LEVEL UP YOUR SOCIAL LIFE

The Gamer's Guide To Social Success

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If you are afraid, come forth.
If you are alone, come forth now.
Everybody here has loved and lost
So level up and love again

Call it any name you need.
Call it your 2.0, your rebirth, whatever--
So long as you can feel it all,
So long as all your doors are flung wide.
Call it your day #1 in the rest of forever.

If you are afraid
Give more
If you are alive
Give more now
Everybody here has seams and scars
So what. LEVEL UP.

- Vienna Teng, Level Up, from the album Aims © 2013 Soltruna Music www.viennateng.com

How To Use This Book

I know you’re anxious to jump into the guide itself, but take two minutes to read this section first. Everything will make much more sense if you do.

This guide is organized into three stages. Each stage has seven levels, and each level has one main quest and three side quests. (There are also some bonus appendixes because everyone likes bonuses.)

The Stages

The stages divide the book into three different section, each focusing on a different goal. The stages are an easy way of tracking your progress, as well as telling you the “big idea” I’m trying to address in each part of the book.

The first stage, “Character Creation” focuses on changing your habits and routines. You’ll be changing your life in little ways – like being more social, more open to experience, and more willing to take risks. The goal is to make you more naturally social, by making social connection part of your everyday life.
The second stage, “Multiplayer” is all about conversation skills. You’ll learn how to have successful conversations, how to read body language, and how to connect with others.

The third stage, “Looking For Group”, is about building friendships and going deeper with friends. The focus here is on building in-depth relationships – making new friends, getting closer with the friends that you’ve got, and feeling more connected with others.

The stages are designed to be completed in order. Character Creation prepares you for Multiplayer, which prepares you to succeed when you start Looking For Group.

Levels

Levels are basically mini-chapters. In each level, I’ll talk about how a concept from gaming can help you improve your social life. Then I’ll give you a main quest and some side quests to help you practice what you learned.

Main Quests

Each level has a main quest for you to complete. Quests are a way for you to apply ideas from the book to your life. Much as you complete quests in RPGs to make your character more powerful, you’ll complete these quests to make yourself more social.

Each quest includes:

- The quest objectives (what you do)
- The quest description (how you do it)
- The quest rewards (why you should do it.)

There are three kinds of quests.

- Collection Quests: Do something a certain number of times.
- Daily Quests: Do something once a day for a week.
- Weekly Quests: Do something once a week for a month.

Feel free to tweak this if you want. If once a week seems too difficult, try every other week. If you want faster progress, try twice a week. If you really like a quest, do it over and over.

The most important thing is to pick a pace that you can stick with. The goal is to move fast enough that you’re making progress, but slow enough that you don’t feel overwhelmed.

Side Quests

Each level has three side quests. Side quests are bonus challenges, and each one is different. They might give you an extra opportunity to practice, make the main quest more challenging, or introduce you to the games I talk about in the level. Side quests are totally optional, but you’ll get more out of the guide if you do them. I recommend doing at least one per level, and it’s great if you can do all three.

Appendixes

At the end of the book are three appendixes: Cheat Codes, Achievements, and Game Directory. Cheat Codes has quick tips and tricks that you can use in social settings, Achievements are tongue-in-cheek
awards for using this book, and Game Directory shows you where you can play every game I mention in this book.

**Quest Strategy Guide**

In some video games you can level up just by reading a book, but real life doesn’t work that way. In real life, you need to practice if you want to get better at something.

That’s what the quests are for. The more quests you complete, the faster you’ll reach your social goals.

But be careful. If you start too many quests at once, you’ll be overwhelmed. If you start quests too slowly, you won’t make much progress.

To strike the right balance, I recommend the following strategy:

- Start a new collection quest when you finish the last collection quest
- Start a new daily quest each week
- Start a new weekly quest every other week (so you should have two active each month.)

In other words, you should usually be working on one collection quest, one daily quest, and two weekly quests at a time. That’s four quests total, which is challenging but doable.

Of course, this is just a rule of thumb. You might find that you prefer to do more or less at a time. Or you might find that you can do a lot of easy quests at once, but need to slow down when a hard quest comes along. If you feel challenged but confident you can handle it, you’re probably doing the right amount.

Basically, think of it like the difficulty setting on a video game – if you’re getting creamed, make it easier. If you’re sailing through without a challenge, make it harder.

