



EVERYONE COMMUNICATES, FEW CONNECT

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The Summary

Prologue

When you are on the phone, it's not uncommon to get disconnected. It's a frustrating experience that wastes your time, limits your productivity, and disrupts the flow of information. When it comes to communication, *connection is everything*.

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What's true on the phone is also true for people. And while it's easy to know when you have a good connection on the phone, it isn't always so easy to know with people. Can you tell when you have connected with people? How are you doing when it comes to connecting?

If the answers aren't clear, you need to improve your ability to connect with people. Everyone talks; Few connect. Those who do connect take their relationships, their work, and their lives to another level. The good news is that, even if connecting isn't something you are naturally good at today, you can learn how to do it and become better tomorrow.

In this book, you will learn the five principles that are foundational for understanding how to connect with people, and the five practices that anyone can do to increase their connection with others.

Chapter 1: Connecting Increases Your Influence in Every Situation

People cannot succeed in life without communicating effectively. Working hard and doing a great job are not enough! To be successful, you need to learn how to really communicate with others—and the key to good communication (and leadership) is the ability to connect with people at every level: one-on-one, in groups, and with an audience.

What do I mean by "connect?" Connecting is the ability to identify with people and relate to them in a way that increases your influence with them. To be successful, you must work with others, and to do that well, you must learn to connect. According to the *Harvard Business Review*, "The number one criteria for advancement and promotion for professionals is an ability to communicate effectively." That means connecting!

I am convinced that nearly anyone can learn to connect with others. Why? Because I did. Connecting wasn't something I did naturally; I had to learn to do it. I saw the difference it made for people who were able to do it. I realized that it made the difference between success and failure. People whom I saw connect with others had better relationships, experienced less conflict, and got more things done than those who didn't connect. If I was going to accomplish my goals and realize my dreams, I had to overcome my inability to connect with people.

I learned that the ability to connect with others starts with attitude. Specifically, it begins with understanding the value of people, and caring about them. In one study, a direct correlation was found between achievement and the ability to care for and connect with people. The study found that high achievers:

- Cared about people as well as profits
- Viewed subordinates optimistically
- Sought advice from those under them
- Listened well to everyone

They valued and cared for the people around them, which enabled them to connect, and then achieve at higher levels than those with a different attitude.

Chapter 2: Connecting Is All About Others

The number one hindrance to connecting with others is seeing ourselves as the center of conversations. It's subtle; it happens in every aspect of life and every level of business.

People often miss incredible opportunities in life by failing to connect. Good teachers, leaders, and speakers don't see themselves as experts with passive audiences they need to impress. Nor do they view their own interests as most important. Instead, they see themselves as guides and focus on helping others learn. Because they value others, they work at connecting with the people they are teaching or trying to help.

When I was a young minister, I had a hard time connecting with people. Then I heard Zig Ziglar say something that changed my life: "If you will first help people get what they want, they will help you get what you want." Finally, I understood what had been missing from my own communication—and from my interaction with other people. I saw how selfish and self-centered I'd been. I realized that I was trying to get ahead by *correcting* others when I should have been trying to *connect* with others.

Connecting is never about me. It's about the person with whom I'm communicating. Why do so many people miss this? Several reasons:

Immaturity. Maturity is the ability to see and act on behalf of others. Immature people don't see things from someone else's point of view. They rarely concern themselves with what's best for others.

Ego. There is a very real danger for people with public professions to develop unhealthily strong egos. Leaders, speakers, and teachers can develop a disproportionate sense of their own importance.

Failure to Value Everyone. Today I see my purpose as adding value to others. However, to *add value* to others, one must first *value* others. Too often our cause or agenda can cause us to devalue people if they aren't important to that cause.

Insecurity. The final reason people often place too much focus on themselves and not on others is insecurity. When a speaker is insecure, he will seek approval from his audience. And the more he wants to seek approval from them, the more engrossed he becomes in himself and how he can impress others. As a result, he is more likely to fail to meet the needs of the moment.

