

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/clips/friendships-help-prevent-burnout/>

Clara Shih, CEO of Salesforce AI, shares a personal story of how maintaining the friendships she had before becoming an entrepreneur helped her mental health while she was starting Hearsay Systems. Though she had limited time to make new friends, her existing close friends became her critical supporters who kept her from feeling burned out.



## Transcript

- I really wanna acknowledge, 00:00:03,270 you know, some of the harder things.. And for me, I didn't expect it to be so lonely.. 'Cause there's so much that happens.. There's so much stress in a startup, and you and your co-founders become the backstop.. And yet, the people you talk to and spend the most time with, who are your, you know, friends, they're your employees.. You can't confide in them.. You can't tell them that you're about to run outta money without a plan.. You can't tell them that you feel totally burned out and, you know, and that you're struggling and you're not sure if this is the right thing.. And it's really lonely.. And also because of the time commitment..

You know, there are those great events, but oftentimes, your time is out of your control.. It's when the term sheet comes in.. It's when the RFP gets issued.. It's when you're about to run outta money.. It's when a customer's coming into town and wants to meet you for dinner that night and else the opportunity goes.. And so I found that that made it hard for me to show up as a good friend.. And it just, I didn't make any deep new friendships during the 10 years that I was running my startup.. I think other people can, but for me personally, I wasn't able to.. And thank goodness, in retrospect, this wasn't part of my premeditated plan.. But thank goodness that I went into my startup with really, really good friends..

These are my best friends, Ali and Becks.. Becks is the one I brought to the conference with me with Jeff Bezos and Hugh Jackman.. And this is Ali and Becks pushing strollers of their babies and mine on our vacation in Palm Springs in 2016, when I was in our office, in, sorry, in our Airbnb house working the entire time.. I missed this walk.. I didn't go to brunch.. I didn't go to the pool.. We had a pool in the house.. I never went in a single time.. I was on calls the entire time because there was a fire happening at Hearsay.. And I think if I had just met Ali and Becks, any normal person would be like, "Who is this person? Who does she think she is?" But because we'd known each other and we were best friends already for 15 years, they knew, they supported me through this..

And so much of being an entrepreneur and succeeding with a startup, it isn't necessarily your product or your technology.. It's you, it's your stamina.. It's your mental health.. Because with your stamina, with your mental health, with your energy, if your product isn't right, you can fix it.. If your technology isn't right, you can fix it.. If you're missing people on the team, you can hire them.. But if you feel burned out or you feel unsupported, then all bets are off.. And so for me, I think friendship was

really an unanticipated effect.. It was a casualty, but also a benefit because I realized how special it was and how important it was for me to have these friends...