complete a difficult task.*

Jane Dutton, PhD, the pioneering researcher behind High Quality Connections, prescribes four key pathways for developing these special connections. One pathway is called Task Enabling, which means helping someone complete a task or project that doesn’t come easily to them but might come more easily to you.

Responding to someone’s needs requires paying attention to what they’re trying to achieve and then providing help when you can. And as Adam Grant, PhD revealed in his book *Give and Take*, humans are reciprocal by nature. When you support someone, they will likely seek an opportunity to reciprocate, thus shifting your relationship into one of mutual support.

CELEBRATE: *Amplify someone else’s joy of achievement.*

Actively and constructively celebrating someone’s achievement, whether large or small, is profoundly important to their psychological well-being. Demonstrating genuine happiness for another’s achievement increases their self-esteem and it also increases their relationship satisfaction by enhancing their trust and sense of closeness to you (Gable et al., 2006).



Create your Action Plan

Use these questions to complete your plan on page 13.

Which relationships do you want to build or strengthen? Identify at least two people with whom you either want to build a new relationship or strengthen an existing one.

What do you know about their character and virtues?

What aspects of their character do you admire?

What matters most to them?

What's important in their life today that you can discuss with them?

What shared interests do you have?

What hobbies, sports, or other activities might you both enjoy?

Can you use these shared interests as a reason to get together?

Which of the strategies from pages 10-11 would you like to apply to each relationship? Choose at least two strategies for each person. Here is a refresher:

Increase time and attention: Make more time for the people you care about and learn what matters to them.

Ask better questions: Use open-ended questions. And then ask follow-up questions, which shows your interest isn't superficial. Listen carefully, learn, and discover. Disclose your own hopes and disappointments to foster trust.

Offer your help: What do they want to complete that they're just not getting around to? What are you good at doing? Is there something you can do together?

Celebrate: When something goes right in their life, amplify their joy with your enthusiasm. Help them celebrate even the small achievements of personal significance or simply notice and compliment their progress.

Tip: A psychological study in 1997 revealed 36 questions that strengthen relationships. Find those questions here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/09/style/no-37-big-wedding-or-small.html>

Create your Action Plan

Complete your Action Plan

Use the questions from page 12 to generate your answers.

RELATIONSHIP 1	RELATIONSHIP 2
Name	Name
Character strengths / virtues	Character strengths / virtues
Life priorities / things that matter to them	Life priorities / things that matter to them
Shared interests	Shared interests
Time and attention commitment <i>How frequently will you reach out?</i> <i>How will you pay more attention?</i>	Time and attention commitment <i>How frequently will you reach out?</i> <i>How will you pay more attention?</i>
Questions to ask	Questions to ask
Tasks you can help with	Tasks you can help with
Something you can celebrate/compliment	Something you can celebrate/compliment

Celebrate the process

When you activate this plan, some things will go well, and other efforts will disappoint. Continue to refocus on what went well. Notice your increased awareness and expression of your own virtues. Notice how your observations of others have evolved. Even if Anchor Relationships don't manifest in the time you'd hoped, you are learning and growing!

Notes



Notes



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This tool was prepared by Kellie Cummings, kc@wellbeingwisdom.net, in fulfillment of her 2022 Rechter Fellowship with the Center for Positive Leadership through the University of Louisville College of Business.

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