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From: EA 1996 Admin <ea1996admin@ea1996.com>
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Pop Quiz: What was one of the most annoying things about high school?

I'll give you a hint, it's probably the biggest reason that some people choose to not attend reunions.



If you guessed “cliques”, you hit the nail on the head.

Let's face it: when we were kids, we were idiots. We were so consumed with our little group of friends, that we often isolated and rejected (either by overt intentional acts, or by unintended perceived exclusion) a lot of people who ended up feeling like they were on the outside.

I don't recall ever purposely excluding somebody or adhering to a clique simply for the purpose of keeping other people out of the group. And I think I've always tried to be sensitive to this kind of dynamic. But, it just happens sometimes. People gravitate towards one group of friends or another. And there are always going to be factors that contribute to somebody feeling like they're not welcome in a particular group. This is especially true when dealing with kids because you have highly charged emotions, relationships, rivalries, socio-economic factors, and other aspects of adolescence that make us fall into distinct partitioned silos. If you were on the football team, you probably hung out with those guys. If you were one of the top-performing students, that was probably your group. If you were a popular girl, you may have hung out with similar types. And if you considered yourself to be a bit of an outcast, you may have sought out others who thought of themselves the same way and may have steered clear of groups where you felt like you didn't belong.

One of the awesome things about growing up is that we can dispose of all of that bullshit and break down those walls of separation. Through this reunion effort, and other paths, I have had the opportunity to get to know some people that I wasn't close to in high school. I guess you could say that we weren't in the same cliques. I tend to learn lessons much later than I should because I'm a dense blockhead. And one lesson that keeps slapping me in the face over and over again is the realization that there are lots of people who I should have been a better friend to from the beginning. It almost feels like I've cheated myself out of what should have been many years of valuable experiences with really great people. Maybe that's one of the reasons why I'm always trying to get people together now. Maybe it's why I'm so persistent about making this reunion thing come together. I don't know.

There are two manifestations of the clique effect on the reunion:

- 1) First you have people who feel like they weren't part of the crowd. They feel like people wouldn't bother to give them the time of day back in school. So they don't want to subject themselves to being reminded of that feeling of isolation again. As one of the organizers, I am aware of more than one instance of people opting out of the reunion for this reason.
 - a. In more extreme cases, there is a subgroup of these people who were directly targeted for ridicule and intentional exclusion. I'd like to say that this wasn't a reality at EA during our era. But that would be delusional denial. The truth is that there are indeed people who were picked on, and it's absolutely heartbreaking. At this stage in my life, I strive to become a champion for people in this category and it's a primary goal that I want my kids to achieve much earlier on.
- 2) Then you have the people who are of the mindset that *"I'm already in contact with the people that I care about – the ones who were part of my cliques. And I have no interest in seeing anybody else so why bother?"*. I know lots of people in this category. And it's typically not an intentionally snobby viewpoint. But to them, the past is the past and there's no point in catching up with people from back then who maybe aren't as significant in their life as the people that they've remained in contact with. Heck, my wife is one of these people. She thinks I'm crazy for putting so much effort into this thing. It's OK, she's always wrong. ;)

Both of these are frustrating viewpoints to me and pose an interesting challenge for those of us who would like to bring the entire group together. On one hand, we'd like to show the people in group #1 that people can and do change. That as people grow up, they become more aware of their impact on others and they become more sensitive to the feelings of others. I don't mean to imply that people in this category are "projects" that we have to fix. I just mean that sometimes giving people a second chance, goes a long way to turn old rifts into much less significant blemishes that eventually just becomes water under the bridge.

On the other hand, we'd like to convince group #2 that there's value in expanding outside of your comfort zone and exploring the treasure of those missed relationship opportunities. Like I said, I'm (still) often pleasantly surprised at how much I enjoy linking up with people that I've known forever, but didn't have close interactions with until recently. I firmly believe that if people would break down their clique walls a bit and mingle in unfamiliar groups, they would have the same experience.

Look... I'm not a touchy-feely guy that spends all day worrying about hurting people's feelings. Anybody who knows me can attest to that. I don't subscribe to the notion that we have to go around with kid gloves on, walking on eggshells as we pore over the delicate emotions of everybody around us. I'm frequently guilty of telling people to just suck it up and stop whining. But with that being said, I am much more in tune with the long-term effects of my actions on others than I was as a kid. I try not to waste much time on regrets, I don't see much value in it. But if I could hop in my DeLorean time machine and change something about the past, it would be enriching my earlier life with those missed relationship opportunities. Thankfully, that book isn't closed yet and it's never too late – not as long as we're still breathing.

To make a cheesy 90s era reference: *"Can't we all just get along?"* Sorry... I just had to. It was right there and just too irresistible.

I don't know if you plan to come to the reunion or not. But if you do, I urge you to sit at a table with some less familiar faces. Hop around a little bit. What's the point in sitting next to the people that you already see once a month and text every other day? If that's your plan, skip the reunion and just go out with that group.

I think we have a really good opportunity here to come together and have a fun night out with old friends, and gain some new ones. Far too often these days, people squander these opportunities and find excuses to do "something better" with their time. Reunions are on the decline and the older we get, the more disconnected we become from our shared past. It becomes harder to keep people engaged in the idea of maintaining the memories. If we can pull this off, we will be the exception and I think we'll all be enriched by the experience.

See you in 2016, I hope...

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