You should also try to track your quest progress. It’s a hassle, but if you track your progress, you’re much more likely to succeed. A few options for tracking quests:

- Pen and paper (especially if you tape it up somewhere you see it every day)
- A spreadsheet
- Todoist.com
- HabitRPG.com

I recommend setting aside a certain time each day for updating your quest progress. For instance, you might give yourself five minutes during breakfast or dinner to review your current quests, update your progress, and perhaps re-read a tip from the guide. This might sound like a lot of work, but once it becomes a habit it will feel effortless. Plus, daily checkups will make you much more likely to succeed with your social goals.

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Stage One: Character Creation

**Level One: Press Start**

This is not going to be easy.
I’m going to ask you to change. I’m going to ask you to grow. I’m going to ask you to fail, again and again until you learn to succeed.

But I promise you, it will be worth it.

It was for me.

When I was growing up, I was the nerdiest, most awkward kid you could ever hope to meet. My comfort zone began and ended with my Super Nintendo, and my social abilities were limited to 1) talking about Star Wars 2) talking about video games and 3) talking about Star Wars video games.

In high school, I was diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome, a condition that makes it much harder for me to learn social skills naturally. So I decided to learn them deliberately, like I was studying a foreign language. At that point, it was about survival more than anything. I just wanted to stop the teasing.

But I was dreaming too small.

Learning how to be social is far, far more than avoiding bullies. It’s about giving your life more meaning. The memories that matter the most to me are not boss battles or high scores. They’re memories of people. I remember late night conversations, dinners with a table full of friends, and incredible dates that ended with kisses in the rain.

I think everyone deserves those kinds of memories. I think everyone deserves a place where they belong, close friends who know them deeply, and the confidence to put their best foot forward in new social settings.

And I wrote this guide to help you get there.

Here’s what I need you to do

**Quest 1.1 (Type: Daily)**

*Quest Objectives*

- Open the book every day this week.
- Yes, that’s really it.

*Quest Description:*

Most people quit.

This quest is about making sure that you don’t.

Here’s the thing. Being more social is not rocket science, and it’s not magic. Like most skills, if you work at it a little bit every day, over time you will get a lot better. The key is just making sure that you work at it a little bit every day – without giving up!

So here’s your quest.

Open this book tomorrow, and then keep opening it every day for a week. You can read it for five minutes. You can read it for an hour. You can even just skim the table of contents if you really want
Here’s why. If you want to succeed socially, you need consistency. You need to let social growth be a regular part of your daily life. Most MMOs keep user interest with daily quests – you’ve got to log in at least for a few minutes to finish the daily quests. You need to have the same kind of consistency with your social life.

Obviously, it’s not the end of the world if you skip a day. But if that skipped day turns into a skipped week and then a skipped month, you’re in trouble. That’s why it’s so important for you to practice consistency.

So your first quest is simple: Read this book every day this week. Of course, you can keep reading today. But I want you to commit that you’ll pick up the book for the rest of the week too. Think you’re up to the challenge?

**Quest Reward:**

- A higher chance of completing the book
- Better odds of achieving social success
- The rest of the book is super cool and you don’t want to miss out.

**Side Quests:**

- Raise the Stakes. Get seven five dollar bills, and stick them somewhere out of the way. Every day that you pick up this book, grab one of the five-dollar bills and use it to treat yourself to something fun. Every day you don’t read, grab a bill and make a $5 donation to charity – or if you really want to motivate yourself, just shred it.
- Write Down Three Concrete, Vivid Goals. Imagine three specific, vivid goals, and write them down. Don’t pick abstract ideas like “I want to be more social.” Choose goals like “I want to be able to start a conversation with someone else and have it go well” or “I want to host a movie night for at least three other people.”
- Schedule Time To Read. Choose a specific time tomorrow when you’ll pick up the guide again – and set a reminder!

**Level Two: Random Encounters**

One of the most enduring tropes of RPGs is the random encounter. Want to make your character stronger? Walk outside of town until you run into a random monster, bash the monster over the head until it falls over, and then move on to the next monster.

The implications of random encounters don’t make much sense (how does anyone get anything done when monsters attack them every ten steps?) But the basic logic is sound: If your character does a lot of little fights, they’ll be prepared to handle the big boss fight when it rolls around.