Understanding that your focus must be on others is often the greatest hurdle people face in connecting with others. It's a matter of having the right attitude. But that alone isn't enough. You must be able to *communicate* that attitude. How do you do that? I believe you do it by answering three questions that people always ask when interacting with others:

1. Do you care for me?
2. Can you help me?
3. Can I trust you?

Whenever people take action, they do so for their reasons, not yours or mine. That's why we have to get on their agenda and try to see things from their point of view. If we don't, we are just wasting time—theirs and ours.

Chapter 3: Connecting Goes Beyond Words

When trying to communicate with others, many believe the message is all that matters. But the reality is that communication goes way beyond words. One study discovered that face-to-face communication has three components: words, tone of voice, and body language. In situations where feelings and attitudes are being communicated:

- what we say* accounts for 7% of what is believed.
- the *way we say it* accounts for 38%.
- what others see* accounts for 55%

All communication has three essential components: the intellectual, the emotional, and the volitional. In other words, when we try to communicate, we must include:

- Thought: something we know
- Emotion: something we feel
- Action: something we do

Fail to include any one of the three and there will be a disconnection from people and a breakdown in communication. When components are missing, the result for me as a communicator is exhaustion. However, when I include all three components—thought, emotion, and action—my communication has conviction, passion, and credibility. The result is connection.

Any message you try to convey must contain a piece of you. You can't just deliver words. You can't merely convey information. You need to be more than a messenger. You must be the message you want to deliver. Otherwise, you won't have credibility and you won't connect.

If you want to connect with others, you need to be sure your communication goes beyond words. You do that by connecting on four levels: visual, intellectual, emotional, and verbal.

Connecting Visually. Anytime you are in front of other people, the visual impression you make will either help or hinder you. Some keys to connecting visually:

1. Eliminate Personal Distractions. Be well-groomed and dressed appropriately for the occasion.
2. Expand your Range of Expression. A poker face is not helpful when trying to connect.
3. Move with a Sense of Purpose. It conveys energy and garners attention.
4. Maintain an Open Posture. Remove obstacles and reduce distance. Physical touch eliminates distance altogether; a handshake, a pat on the back, or a hug can promote connection.

Connecting Intellectually. To effectively connect with people intellectually you must know two things: your subject and yourself. There's no substitute for personal experience when we want to connect with people's hearts. If you know something without having lived it, your audience experiences a credibility gap. If you've done something but don't know it well enough to explain it, the audience gets frustrated. You have to bring both together.

As important as it is to know your subject, it's equally vital that you know yourself. Effective communicators are comfortable in their own skin. Because they know themselves, they gravitate to their sweet spot when they speak to people.

Connecting Emotionally. Whatever is inside of you, positive or negative, will eventually come out when you are communicating to others. If you are positive, believe in yourself, and focus on others, there is a good chance you will connect with others because you make it possible for others to feel what you feel.

Connecting Verbally. What we say and how we say it makes quite an impact. People respond to the language we use. When I speak to an audience, I strive to make what I say punchy and memorable.

The art of communicating beyond words requires the ability to bring all four of these factors together. This can be difficult; it's also intuitive. The best advice I can give is for you to learn how to be yourself. The best professional speakers know themselves and their strengths, often learned through trial and error, and they use them to their greatest advantage.

Chapter 4: Connecting Always Requires Energy

Think about the best communicators you know. How many of them are low-energy people? I'd bet the answer is none. Connecting with people doesn't just happen. If you want to connect, you must be intentional about it—and that always requires energy. When I say energy is required, I'm not saying you have to be a high-energy person or an extrovert. You must simply be willing to use whatever energy you have to focus on others and reach out to them.

Here are five observations about energy:

1. Connecting requires **initiative**—Go First. Most people recognize the value of initiative, and would readily admit that taking initiative is important in relationships, but still don't do it. They wait for the other person to make the first move.
2. Connecting requires **clarity**—Prepare. Develop yourself into the best you can be. Find out who the people are you will be speaking to, and what their issues and concerns are.
3. Connecting requires **patience**—Slow down. Moving at the speed of another person can be exhausting. It obviously takes energy to keep up with someone who is moving faster than we are. But it's also tiring to move at a slower pace than we want to.
4. Connecting requires **selflessness**—Give. In life there are people who give and people who take. Everyone prefers to be around givers. Being a giver can take a lot of energy, but it's usually win-win. It energizes you while it helps others.
5. Connecting requires **stamina**—Recharge. Connecting can be draining. If we aren't careful we can be completely depleted of energy! Find out what energizes you, and take time for it. Then you will have reserves to draw on when needed.

