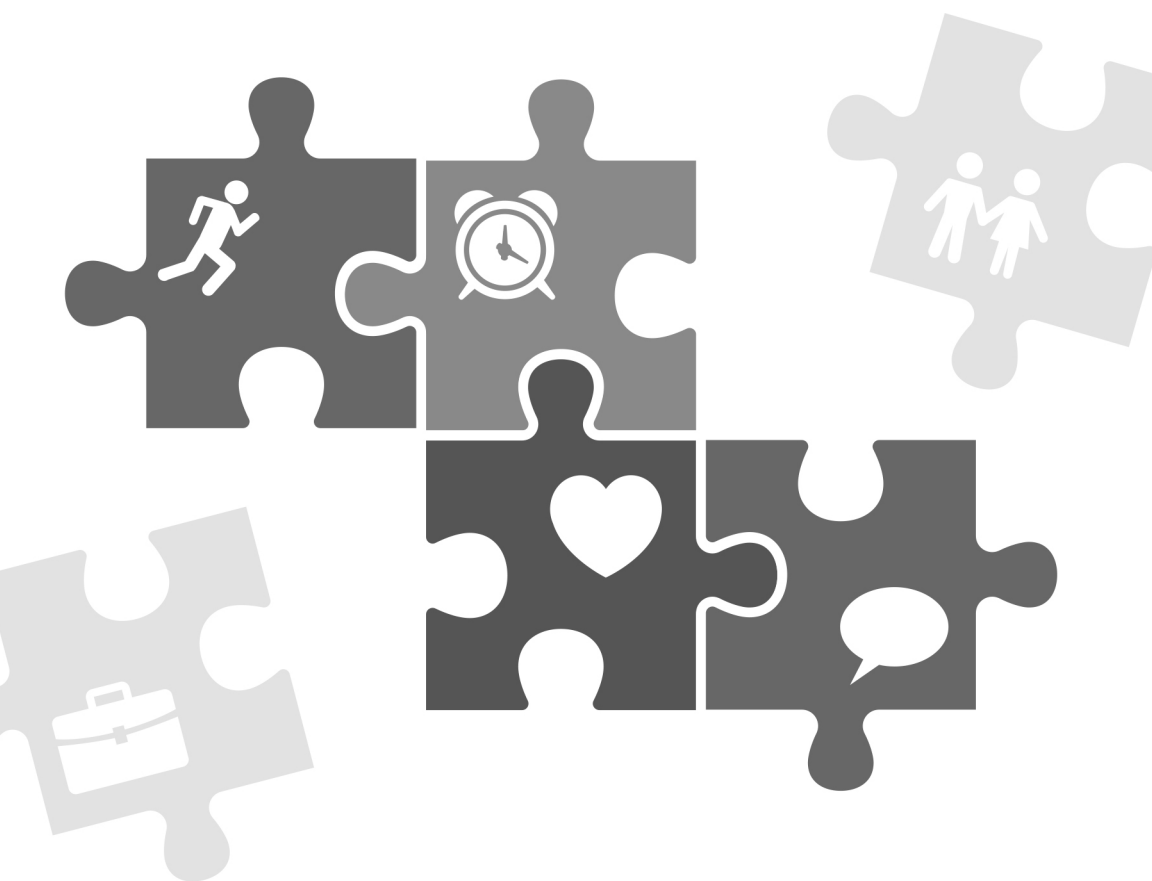


THE SOCIAL PUZZLE

ADVICE ON LIFE & LOVE



STEVEN BOUDREAU

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*This book is dedicated to my Mom and Dad.
Thanks for always being there for me!*

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BACKSTORY

I GREW UP in a suburb in Washington State.

I can remember from my earliest memories that people always fascinated me. Instead of reading or building things, I just surrounded myself with others. And what resulted by doing that, at least for me, was a whole lot of interesting conversations.

I started having conversations with people at a very young age. And it wasn't just, "Hey Ryan, want to go play football?" It was, "Hey Ryan, what do you think about this? What do you think about that?" Or "So-and-so says those things because they're insecure and want to be loved."

