

## Step 5

### KEEP YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE, AND YOUR ENEMIES FAR AWAY!

*"Know who you can count on and who you can count out!"*

-John-Leslie Brown

The cliché says that you should keep your friends close and your enemies closer. That is one of the most ridiculous things I have ever heard! Life is short. *Why in the world* would I want to surround myself with people who hate me and want me to fail? If you are trying to take yourself seriously, you need to surround yourself with people who take you seriously and will build your self esteem. This is true for your personal life as well as your business life. As I said before, it takes you 17 times to hear the positive opposite of a negative comment until you actually believe the positive comment to be true. I don't know about you, but I don't have that kind of time!

My friends support and motivate me. I have a few friends that I've known since elementary and middle school. One of them, Richard, would always come to my shows and tell me: "O (my nickname), you're one of the best poets out there." He would tell me that every time he saw me perform. I always just smiled and thanked him for the compliment until I realized that he actually wasn't just saying it out of friendship, but that he actually *thought* I was among the best. Imagine what I would have begun to believe if he told me I was horrible every time he saw me perform and I kept inviting him to the shows?

When I was seriously thinking of quitting my job before I started Free Your Mind Publishing, I had a conversation with another best friend, Malik. Rather than tell me I should be more concerned with job security and my family, he said: "Well, you've always been known to make good decisions." You need that type of confidence and support from friends if you plan to venture out on your own and into the realm of entrepreneurship or if you just want to have a better quality of life overall.

Simply put, you will be much more successful if you have the support of your friends, your significant other, your spouse and other family members. I am fortunate to say that my parents and my siblings have *always* been supportive of my work. My parents always found opportunities to put me in the public eye to share my work or the work of others like Dr. Maya Angelou. Through my sister Shaumba's nonprofit organization, OrigiNation, I was always able to share my work at her dance recitals. The list goes on and on.

Lastly, I have been so fortunate to have the support and blessings of my wife Kendra in my personal life as well as in this business. We had been dating since 1994. She knew my aspirations of going to college to study international affairs and maybe becoming an ambassador one day. Imagine fast forwarding to 2004 and me coming home from my go-nowhere job and telling Kendra: "I think I wanna be a full-time poet." Many spouses would look at their mates as if they were insane, but Kendra said: "You should quit."

Kendra saw my vision for Free Your Mind Publishing and also saw that my 9-5 job was killing me—*literally*. I began developing debilitating headaches that I never had before I began working at this job. She knew that I could do better, even though it meant we would have to put off getting a house for another year because I needed two years of documented income to qualify for a particular program.

Well, with the support of my friends and family, I started my business. I made more in my first year than at my go nowhere job, and my second year, I made more than the first! This was possible because I surrounded myself with good friends and family, and I wasn't living with the enemy! If you are trying to get paid for your work, you *must* purge yourself of *all* negative energy around you, which may come in the realm of jobs, friends, family, and even your spouse. As talk show host Michael Baisden said, there is nothing like being married to someone who is not supportive of your passion.

As you become more successful in your business, family, or social life, you will find that your thinking is not on the same level as many of your peers. You'll often find yourself conflicted over whether you are outgrowing your friends or becoming arrogant.

Here is an example. Have you ever watched that old sitcom "Home Improvement" with Tim Allen? There was once an episode where his best friend from high school 20 years ago came to visit. His best friend was still out there riding motorcycles and being a bachelor while Tim had settled down with his wife and teenage kids.

One day while Tim was in the backyard talking to his neighbor, Wilson (played by the late Earl Hindman), he brought up his predicament. Tim tells Wilson that he feels bad because he and his old buddy didn't have anything in common but have been best friends for 20 years. Wilson wisely tells Tim that he needs to decide whether the visitor has been Tim's best friend for 20 years or whether he was Tim's best friend 20 years ago. You face the same situation every day with the company you keep.

I can count on less than one hand the amount of people I still associate with from high school. People change over time for the better and, unfortunately, for the worse. I once saw a billboard that read: "In high school, Einstein was no Einstein." Einstein once said that the mindset he had that took him to one level was no longer sufficient to take him to a higher level so he had to change his thinking. The rest is history and the lesson is simple: as you change your thinking to get to the next level, you have to change your environment to meet your new needs and that may also mean changing the company you keep. That could oftentimes mean your relatives!

Look at anyone who is not helping you to reach your goals as the enemy and get as far away from them as possible. They will knowingly and often unknowingly bring you down. There is a reason why there are only a small number of billionaires in this world. They have a vision that no one else sees until they make it a reality. Anyone who sees things differently from them is considered a liability. If Amway's Dexter Yager still committed himself to hanging with his fellow beer truck drivers, he may have been content, but he would not

be a billionaire with Amway. Remember also that Thomas Edison and Henry Ford were friends! Think they didn't push each other directly or indirectly? Watch the company you keep. As a matter of fact, start now! Write down who you can count on and who you can count out and start counting today!

**Exercise: "You can count on me!"**

**Who can you count on and why?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_

**Who can you count out and why?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_

If you have more people on list #2 than you do on list #1, you have some work to do in order to detoxify your life!