No audience arrives at an event expecting to provide energy to the speaker. People come expecting to receive, not to give. If you are the speaker, keep that in mind. Confidence, passion, and positivity all bring energy. The more energy you bring, the better your chances of connecting.

Chapter 5: Connecting is More Skill than Natural Talent

Connecting is a skill that can be learned. You must learn to connect with others by making the most of whatever skills and experience you have. There are a handful of factors that great communicators draw on that cause people to listen to them.

First is relationships—who you know. One of the quickest ways to gain credibility is to borrow it from someone who already has it. Dr. Phil and Dr. Mehmet Oz both developed an audience after appearing on Oprah and getting her endorsement.

Second is insight—what you know. People will listen to someone who can communicate something of value, something that will really help them. If you have an area of expertise and share it generously with others, people will listen to you.

Third is success—what you have done. America has a success culture. People want to be successful and will seek out people who can help them become successful. If you are successful, people will want to listen to you.

Fourth is ability—what you can do. People who perform at a high level in their profession often have instant credibility with others. When they speak, others listen (even when they

are speaking about things that have nothing to do with their area of expertise). That's why athletes can make millions endorsing products.

Fifth is sacrifice—how you have lived. People all over the world respected Mother Teresa because of the life she lived—a life of sacrifice. If you have made sacrifices, suffered tragedy, or overcome painful obstacles, many people will relate to you. And if you have been able to remain positive yet humble in the midst of life's difficulties, others will admire you and be able to connect with you.

Part II—Connecting Practices

Chapter 6: Connectors Connect on Common Ground

If I had to pick a first rule of communication—the practice above all others that opens the door to connection with others—it would be to look for common ground. People who connect are always searching for common ground. They build upon agreement, not disagreement. Yet people often neglect to find it.

Sometimes people assume they already know what others know, feel, or want. Once you put someone within a box, it becomes more difficult to think of them as anything different. At that point you stop paying attention to them and miss clues that would otherwise help you to find common ground with them.

Other times people act in arrogance: "I don't need to know what others know, feel, or want." Arrogant people seldom meet others on common ground. They don't make the effort because they believe they shouldn't have to. In their estimation, they live on higher ground than others; they expect others to come to them.

Some people are just indifferent: "I don't care to know what others know, feel, or want." Indifference is really a form of selfishness. Communicators who are indifferent are focused on themselves instead of finding the best way to relate to others.

A fourth issue is control: "I don't want others to know what I know, feel, or want." Some leaders feel that by keeping others in the dark they maintain a measure of control. Good leaders keep people informed and even include them in decision-making whenever possible. You can't establish common ground if you refuse to let people know you.

There are some simple ways you can increase your ability to connect with others. Choose to spend time with others, and learn to listen to people. That shows your interest. And if you really want to show interest, ask questions. It is the surest way to keep a conversation lively, as well as to get to know the other person.

If you aren't especially outgoing or have a difficult time asking questions, here is a trick for you. Remember the word FORM, which stands for family, occupation, recreation, and

message. When you ask questions centered on these topics it is amazing how much you can learn about a person.

Roger Ailes, a former communication consultant to presidents, believes the most influential factor in public speaking is likability. He says that if people like you, they will listen to you, and if they don't, they won't. So how does a person become likable? By *caring* about others. People like people who care about them. When others know you care, they'll listen.

Humility is another quality that makes you likable. If you want to impact people, don't talk about your successes; talk about your failings. Admit your weaknesses, and be patient with other's weaknesses. Point the spotlight at others rather than yourself. Do that with people, and they will relate to you and listen to what you have to say.