These conversations just happened naturally. I just started observing my surroundings, peoples' interactions, and human behavior from a very early age, and I shared what I saw and thought with others. And those experiences have really defined a core part of who I am.

So, I'm writing this book to share my thoughts, experiences, and observations that have developed on the two most important things that I care about—life and love.

I've wanted to write this book for about a decade. There are three main reasons why it's taken me such a long time. (1) Finishing a book is hard; (2) I was pressuring myself into thinking that it had to be a certain length, which would paralyze my thoughts and flow; (3) I didn't know how to structure and categorize it, and I really wanted to.

BACKSTORY

So one day I just decided to start writing and see what happens. And doing that led me to continuing to just write. And doing that made me realize that writing is really about editing. And editing led me to what you're reading now.

CRITICISM

I THINK SOME people will criticize my book for the following reasons (which I'm okay with):

- My writing style (I often write in fragments)
- My grammar not being formally correct (I write like I talk)
- Incorrect punctuation (I probably add commas when I'm not supposed to)
- That I come off too simplistic with regard to the issues I discuss
- That I don't go deep enough into the issues I discuss
- That there are obvious exceptions to the points I make
- That I sound repetitive
- That my tone comes off as too extreme or absolute
- That I'm too idealistic
- That most of what I write applies to specific situations
- The chapters are too short

INTRODUCTION

MY WRITING IS intended for anyone who's curious about life's experiences. Who have unresolved thoughts in their head. Who have felt stuck or unsure.

It's a book about people, love, and life.

However, this book shouldn't be read like a rulebook because there's no rulebook to follow when it comes to love and life.

My hope is that it makes you think about things, perhaps in new ways, and maybe it'll even help a few people live a slightly better life.

PART I

RELATIONSHIP ADVICE



THE ANATOMY OF COMMUNICATION

PEOPLE ARE COMPLICATED. As a result, communication is complicated.

Like many, I believe communication is one of the most important facets to any relationship. Good communication is key to having a good relationship.

And yet, many relationships experience poor communication.

A lot about people is very similar—we eat, drink, want to be happy, go to work, like to travel, etc. But then there are experiences and characteristics that make each of us unique and shape who we are as a person.

Examples include: where you were born, where you grew up, your ethnicity, your educational background, what you read, the music you listen to, the kind of art you like, who your heroes are, the challenges you've been faced with, the triumphs you've experienced, etc. All of these things contribute to who you are as a person. They make you who you are.

While many people experience similar combinations of these things, very few people (if any at all) are identical. Any two people could have been born and grown up in the same area, raised in similar socioeconomic backgrounds, graduated high school and college at the top of their class, and have gone on to become doctors. But one could have ended up opening their own family practice in a small office in a cozy part of Santa Monica, California, while the other decided to become a traveling physician.

While much of their youth, young adulthood, and transition to becoming adults were nearly the same, their respective experiences as doctors would undoubtedly be different. And these experiences would ultimately shape them in unique ways, and perhaps very different ways.

This uniqueness about them could influence how they communicate.

Perhaps the traveling physician's environment has revolved around lots of geographic change and uncertain, high-energy, high-risk environments, while the family office doctor is used to a calm, low-energy, low-risk environment that deals with common checkups and procedures.

It might be best to communicate with someone like the traveling physician on-the-go, perhaps while you're walking or hiking, since they're used to lots of change, a certain type of chaos, and high-pressure situations. They may be able to think most clearly in an environment like that, as well as feel the most comfortable.

On the other hand, for the family office doctor, it might be best to sit down for coffee in a secluded area, or in a private office to communicate things of significance. They may prefer a calm, quiet, and private environment in order to communicate and process things.

This is just one example of the complexities of communication. People think and communicate best, and most comfortably, in varying environments.

Be aware of that.

Communication is many things. It's knowing when to talk and when to listen. It means asking engaging questions. It means knowing when, who, and how to push someone to get more out of them and when to hold back. It means knowing which battles to pick—knowing that sometimes saying nothing is the strongest form of communication, but understanding the impact that staying silent has. Communication means understanding that sometimes people are just venting and don't want advice. And if you're not able to intuit or feel if someone is venting to you, then you should just nicely ask the other person if that's what they're doing.