And the same logic is true when it comes to social interactions. Obviously, there are some differences – please don’t bash random people over the head! But the big idea is the same. If you make the most of all of the little opportunities to be social each day, you’ll feel much more confident in high-stakes social situations.
Unless you never leave the house, you probably have dozens of little opportunities to be social. Whether it’s the cashier at the store, or the person sitting next to you in class, or the coworker you work with, you have the opportunity to connect with several people each week.

The thing is, most people waste these opportunities.

Most people go through life treating others like NPCs, not like real people.

See, when most people interact with strangers and acquaintances, they generally connect with them on a functional level, not a personal level. Connecting with someone on a functional level means you interact with them only enough to accomplish a particular function. For instance, you talk to the cashier just enough to check out. You talk with a coworker just enough to get information on a new project. When you add social pleasantries (like asking “how are you doing?”) you only add enough to accomplish the function of conforming to social norms.

Connecting with someone on a personal level means that you treat them as a person, not an NPC. It means recognizing that they exist outside of their interaction with you, and trying to show some interest in them or a little compassion towards them.

Practically, it might look like telling your cashier you appreciate their hard work. It might look like asking a barista what her favorite coffee is. It might look like asking your coworker about his weekend. It might look like asking a classmate how he did on the last test. It could just mean giving someone eye contact and a genuine smile. It might be looking at a name tag and saying “Thank you, [Name].”

It isn’t that hard to do, but it can make someone else’s day. And it can supercharge your social confidence. Instead of remembering the times you failed socially, you can think about the dozens of little moments of connection you had throughout the week. Instead of relying on rusty skills to connect with a new friend, you can use abilities that you practice constantly. All it takes is a deliberate choice to treat the other person as a human instead of a tool – a fellow player, instead of a disposable NPC.

That’s what today’s quest is all about.

**Quest 1.2 (Type: Collection)**

**Quest Objectives:**

- Create 10 moments of connection with strangers or acquaintances.

**Quest Description:**

This might feel a little awkward at first. And you might screw up. You might ask a question that’s a little too personal, or try to start a conversation with someone who wants to be left alone.

But that’s okay. Stick with it, and you’ll find you succeed more than you fail. And I think you’ll also find that these moments of connection feel great, for both you and the other person.

Of course, having a social life means more than connecting with random people. But we’re laying the groundwork here. Remember, random encounters prepare RPG heroes for the boss battle. Every time you deliberately create moments of connection, you’re getting a little more confident socially, and a little bit better at relating to others.
**Quest Reward:**

- Start a habit of connecting with others
- Practice your connection skills
- Make ten people feel a bit happier.

**Side Quests:**

- Don’t stop at making moments of connection with strangers and acquaintances -- create some with family or friends, too!
- When someone creates a moment of connection with you, notice what they did that made you feel connected with. Then do that with someone else!
- Create a few moments of connection online. Send a friend an email just to say hi, or to thank them for something they’ve done for you.

**Level Three: Leave the Starting Zone**

Most games have some kind of starting zone for new players.

First person shooters often begin with a tutorial of some kind. MMORPGs have a newbie zone where the monsters don’t attack you without provocation. In the starting zone, things are easy, and it’s very unlikely that you’ll fail.

Of course, if you never leave the starting zone, you miss out on most of the game. Leaving the tutorial means you’ll probably end up dying a few times, but it also means you get far more enjoyment.

In real life, we’ve got something like the starting zone – it’s your comfort zone. Your comfort zone is the conversation topics you’ve already discussed many times before. It’s the activities you’ve already experienced. It’s the people you’ve already gotten to know.

There’s nothing wrong with the things in your comfort zone. It’s awesome to have favorite hobbies and people you feel really comfortable with. But your comfort zone is limited. There is, so much that life has to offer. And if you stick only with what’s comfortable, you’ll miss out.

So today’s quest is about expanding your comfort zone.

**Quest 1.3 (Type: Collection)**

**Quest Objective:**

- Find something you’ve never done before.
- And then go do it.
- (Optional) Go do it again!

**Quest Description:**

Pick something meaningful. It’s not very meaningful to watch a Youtube video you’ve never watched before. It’s much more meaningful to try yoga, explore a park near your house for the first time, or volunteer at a soup kitchen.
In general, you should feel a little nervous – if you are totally calm, you’re probably still within your comfort zone. You might try asking yourself “On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is as scary as possible and 1 is not scary at all, how scary is this?” You probably want to try things that are in the 4-6 range on that scale.