A final way to find common ground is to move into other people's worlds. We must adapt to others and try to see things from their point of view. This willingness to see things from others' point of view is really the secret of finding common ground, and finding common ground is the secret of connecting. If you were to do only this and nothing else, your communication would improve immensely in every area of your life.

When I really want to get to know someone, I ask three questions:

1. What do you dream about?
2. What do you sing about?
3. What do you cry about?

If you know the answers to those questions, you will be able to find common ground with someone and connect with that person.

Chapter 7: Connectors Do the Difficult Work of Keeping It Simple

I think a lot of people believe that if you bombard people with a lot of complex information or big words, you are intelligent. While many of the issues we face in life are complex, as leaders and communicators, our job is to bring clarity to a subject. It doesn't take nearly as much skill to identify a problem as it does to find a good solution. The measure of a great teacher isn't what he knows; it's what the students know. Making things simple is a skill, and it's a necessary one if you want to connect with people when you communicate.

Keeping it simple is a simple concept. However, simple doesn't mean easy! Here are five guidelines for keeping it simple:

Talk to people, not above them. A preschool-aged boy was eating an apple and asked his dad why it was turning brown. The father explained, "Because after you ate the skin off, the meat of the apple came in contact with the air, causing it to oxidize, thus changing its molecular structure and turning it a different color." After a long pause, the boy asked, "Daddy, are

talking to me?" A lot of people feel that way when a speaker doesn't make the effort to make their ideas clear and simple.

Get to the Point. All good communicators get to the point before their listeners start asking "What's the point?" To do that, you must start out already knowing what the point is. I ask myself two key questions to help me identify the point: "What do I want them to know?" and "What do I want them to do?" If I have clear answers to those two questions, then I know I'm on track.

Say it Over and Over and Over and Over Again. Good teachers know that the fundamental law of learning is repetition. I once heard that people need to hear something sixteen times before they really believe it. If you want to be an effective communicator, you have to be willing to keep emphasizing a point.

Say it Clearly. People are not persuaded by what we say; they are persuaded by what they understand. When you speak clearly and simply, more people can understand what you are trying to communicate. Being simple as a communicator isn't a weakness; it's a strength!

Say Less. Don't fall in love with the sound of your own voice. I've discovered that when I speak for less time and do so more succinctly, people remember it better and longer. You will undo all the good you've done if you drag it out in order to get in just one more point.

It may seem counterintuitive, but if you want to take your communication to the next level and connect with people, don't try to impress them with your intellect or overpower them with too much information. Give them clarity and simplicity. People will relate to you, you will connect, and they'll want to invite you back to communicate with them again.

Chapter 8: Connectors Create An Experience Everyone Enjoys

What words would you choose to describe the best communicators who have connected well with you? Entertaining? Energetic? Funny? I'm pretty sure it wouldn't be *boring*. Being boring and connecting do not go together.

Over the years I've learned a few things about how to be interesting and to make communication an experience everyone enjoys. I believe *everyone* can improve their ability to create an experience that others enjoy. Try to do as many of these seven things as possible:

Take Responsibility for Your Listeners. Some speakers blame their audiences if they don't respond favorably to their speeches. In general, there are no bad audiences; only bad speakers. Your first responsibility as a speaker is to gain and keep the audiences attention. Great communicators take responsibility for other's responses to them, even in tough settings under difficult conditions.

Communicate in Their World. Too often speakers are unwilling or unable to get out of their own world and say things from the perspective of their listeners. Not only does that make it unlikely that a connection will develop; it actually creates distance between speaker and listener. People don't remember what we think is important; they remember what they think is important. Anything you can do to relate to your listeners and meet them on *their* terms is going to help you connect.

Capture People's Attention From The Start. When speaking, I don't have much time before people either tune in or turn off. And if they turn off, it is very hard to win them back—if I can at all. So I try very hard to start well. Using humor works well. I also will try to create a sense of anticipation. I'll often say something like "You are about to learn something," and then ask them to say that to the person next to them. It engages people and often increases the energy in the room.

