

Robin Dunbar: You've Got to Have (150) Friends



Published: December 25, 2010

MORE than anything since the invention of the postal service, Facebook has revolutionized how we relate to one another. But the revolution hasn't come in quite the way that the people behind it and other social networking sites assume.

These sites may have allowed us to amass thousands of "friends," but they have not yet devised¹ a way to cut through the old-fashioned nature of relationships themselves. Our circle of actual friends remains small, limited not by technology but by human nature. What Facebook has done, though, is provide us a way to maintain those circles in a dynamic world.

[...] The critical component in social networking is the removal of time as a constraint². In the real world, according to research by myself and others, we devote³ 40 percent of our limited social time each week to the five most important people we know, who represent just 3 percent of our social world and a trivially small proportion of all the people alive today. Since the time invested in a relationship determines its quality, having more than five best friends is impossible when we interact face to face, one person at a time. Instant messaging and social networking claim to solve that problem by allowing us to talk to as many people as we like, all at the same time. [...]

The developers at Facebook overlooked one of the crucial⁴ components in the complicated business of how we create relationships: our minds. Put simply, our minds are not designed to allow us to have more than a very limited number of people in our social world. The emotional and psychological investments that a close relationship requires are considerable⁵, and the emotional capital we have available is limited.

Indeed, no matter what Facebook allows us to do, I have found that most of us can maintain only around 150 meaningful relationships, online and off — what has become known as Dunbar's number. Yes, you can "friend" 500, 1,000, even 5,000 people with your Facebook page, but all save the core 150 are mere voyeurs looking into your daily life [...].

¹ to device sth: to create sth.

² constraint: limitation, restraint

³ to devote: to dedicate

⁴ crucial: important, fundamental

⁵ considerable: significant, large

PARTNER A



tuniteststs.th

3. Find someone who is Partner **B**. Exchange information and complete your table.

PARTNER B



نجاحك يهمنا

1. Read the text for gist. What is **the author's thesis**?

2. You are Partner **B**. Scan the article for the author's statements regarding keeping up friendships **face to face**. Fill in the right column of the table below.

Statements the author makes regarding keeping up friendships.....

...online (Partner A)	... face to face (Partner B)

3. Find someone who is Partner **A**. Exchange information and complete your table.

What is **the author's thesis**?