Irony Is Stunting Your Relationships

It’s easy to make acquaintances in the modern world. New connections are just a few taps away on any mobile device. That’s an amazing thing.

Sincerity and depth in relationships with other young people is harder to get at.

You’ll note this if you pay attention at your next outing with social acquaintances. You may be able to talk and laugh about almost anything. You may feel that’s a good indicator of a growing friendship.

Then a serious topic comes up.

If you don’t move on from it, any serious topic will become a weird sort of magnet for millennial irony. Anything deeper than or different from the norm gets caught in a thick (protective or dismissive) layer of serious-not-seriousness–ness. You know the kind.

It’s the irony of laughing at yourself immediately after saying a heartfelt truth.

It’s not serious, even when it deeply wants to be.

It’s the kind that says “nothing to see here!”.

It’s self-deprecation, truth-deprecation, winky-faces , tongues out self-mockery.

And it’s everywhere. I challenge you to find a table of young people where sincerity rules the day. Irony is a powerful defensive mechanism for the ego. It may allow people to speak the truth **(e.g. “I sometimes feel ashamed of my lack of work ethic”),** but it always appends a major disclaimer: NOT REALLY! **(e.g. “I’m such a lazy millennial! Hahaha!”)**

Anymore, the bravest thing a member of my generation can do is to say something with a straight face.

Let’s leave aside what that means about our world: that it’s not safe to say meaningful, true things for the risk of being mocked. Let’s consider what it means for your relationships.

If you never break through the ice of irony in a friendship, you’ll never get at the kind of

relationship that can really bring you life.

Cracking jokes and staying at surface-level with a large enough group of friends may be fun in the moment (I love clever language and irony), but it’s an exhausting effort at scale. And it leaves you lower and emptier than before if it never ventures into the things that will make you a human being of courage, integrity, and love.

Of course, if you want that from your relationships, you’re going to have to be the one to break the ice of irony. You’re going to have to take the risk of being thought sentimental, sappy, foolish, naive, “pure,” innocent, overly idealistic.

Here’s the thing, though. The more irony your erstwhile friends have to deploy as self-protection, the more you can be sure they’re desperate for someone to say something and mean it. To let “yes” be “yes” and “no” be “no” is a drink of cold water in the desert of millennial irony. Be that water for the people around you, and you may be able to move into more fertile and productive ground for friendship.