Say It So It Sticks. All great communicators have one thing in common: they say things in a way that people remember. Be original (there is a direct correlation between predictability and lack of impact). Use humor. Use a shocking statement or statistic.

Be Visual. Most people learn visually. What people see has become increasingly important. Use visuals when you can. I also use words to try to stimulate the imagination of my listeners. I want to encourage them to create their own visuals.

Tell Stories. Perhaps the most effective way to capture people's interest and make the experience enjoyable when you talk is to include stories. Cold facts rarely connect with people. But good stories have an incredible impact and can help even the weakest communicator improve their ability to connect.

The bottom line when it comes to holding people's interest and connecting with others is that you should try to be the kind of communicator *you* would like to hear.

Chapter 9: Connectors Inspire People

When someone begins to communicate with others, the first thing people do is start asking questions at a subconscious level. They want to know what's in it for them. They want to know if the speaker is credible. Watching effective communicators inspire people, I've come to the conclusion that there is a kind of formula, which I call the Inspiration Equation:

What they know + What they see + What they feel = Inspiration

When these three factors come into play and a communicator is able to bring them into alignment, it creates a synergy that inspires people.

What People Need to Know. When non-connecting speakers think about what their listeners need to know, they focus on information. That's not what I'm talking about here. In the context of connecting, people need to know *you're on their side*.

People need to know that you understand them and are focused on them. That makes a lasting impression. Take time to think about what they are thinking; listen to what they are saying; watch what they are doing. It will help you understand them.

People also need to know you have high expectations of them. People will live up to (or down to) what you expect of them. When I communicate with people, I mentally put a "10" on their head. By that I mean that I see everyone as having the potential to be a "10" on a scale of 1 to 10. People respond positively to those who believe in them and call them to be their best and give their best.

What People Need To See. People will decide quickly if they are going to listen to you. There are a few things people need to see:

People need to see your conviction. You can't fake conviction! Connectors who inspire others possess a conviction that far outweighs their words.

People also need to see evidence of your character. In the end, people want to be able to trust the person communicating with them. If your life is consistent with your words, people will note that, and you will have credibility with them.

What People Need To Feel. The most important factor in the Inspiration Equation is what people feel. If you leave that part out and you don't help people feel what they need to feel, they will never be inspired. People will not always remember what you said or what you did, but they will always remember how you made them feel.

People need to feel your passion for the subject and for them. Passion motivates people. It helps them to say yes to the question, "Will it be worth it?" But passion alone isn't enough. People must also feel your confidence, because confidence is what inspires them to say yes to the question, "Can I do it?" Inspiration comes to people when they can readily answer yes to both of these questions.

When a communicator puts these three things together, the result is inspiration. Unfortunately, some people stop there. They encourage people, make them feel good, help them to feel confident, but then they never lead them to action. It's not enough to help someone feel good. They need to act. Action changes lives. If you really want to help others, you need to take your communication to the next level, which is to call people to action.

If you want to move people to action, you need to give them an action plan. Give them specific steps to take. I usually encourage people to take action on a step within the next 24

hours, and to share what they have learned with another person. Seems simple, but if applied, it can be life changing.

Chapter 10: Connectors Live What They Communicate

Usually when someone new steps into a leadership position, the people impacted have hope. They want their leader to do well. And if the leader has good communication skills and is able to connect, then people listen, believe, and follow. But this honeymoon doesn't last long.

After the first six months, the focus shifts to credibility. When a person is credible, the longer the time, the better it gets. When someone lacks credibility, the longer the time, the worse it gets. As time goes by, the way people live outweighs the words they use. If they live well, time is their friend.

Credibility is all about trust. Trust plays the same role in all relationships, and it always impacts communication. To be an effective connector over the long haul, you have to establish credibility by living what you communicate. If you don't, you undermine trust, people disconnect from you, and they stop listening. The bottom line is that the effectiveness of the communication relies more on the character of the messenger than on the content of the message. There are a few important things we can do to help us live what we communicate.