That being said, the thing you pick should be something you actually want to do. It’s good if it feels scary or hard, but it’s not good if it just feels unpleasant. The point is to find an experience that will be rewarding, not something that is miserable. So if you know you’ll hate the opera, don’t choose an opera visit as your comfort zone expander.

Some possible ideas:

- Visit a local museum
- Go to the bookstore or library and read the first chapter of a book from a genre you’ve never read before. Buy the book if the first chapter holds your interest.
- Find a local park or running trail. Go for a walk or a jog.
- Google for “things to do in [your city].” Pick one.
- Volunteer for a day at a homeless shelter.
- Eat at a style of restaurant that you’ve never been to before – for instance, an ethnic restaurant or a vegan restaurant.
- Get some pencils and paper and try drawing something. Or buy some kids’ art supplies and rediscover fingerpainting or coloring books.
- Visit a class for a type of exercise you’ve never done before.
- Drive to a nearby city that you’ve never been to before. Explore the city without looking up anything about it beforehand, and eat dinner at a local restaurant that you discover during your wanderings.

**Quest Rewards:**

- Build your confidence
- Expand your comfort zone
- Discover a new hobby or passion

**Side Quests:**

- Activate co-op mode! Invite a friend along to any of these experiences.
- Change something from your daily routine, and maintain that change for a whole week. For instance, if you normally switch on the computer immediately after waking up, see what happens if you read a book for ten minutes first. If you normally take the freeway home from work, see what happens if you take some side streets instead.
- Try something that you think you’ll dislike, just to see what happens. For instance, even if you assume you dislike crowds, try going to a crowded concert. You might enjoy it more than you think – or you might learn that you can tolerate discomfort more than you thought.

**Level Four: Go Into The Tall Grass**
I’m a Pokémon purist.

I’ve only played Red and Blue and I think there are really only 150 Pokémon (151 if you count Missingno). Nowadays, when I listen to conversations about Pokémon, I’m flummoxed by everything that’s new. There’s IVs, EVs, new Pokémon types – and also Pokémon can be shiny now for some reason? An awful lot has changed.

But there’s one constant since the first Pokémon game: if you want to find new Pokémon, you need to go into the tall grass.

Pokémon generally don’t come to you. There’s a specific place where you go if you want to catch them.

The same thing is true for meeting new potential friends. You need to go to the places where those connections are most likely to form.

Obviously, you can find people almost everywhere. But there are certain contexts where friendships are likely to grow, and contexts where they’re not. While it’s possible to befriend someone you meet in a grocery store, it’s very unlikely. People don’t come to grocery stores to socialize, so you’re likely to come across as strange if you try to start a personal conversation.

Conversely, if you join something like a book club or a dance class, it’s much easier to form friendships with the people you meet. At events like this, you have a lot of opportunities for conversation, and conversation is encouraged. Plus, you know you have at least one thing in common with everyone there.

It’s easy to find the “tall grass” where potential friendships can be made. Just look for gatherings that fit these four criteria.

- This gathering should foster interaction between strangers. In other words, it should be easy for you to start a conversation with people that you do not know. A concert does not foster interaction, because most people going to a concert only talk with their friends. A theater class does foster interaction, because you will naturally interact with others as you practice your scenes together.
- The gathering should be something that you will probably enjoy doing. If you hate a particular activity, it will be hard to motivate yourself to go, and you will probably not get along super well with people who love that activity.
- The people at the gathering should be friendly, positive people. In other words, if you go to a social event and everyone seems rude and unfriendly, you might want to try another event.
- You should have the opportunity to meet new people every time you go. If you hang out with your best friends every Friday night, that’s great, but it doesn’t count for this quest because it doesn’t give you the opportunity to meet new people.

To sum it up: If you want to expand your social circle, you need to go to events where you can meet new people that have the potential to be good friends. You need to go into the tall grass.

**Quest 1.4 (Type: Weekly)**

**Quest Objectives:**
• Go to a social gathering where you might meet new potential friends
• Do this once a week for one month.

Quest Description:
You can do the same gatherings each week or different ones – whichever option gives you the best chance of making friends. You can also try more than one social gathering each week if you like.