Poor communication often results in arguments, and arguments often result in poor communication. The two necessary ingredients to good communication are honesty and empathy.

I think a common argument or problem that comes up in relationships is when one person expects or wants the other person to act

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differently than they currently do. While I think people should shy away from relationships that require a lot of change from either person, many people get into relationships that require a lot of change or compromise for them to work out.

I think the best way to address this type of situation is to first think quietly on your own about it for several days, weeks, or months. This is important because you don't want it to come off as demanding or as a knee-jerk reaction to something else. These types of things are significant issues. And they require care. Show the person you care by thinking deeply about it yourself before you discuss it with them.

You should think about the other person's reasons for acting a certain way. Think about why they could be doing what they're doing. Think about what experiences could cause them to act this way (e.g. Did they grow up in an environment where their parents acted this way?), think about why you want them to act differently. And think about why it bothers you—why you want them to change. I think doing so will put you in an empathetic mindset, which is necessary to effect long-term, sustainable change. You have to be understanding, patient, and calm. No one wants to feel coerced into doing something, especially something that might not come natural to them.

When you think you're ready to bring it up with them (after you've thought things through), don't be alarmed if they say they need time to think things through themselves. You might not be able to resolve the issue right then and there, which may be frustrating to you because you've been thinking about it for a while. But this could be the first time they're hearing about it, or they could just process things differently than you. Some people aren't able to process their feelings and emotions on-the-spot. If you truly care about them, you'll give them the space they need to process their side of things.

Be empathetic.

I don't know the exact percentages, but it's often mentioned that much of communication is non-verbal. Paying attention to what non-verbal cues you're giving off to someone is also important.

The way to be better at communicating is to be more empathetic. And the way to do that is to understand that people are different from you, and to accept that. Empathy means putting yourself in someone else's shoes by trying to think about why they might think a certain

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way—what things (circumstances, experiences, etc.) could lead them to their line of thinking.

I encourage you all to spend time and effort to become better communicators, as it plays such a big part in our lives and relationships.

PART II



LIFE ADVICE



MIDDLE STAGES

IF YOU'VE EVER grown out your hair, you've probably encountered the middle stages.

The middle stages of many things seem to cause people angst. It's when you're often wandering. You don't know whether to go right, left, up, or down. You don't have an intuitive sense for how something should be.

In short, you lack direction.

That feeling of being lost, and perhaps alone, can be overwhelming. But with the right things in place, it also presents an opportunity—an opportunity to discover and grow.

The start is exciting. The lead up to the finish is often times exciting, too.

It's the middle stages that are the true test of a thing's worth. Because it's the middle stages — the times when everything seems stagnant — where the real growth happens.

I'm willing to try a lot of new things. I'm also willing to do a lot of momentary things — like hanging out with friends, going to the movies, playing sports, going out for dinner, etc. The reason I'm willing to do these things is of course because I like to. But also because I have a good sense of when these things will end. Most don't reach the middle stages, or if they do, it's usually not noticeable.

When I realize that I've reached the middle stages of something, I stop and think about how I'll proceed. Sometimes I can do this within

minutes, even seconds. I just know. But for the most important things in life, it takes longer to figure things out.

That's because the things that really matter usually take a lot of time, energy, and attention.

I'm very patient about how, when, and where I exert my time and energy on middle stage endeavors. It's because the middle stages are such an important time. As you go through it (perhaps on a day-to-day basis), you may be confronted with asking yourself whether you want to keep going or not.

If I decide to proceed, I'm making a long-term bet on the future. And once I've made this bet—once I've made my decision—it takes a lot for me to change. But if I come across new, useful information that suggests otherwise, I will let go. But keeping this practice to a minimum is of the utmost importance to me. The longer you're in the middle, and the more challenging the middle is, the more you feel like you have to lose, so the more you want to hold on, even when the facts say otherwise.

It's only when I know I want to go through the middle stages of something that I see it as an opportunity. And while there may be some long days, some ups and downs, I'm just focused on what's right in front of me. Because you learn that sustained pleasure during the middle stages is a good indication that you're doing something worthwhile.