

KEEP THE RIGHT PEOPLE

我決定，生活裡只留下對的人：動手處理消耗你的人，擺脫煩雜忙的互動，過你想要的理想人生

Are you holding on to relationships that hurt you – controlling elders, irresponsible partners, needy friends, and the like? Can you imagine what would happen if you tidied your emotional life the way Marie Kondo tidies a house? Author Yang Chia-Ling offers us simple, rational methods to reclaim precious time and energy by freeing ourselves of exhausting negative relationships.

Are you holding on to relationships that hurt you, like controlling elders, irresponsible partners, and needy friends? Ties like these, although they begin with love, can leave us feeling pressured, misused, and exhausted. Oftentimes, we maintain them anyway out of hope or feelings of responsibility. Yet author Yang Chia-Ling is here to prove that we serve ourselves best by sweeping such relationships out the front door.

Keep the Right People is a clear, step-by-step road map to emotional self-preservation that begins by teaching us how to identify the problems in our relationships, equips us emotionally to move forward, then guides us in the delicate process of “relationship tidying”. Yang anticipates the problems that may occur during the “tidying” process, and offers us strategies for understanding and dealing with those problems. Finally, for those of us unwilling to go through the process, she offers insight into what might be holding us back.

Yang Chia-Ling integrates psychological evidence with cultural insights in a cogent analysis of human relationships that aims to help us reclaim our time and emotional energy, two of our most precious commodities in this fast-paced age.



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Author, entrepreneur, and communication specialist Yang Chia-Ling is a woman of many hats, who likes disrupting boundaries and integrating the emotional and the rational in her many projects. She has written a number of books designed to help people break through their own barriers and improve their lives.

KEEP THE RIGHT PEOPLE

By Yang Chia-Ling

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The people who make you sigh

"I'm an adult and I've got my own job, but my mother wants me home at 10 p.m. every night. I can't stay out overnight or come back late. Even if I tell her it's for work, that we're taking clients out, she just doesn't understand. And I can't go out on my days off either – I have to stay home, because going out means spending money. She doesn't trust anyone I know, because she thinks we can only rely on family. I'm like a caged bird and I can't get free."

"My mother-in-law insists we take our son to her place for dinner once a week. And if we're late for dinner, she goes on about how we aren't setting a good example: he won't get enough sleep, he won't get up in the morning, that's why he's so skinny, he won't grow up to be tall. I've tried to explain, but she doesn't want to listen, she just drones on about the same old things. I'd love to cover my ears and walk out, but that'd just make things worse. So I look at my husband and hope he'll say something to her, but he thinks I should just put up with it. He tells me she's trying to help, that she means well, and doesn't want to make things awkward. But it's wearing at my relationship with my husband, and things are only getting worse."

"My husband's never once taken the kids to the doctor or dropped them off at school. Sometimes, when I'm so busy my head's spinning, I ask him to help, but it's always 'the kids don't listen to me, they just start crying for you, what's the point of me doing it?' I feel like pointing out they're his kids too, but he's acting like they're nothing to do with him."

"If my best friend's feeling down, she expects me to drop everything to go to see her. But when I need her to do something for me, she makes excuses. It's like she thinks she's a princess and I'm the maid."

"I've got one friend who's been very good to me, who helped me a lot when I was just setting out in my career, and I've very grateful for what he's done. But over the years he's turned against my other friends and complains about them behind their backs. I hate being stuck in the middle. I don't want to let him control me, but I'm worried about losing his help and the contacts he's helped me make. Or I could distance myself from him, but what if I look ungrateful? I can see our relationship has gone bad, but I don't know how to end it."

Perhaps you've been in similar situations. Some people just make you sigh when you think of them, and nothing seems to change no matter how you try to talk to them.

Friction in these relationships starts out like minor inflammations; it's not too painful, so you ignore it and hope it goes away. But then conflict increases, or the wound starts to fester and

ache, and you realize something needs to be done. At the same time, you're worried about losing other positive aspects of the relationship, or you are scared of the side-effects of treatment – the feelings of guilt that prevent you acting. So rather than taking prompt action, you delay. Everything gets worse, sucking up your energy and ruining your relationships. It becomes too painful to even think about.

A society which can't say goodbye will struggle with being together

Taking a closer look at relationships, we note that two different spaces overlap at every meaning: the “I” space and the “we” space. Some “we” relationships overlap closely, others less so. And these relationships make up your links – perhaps close, perhaps not – with the world.

In theory, we should be concerned with both of those contexts, or even worry about “I” first, if we are to build loving rather than transactional relationships. This is why we say you have to learn to love yourself before you can love others. But in our culture, the “I” disappears in any new relationship, pushed out by other concerns: “What will he think if I do this?”, “Will she be unhappy if I don't do what she wants?” or “Surely we can find some way to get on?” We constantly put the other at the center of our thoughts and rarely think solely of ourselves, for fear of being labeled as selfish.

When a relationship starts, we want it to go well – to deepen and become more trusting. We fear reversals or delays. The idea of breaking up or saying goodbye seems terrifying. Hence the crimes of passion and stalking we see so often on the news.

The idea of separation makes people nervous – as shown by the taboo around talking about death

Every object, no matter how sturdy, will change as it ages. This is even more true for people, who change constantly. As we age, our priorities and views change – and this can challenge our relationships.

Relationships flow like the seasons. Refusing to see that relationships change over time, to insist on lifelong and unchanging friendships, only causes us more suffering in the end. Summer heat waves and winter snows only do harm if they linger too long.

Shifting relationships

A business owner once told me of a friend who'd offered advice and support when he was starting out, and the new venture did well. In gratitude, he engaged his friend's company as the supplier for one of his projects. But the market changed, and the two firms diverged. Eventually the quality and quantity of the products supplied was inadequate.

In theory, he should have changed how he worked with his friend by cancelling or reducing orders. But he valued the friendship and felt he'd made a promise he must keep, so he never sat down to tell his friend what the problems were. The situation continued until a major

project failed. He had to pay compensation for breach of contract and lost the friendship – and was even blamed by his friend for everything going wrong.

This friendship was bound to fail, as the two men had not realized that their roles had changed over time.

When a friendship develops into a business partnership, you need to consider more than emotions. Other responsibilities come into play. The head of a company must ensure it survives – he can't decide who gets orders based on his personal preferences or friendships. To live up to that responsibility, he must take a broader view and act in the company's interest. When that interest conflicts directly with a personal relationship, the relationship has to change.

Similarly, best friends from our high school and university days will drift away as our social circles change. The clubs, the hobbies, the people we chatted with for hours will also fade away as our interests evolve.

Time takes us on different journeys and brings us different experiences. We have less time to spend with each other and fewer shared interests. Eventually, only the memories remain. Failing to acknowledge this fact and continuing to act as if our student friendships must survive will only cause stress.

Even family relationships change as we grow and develop in our own way. We drift apart or become closer, and will relate to each other differently. Parents especially need to accept that as children grow they need to make friends of their own age and discover their own interests. They will not spend as much time with their parents as when they were young.

As children grow, the make-up of their lives change. Family is no longer everything: they have classmates, teachers, and friends whom they hope will like them. Their own sense of identity will continue to develop and strengthen, leading to new ideas and values, and they will no longer be as obedient.

Parents may be unwilling to change how they relate to their child at this point and insist on maintaining control of their child's life. This will slowly suffocate the child's personality for the sake of the relationship.