Some possible ways to find social gatherings:

• Check Meetup.com for groups that meet in your area
• Check the Craigslist activities and group sections (although use common sense and stay safe!)
• Contact the game stores in your area and see if they host any game nights.
• Google for [things to do] + [your city] or [places to meet people] + [your city]
• Research religious organizations in your area – most churches have community events throughout the week. If you’re not religious, you might still make some friends at an event geared towards visitors.
• Look up classes for something that you’re interested in – like theater, art, photography, or cooking.
• See if your community theater has open auditions
• Contact your local library and book stores and see if they have any book clubs.
• Check out Toastmasters.org and find a club near you (they’re free to visit!)
• Look for volunteer opportunities.
• If you are a college student, look up clubs and student groups on campus, and visit one.
• Look for physical activities featuring social interaction – like a dance class or a team sport.

To sum it up: Once a week for a month, go somewhere fun where it’s easy to meet new people. Sound like a plan?

Quest Rewards:
• Opportunity to meet new people
• Opportunity to practice your conversation skills
• Explore new hobbies and discover fun things to do.

Side Quests:

• Create a social gathering where other people can meet. The easiest way to do this is to plan an event where you invite different groups of friends. For instance, if you know people from a bowling league and from a theater class, organize a movie night where you invite both groups. That way people from the bowling league have the opportunity to befriend people from your theater class, and vice versa.
• Try for two or three events a week instead of one.
• Bring a friend to one of these events!

Level Five: Infinite Lives
In most classic games, you had a limited number of lives. Run out of lives, and it was game over – start back at the beginning. This design feature was inspired by arcade gaming, because it was in an arcade owner’s best interest to force you to pony up more quarters for more lives.

But as arcades became less relevant for gaming, game developers started to reconsider the idea of limited lives. Why force a player to start over just because they used up their last life? So developers started phasing out the life system, and nowadays it’s very rare to find a game that will show you a “Game Over” screen. In most modern games, dying just drops you back at your latest checkpoint, with no further consequence.

Of course, there are benefits to more high-stakes gameplay. In recent years rougelike games (where you get a single life and dying means starting from scratch) have become increasingly popular. When every decision counts, the game becomes much more engrossing.

But rougelikes can be exhausting to play. When a single mistake could mean that all of my progress is lost, I tend to anxiously ponder every decision. And when I do make a mistake, it can be deeply frustrating. I’ve yelled at my poor computer more than once when playing Don’t Starve (and I still have unresolved anger towards those darn swamp tentacles.)

Of course, you bought a book on growing your social life, not a book on game design. So what’s my point?

Simple.

In social settings, most people act like they’re playing a rougelike. They assume that a single mistake will DOOM THEM FOREVER, so social interaction becomes about avoiding mistakes instead of having fun and connecting with others.

But here’s the reality. In most social interactions, it’s totally fine to make mistakes. In fact, everyone makes mistakes pretty much all the time in social interaction.

Don’t believe me? Just listen in to everyone else next time you’re in a group conversation. You’ll hear the other people in the group interrupt each other, tell jokes that fall flat, share boring stories – all sorts of mistakes. And for the most part, everyone moves along with skipping a beat when those mistakes happen. Sure, maybe there’s a moment of awkwardness, but then someone changes topics and the conversation moves along.

In other words, social interaction is more like a game with infinite lives than a rougelike game. Of course, it’s better to avoid social mistakes if possible, and if you hurt or offended someone, you should definitely apologize and make amends.

But if you make a mistake, you get to try again. Even in a worst case scenario where you mess up a conversation so badly that the person doesn’t want to talk to you anymore, you can always talk to someone else. There’s always another social respawn waiting.

And that means you don’t have to be afraid. You can let yourself relax, and maybe even be a little playful. If you make a mistake, it’s okay – just apologize, and do your best to not repeat that mistake in the future.

Quest 1.5 (Type: Collection)
**Quest Objectives:**

- Make ten deliberate social mistakes
- See if the world ends

**Quest Description**

I promise, I’m not crazy.

Yes, I know you bought this book to find social success, not deliberately sabotage yourself. But hear me out.

If you’re like many people, your fear of social failure is much bigger than it needs to be. When you spend so much time avoiding failure, you never get the chance to really enjoy social interaction. Who is going to have more fun – someone trying to make it through a game without losing a single life, or someone trying to explore all of the cool features the game designers programmed?

The cool thing about fear is that if you deliberately confront it, it tends to back down. The first time you ride a roller coaster, it’s terrifying. The tenth time you ride it, it’s probably not scary at all. That’s what this quest is all about.

Of course, you should only do harmless mistakes. The goal is to choose social mistakes that feel scary, but that won’t actually cause any harm to you or anyone else.