Connect With Yourself. The relationships we have with others are largely determined by the relationship we have with ourselves. The first step toward connecting with ourselves is knowing ourselves, and that comes from self-assessment. We need to become self-aware. After that comes liking ourselves, which is a result of our self-talk. If you are constantly saying negative things about yourself internally, you won't be confident with others.

Right Your Wrongs. Everybody makes mistakes, but it doesn't have to cost you your credibility. You can maintain your integrity by acknowledging your mistakes, apologizing, and making amends where appropriate.

Be Accountable. Many of the presidents who are rated highest by historians have one thing in common: they were seen to have delivered on their promises. One of the best compliments you can give to another person is to say, "I can count on you." When you make a commitment, you create hope. When you keep a commitment, you create trust. We especially need accountability in the areas we are weakest.

Lead The Way You Live. People who live their message, who lead the way they live, who have integrity between words and action, are different from others who don't. They are connectors because of how they live. For some communicators, *content* is the most important issue. For connectors, *credibility* is most important. If you aren't willing to try to live something, you probably shouldn't try to communicate it. That doesn't mean being perfect, but it does mean working at it.

Be Vulnerable. When you are honest with people, it makes you vulnerable. Many people find that to be very uncomfortable, but authenticity and vulnerability lead to connection. Some leaders think they shouldn't show weakness; they don't realize that their people already know their weaknesses. Admitting them just lets them know that you are aware of them also.

Deliver Results. I am amazed by the number of speakers, consultants, and coaches in the marketplace today. Some are fantastic, but others have very little credibility. Why? Because they've never actually accomplished anything themselves. They've studied success, leadership, or communication, but they've never been on the front lines of building an organization or developing a product or service. If you really want to connect with people, then deliver results before you deliver a message. Communicate from experience.

To be successful in the long run, you need to do more than connect. You need to keep connecting, and you can do that only when you live what you communicate. When you do, the results can be fantastic, and the more time goes by, the better the relationship gets.



From the Pastor's Perspective

*A*s usual, John Maxwell fills his book with helpful information. I think he is 100% correct in making a distinction between connecting and communicating. Learning to connect with individuals, small groups and larger audiences can take anyone's ministry to a whole different level.

There were three primary "take-aways" for me from this book.

The first take-away for me relates to the topic of energy. Maxwell explains how connecting requires energy. I especially appreciated the distinction he made between “taking” and “giving” even when speaking publicly. Maxwell says it this way:

No audience arrives at an event expecting to provide energy to the speaker. People come expecting to receive, not to give. If you are the speaker, keep that in mind. Confidence, passion, and positivity all bring energy. The more energy you bring, the better your chances of connecting.

I decided to experiment with that this past week at church. I very intentionally approached the teaching time with a mindset of “giving.”

I don’t think I am generally a “taker” but I decided to be very intentional about my approach this week. The difference was noticeable. I didn’t change the content of my talk at all, but the energy in the room was clearly higher.

I did the same thing several times in different settings throughout the week as I talked with different individuals. Again, the difference was noticeable. The only change was being intentional about trying to “give energy away.” It’s a conscious mindset we can adopt that makes a difference. I encourage you to give it a try.

The second take-away for me is related to the first: “It’s about them, not about me.” It’s very easy to let it be about me—how am I doing? Was it a good teaching? How did you like the service (because it reflects on me)? Making it about others—how can I get to know them better? How can I encourage, bless, or add value to them? What do they need or want? I think that is somewhat natural for most leaders or pastors, but bringing it to the forefront of my mind helped me be more intentional about it. I definitely connected more easily with more people.

The last take-away for me related to common ground. Maxwell says *“If I had to pick a first rule of communication—the practice above all others that opens the door to connection with others—it would be to look for common ground. People who connect are always searching for common ground.”*

His acronym FORM, for family, occupation, recreation, and message is helpful. Those are areas we can ask questions about as we seek to find common ground with people. I will be sharing it with our leaders, greeters and Welcome Team. Taking that extra step to find out a little bit more about someone, to express a little more interest, goes a long way towards making them feel welcomed and valued. If we want our churches to be welcoming places, we shouldn’t take it for granted. Using FORM is a simple way to equip people to express the culture we want to have.