Here are some ideas:

- Deliberately tell a joke that isn’t very funny. (Aka, Google for “dad jokes”)
- Make plans with a friend. After making the plans, call back in an hour or so and ask to change some minor detail of the plans (for instance, ask to reschedule for 4 instead of 3.)
- Leave your wallet in the car before entering a grocery store. Pick out something to buy, bring it to the register, then “realize” that you forgot your wallet when it’s time to pay. Apologize, get the wallet, and pay as normal.

You probably noticed that these ideas range from small mistakes (unfunny joke) to big mistakes (lost wallet.) When you try this yourself, I recommend starting with small mistakes, and working your way up to bigger and bigger mistakes. Just remember to never risk mistakes that could cause anyone real harm.

Also, if social interaction in general is very scary for you, I strongly encourage you to talk to a therapist. This level is designed to help people with moderate amounts of anxiety, but it’s best to have a professional help you with high levels. The good news is that social anxiety is incredibly treatable. So talk with a therapist if your anxiety levels feel out of control or really distressing.

**Quest Rewards:**

- Less anxiety
- More confidence
- Fun stories to tell about your deliberate mistakes!

**Side Quests:**
- Read up on exposure therapy for social anxiety (that’s where the ideas in this level are borrowed from.) Brainstorm a few new ideas for mistakes that you can practice making.
- If your level of anxiety feels higher than you’d like, research therapists in your area and consider contacting one.
- Before trying each social mistake, write down how you expect others will react. After doing the mistake, notice their reaction and compare it to your prediction.

**Level Six: Hardware**

StarCraft 2 was released more than twelve years after the original StarCraft debuted. I had hours of happy memories playing the original StarCraft during my childhood – I even set up a StarCraft LAN party for one of my birthdays. So it was a no-brainer that I would pick up StarCraft 2 soon after it was released.

Unfortunately, I quickly ran into a problem. My PC was full of aging components that I had not upgraded for years. My computer put up a valiant effort, but it just wasn’t up to the challenge of rendering StarCraft 2. See, as a game of StarCraft 2 progressed, the armies grew in size. This meant there were more units to render, which meant my poor computer had to work harder and harder, which meant that eventually it just couldn’t keep up.

I would start a match with everything working fine. Then the map would start to fill with units, my computer would start to chug, and my frame rate would fall into the single digits. Needless to say, I did not win a lot of StarCraft 2 matches on my aging computer.

Fortunately, there was a solution to my problem. I patiently saved my money, and bought a bunch of shiny new PC parts. StarCraft 2 ran great on the new hardware, and I was able to win a lot more games.

You have hardware too – it’s called your body. And just as my StarCraft performance was impaired until I upgraded my computer, your social performance will be impaired if you don’t take care of your body.

The reason is pretty simple. There’s a ton of research that shows that if you exercise regularly, you’ll have more energy and a happier mood. Now, let’s say you’re talking to someone. Are you more likely to make a positive impression if you’re tired and sad, or if you’re energetic and upbeat?

Of course, there are all sorts of other benefits to exercise that go beyond social interaction (like not dying from a heart attack.) But let’s focus on the social benefits. If you take care of your body, your body will provide the power for you to put your best foot forward.

And you don’t need to make dramatic changes to reap the benefit. The most important thing is to make a change that you can stick with. The CDC recommends 150 minutes of moderate exercise (ie, brisk walking, leisurely bicycling) or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise (ie, running, fast cycling) per week. That’s not too bad – either 30 minutes of moderate exercise five times a week, or 25 minutes of vigorous exercise three times a week. You don’t even need to do it all at once, so you could try getting in three ten-minute walking sessions instead of one thirty-minute walking session.

And if you’re not exercising at all, you’ll benefit from doing even half of what the CDC recommends. So try to start by doing just 15 minutes of walking five times a week, or going for a run just twice a week. Remember, the important thing is to pick something that you can stick with – so start slow and easy. If
the very idea of exercise fills you with dread, start by walking for just ten minutes, three times a week. You can always build from there.

You can also try to make exercise more fun. For instance, you might join a class at the gym, or download an app like “Zombies Run.” I personally like playing Hearthstone on my phone while using the cardio machines at the gym. I also love Dance Dance Revolution, because it’s fun and a great workout. You can also try being active by doing things that don’t feel like exercise, such as gardening. Experiment until you find something that works for you.

The important thing is to start and keep going. If you make a habit of exercise, you’ll have more energy and a better mood, and that will pay big dividends when it comes time to be social. Plus, you might live longer, lose weight, and just generally be better off. The right exercise for you is the exercise you can stick with. So start exercising, and stick with it.

Oh, and one more thing. While exercise is very important, there are plenty of other ways that you can take care of your “hardware.” Eating right, quitting smoking, sleeping 8 hours a night, getting regular checkups at the doctor – all of these things will help you out a lot. While the quest today will focus on exercise, here’s a quick checklist for the other stuff:

- Are you getting 8 hours of sleep per night? If not, Google for “sleep hygiene” and read up on tips to help you sleep better. You should also try going to bed earlier.
- Are you eating breakfast? If not, stop skipping breakfast. You’ll gain more energy by taking ten minutes to eat breakfast than you would by getting ten more minutes of sleep.
- Do you have unhealthy habits you can’t seem to stop (smoking, eating lots of junk food, etc)? If so, book an appointment with your doctor or a therapist. They should be able to help.

**Quest 1.6 (Type: Monthly)**

**Quest Objectives:**

- Exercise at least one hour a week
- Keep it up for at least a month
- (Optional) Exercise 2-3 hours per week.

**Quest Description:**

If you haven’t exercised in a long time, you might just want to start with ten minutes of walking each day. If you feel like you’re in pretty good shape, give yourself more of a challenge. The most important thing is to pick something you can stick with, which means picking something you don’t hate. Start easy and get harder as you go along. (You can talk with your doctor or a trainer at the gym if you’re not sure where a good place is for you to start.)

I recommend you do some research into the different types of exercise available. I used to hate exercise until I found out how to make it fun. Once I discovered sports like fencing or swing dancing, exercise became much more enjoyable for me. A friend of mine hated exercise until she discovered Couch to 5K and then she became really motivated to run. There are a ton of different ways to be active. Instead of starting with something you know you’ll hate, look at your options and try to see if there is something that interests you.
Remember, your exercise doesn’t need to feel like exercise to count. Go walking in a park or take the stairs instead of an elevator – every bit of extra movement adds up.

Your goal is consistency. If you stick with this for a month, you’ll probably stick with it long term. Don’t give up. So start small, start slow, but show up every time. Your hardware will stay healthy, you’ll have more energy and a better mood, and the social payoff will be huge.

*Quest Rewards:*

- More energy
- Happier mood
- Better health

*Side Quests:*

- Exercise with a friend! Ask someone if they would be interested in exercising with you. For instance, you might find someone who would be a good running partner, or someone who would be willing to take an exercise class with you.
- Improve your diet! I don’t recommend you try to dramatically overhaul your eating all at once (because you won’t stick with it). But see if there is a single change you can make that will have a big impact. For instance, I stopped buying chips at the grocery store. When I had the chips in my house, I would always eat them. But if the chips never made it home with me, then I never really missed them (and my body certainly didn’t miss the calories!). I also switched to diet soda and saved hundreds of calories each week. Start with simple changes like that, and build over time to improve your diet.
- Set yourself a fitness goal and work out a bit harder every week until you reach it. It’s best if your goal is something that you can achieve in a month or two of good effort – after all, you can always give yourself a new goal.

**Level Seven: It’s Dangerous To Go Alone**

In video games, the hero always seems to instantly adapt to the fact that their life has been turned upside down. Gordon Freeman is a nerdy scientist. Link is a dweeby kid. Mario fixes pipes for a living. None of them start their games as heroes or warriors.

Yet fifteen minutes into the game, they’re killing enemies, dodging traps, and on a mission to save the world. And none of them seem fazed by this! It’s like they’ve flipped a switch and effortlessly engaged hero mode.

Unfortunately, real life growth doesn’t work that way. Real life change is often painful and slow. And real life change is hard to do alone. There’s a reason why Weight Watchers and Alcoholics Anonymous are so popular – they’ve realized that if you try to change your life without any help, you’re more likely to fail.

In other words, it really is dangerous to go alone.
By this point in the guide, you might be feeling a little of the pain that comes from making a life change. Being more social doesn’t happen overnight – it requires unlearning old habits, building new skills, and being willing to challenge yourself. It might be tempting to think “I’ll put this on pause for now” – and then never come back to it!

In other words, this is the point where you might benefit from a little support.

That’s what today’s quest is about.

**Quest 1.7 (Type: Monthly)**

**Quest Objectives:**

- Find someone you feel comfortable talking to about your social goals.
- Make a commitment to connect with them at least once a week for at least a month.

**Quest Description:**

It’s up to you what your conversations with this person looks like. It could be as simple as you telling them how you are doing socially, and them giving you encouragement. Or you might have them help you plan social activities, or coach you on conversation skills. You could meet them in person, have a phone call, or even just share emails. Figure out what would be most helpful for you, and do that.

You have two options to find this person.

First, you can look for someone you already know – perhaps a trusted friend or family member. Make sure this is someone you can be honest with, someone who cares about you, and someone willing to help. You might even provide mutual support – for instance, maybe they can help encourage you socially, and you can encourage them with their fitness or academic goals.

If someone is immediately coming to mind as you read this, then you should probably talk to that person. If nobody is coming to mind, or if you feel awkward talking about your social growth with someone that you know, then this might not be the best option for you.

Your second option is to book a session with a professional therapist. Therapists are skilled at helping you achieve your goals, and they can also help you break through mental blocks or unconscious fears that hold you back from social connection. Especially if you are struggling emotionally (for instance, with depression or anxiety) a therapist is a great option.

While therapists do usually cost money to see, your health insurance might make therapy more affordable, and many therapists also offer “sliding scale” discounts for people struggling financially. Also, if you are a college student, most colleges offer free or low-cost counseling to students. So don’t assume that money will be an obstacle.

Not sure how to find a therapist? A good place to start is usually by googling for “therapist in [my city]”. You can also google for a therapist that focuses on your specific issue or group, for instance “anxiety therapist” or “therapist for teenagers.” Look at a few of the websites that come up, and contact the therapist who seems like the best fit for you. Many therapists will offer a free phone consultation, so you can chat with them on the phone and see if you like them before you commit to a full session.
Whoever you pick, stick with it for at least a month. If you try someone and it doesn’t work out, try someone else. I know it feels awkward to ask someone else for help – but trust me! Having someone in your corner makes it much more likely that you’ll succeed.

**Quest Rewards:**
- Advice and encouragement
- Greater chance of social success
- Luke Skywalker had a mentor (Obi-Wan) so you will basically be like Luke which is super cool.

**Side Quests**
- Look for online support. A good place to start is Reddit.com/r/socialskills. /r/socialskills is an online community of 100,000 people that I moderate, and an excellent place to get advice and help as you become more social. You can also try 7 Cups of Tea (7Cups.com) which is a website where you can give and receive supportive listening.
- Look for an in-person group that will be supportive of you. Meetup.com sometimes has “introvert” or “social anxiety” meetups. While they might not fit your situation exactly, the people in those groups would probably support your desire to become more social.
- Try being your own support. Go to FutureMe.Org and write yourself some encouraging letters. You might want to set it up so that one arrives every week, or every month.

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**End Of Excerpt**

Hi guys! It’s Dan here. I hope you enjoyed the first third of *Level Up Your Social Life!* If you’ve been trying out the quests, you might find that you’re feeling a little more confident already.

I’d love for you to keep reading, because the best parts of *Level Up Your Social Life* are ahead. If you want to keep going, head on over to Amazon and [buy the book](https://www.amazon.com/Level-Up-Your-Social-Life/dp/1788621705). You’ll be leveling up your social life in no time!

By the way, if you have any feedback about *Level Up Your Social Life*, or questions for me in general, my email address is [dan@improveyoursocialskills.com](mailto:dan@improveyoursocialskills.com). I try to respond to everyone who writes to me (although it might take me a few weeks.) If you’d like more help than I can offer via email, check out social skills coaching ([improveyoursocialskills.com/social-skills-coaching](https://improveyoursocialskills.com/social-skills-coaching)) – it could be exactly what you’re looking for.

Anyway, I really appreciate you taking the time to read this excerpt. Thanks again for checking out *Level Up Your Social Life*, and good luck on your social journey!

Dan

P.S Can I ask a favor? If you do buy *Level Up Your Social Life*, can you leave an honest Amazon review after you’ve finished reading it? Amazon reviews make a HUGE difference in getting more people to read my book, and if my book has helped you, your review makes it easier for it to help others. If you’ve already read *Improve Your Social Skills*, you could go back and leave a review for that too. Thanks!