Everyone Communicates, Few Connect
What the Most Effective People Do Differently

by John C. Maxwell

Connecting with Others
THE MISSING LINK TO GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS

QUICK OVERVIEW

John C. Maxwell’s latest book, Everyone Communicates, Few Connect, gives a solid framework to help you get your message across better than ever before. Filled with plenty of humorous anecdotes, and a candor that removes him from a pedestal and places him squarely in your corner, Everyone Communicates gives clear instructions to help you engage, inspire and motivate your audience.

The book is written so that a novice to communication can grasp it, but is filled with nuggets professional speakers will benefit from hearing. As usual, Maxwell delivers a page turner that will make you laugh out loud, all while providing the gold standard in communication and leadership.

APPLY AND ACHIEVE

John C. Maxwell is the first to admit that his success as a speaker wasn’t 100 percent intuitive. And that statement demonstrates one of his keys to connecting with an audience: Admit your failures and weaknesses.

Maxwell firmly believes that most who strongly desire to can develop the ability to connect with others, whether one on one, in a small group or speaking to a larger audience.

In Chapter 5, Maxwell allows his associate to take the reins and offer tips he has observed from Maxwell’s communication style. You can apply and achieve success by doing these five things Charlie Wetzel observed Maxwell doing:

1. Show confidence
2. Exhibit authenticity
3. Prepare thoroughly
4. Use humor
5. Focus on others

If you want to have better relationships, if you want to achieve personal success, or if you want to become a better leader, make connecting your goal by doing these five things.

SUCCESS Points

In this book, Maxwell shares tips on how to:

- Connect visually
- Connect intellectually
- Connect emotionally
- Connect through preparation

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am convinced that I can help you to learn how to connect with other people. That’s the reason I wrote *Everyone Communicates, Few Connect*. In the first part of the book, I’ll teach you the five principles that are foundational for understanding how to connect with people. In the second part, you’ll learn five practices that anyone can do to connect with others—regardless of age, experience or natural ability. Learning to connect with people can change your life.

Ready? Let’s get started.

**PART 1: CONNECTING PRINCIPLES**

**Connecting Increases Your Influence in Every Situation**

People are people. And wherever you find them, they desire to connect with others!

If you are facing connecting challenges, as I was early in my life and career, you can overcome them with connecting choices. You can develop the communication advantage by learning to connect with every kind of person in any kind of situation.

And I can help you. Because I have learned to connect with others, and because I have helped many others to learn how to connect, I feel certain I can also help you. My desire is first to help you learn the principles behind connecting with others, by…

- Focusing on others
- Expanding your connecting vocabulary beyond just words
- Marshalling your energy for connecting
- Gaining insight in how great connectors connect

And I’ll help you acquire the practical skills of connection:

- Finding common ground
- Making your communication simple
- Capturing people’s interest
- Inspiring them
- Being authentic

These are things anyone can learn to do.

I believe that almost everything we become and all that we accomplish in life are the results of our interaction with others. If you also believe that to be true, then you know that the ability to connect with others is one of the most important skills a person can learn. It’s something you can begin to improve starting today. This book will help you do it.

**Connecting Is All About Others**

I admit that when I began my career as a minister, I didn’t understand that connecting is all about others. When I spoke to an audience, I was focused on myself and not them. I lived for positive feedback. And my goal was always to be impressive. I even wore glasses to make me look more intellectual. When I think about it now, I shudder in embarrassment.

**My Light Bulb Moment**

Then something happened that changed my attitude. When I was 29 years old, my dad invited my brother-in-law, Steve Throckmorton, and me to attend a Success Seminar. There, I heard a speaker who understood how to connect with people. I sat there mesmerized.

At the time, I remember thinking, *This is someone who understands success. I like him. But there’s more to it than that—he really understands me. He knows what I believe. He understands what I’m thinking. He knows what I feel. He can help me. I would love to be his friend. I already feel like he’s my friend.*

That speaker was Zig Ziglar. His way of connecting with an audience totally changed my thinking about communication. He told stories. He made me laugh. He made me cry. He made me believe in myself. And he shared insights and tips I could take away from the event and apply personally.

That day I also heard him 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.

Deep down, most of us want to feel important. But we need to fight against our naturally selfish attitude, and believe me, that can be a lifelong battle. But it’s an important one. Why? Because only mature people who are focused on others are capable of truly connecting with others.

**Connecting Always Requires Energy**

If you can carve out moments to do what energizes you, then you will always have reserves of energy you can draw upon when you want to connect with others.
Connecting with others is like anything else in life: You have to be intentional about it. Many people get lazy when it comes to connecting one on one. They take for granted that people will listen to them. But that’s doing a disservice to others, especially the people who are closest to you, such as your friends and family.

Avoid that pitfall. The next time you try to connect with someone one on one, gear up for it mentally and emotionally, just as you would for an audience. If you bring intentional energy to the conversation, you make it much easier for people to connect with you.

If you’re looking for ways to increase the energy one on one, then do what Margaret and I have done with each other for many years:

• Write on a piece of paper the significant things that happen to you during the day.
• For important things, tell no one else before sharing it with this specific person.
• Take time each day to go over your lists with each other, which requires intentionality and energy.

The next time you communicate to a group, don’t allow yourself to become complacent. Bring energy to the process and then continue bringing it—even if the energy in the room is good.

No audience arrives at an event expecting to provide energy to the speaker. People come to shows, conferences, workshops and events expecting to receive, not give. If you are the speaker, you must always keep that in mind.

Think about ways you can increase your energy when speaking to an audience. For example, confidence, which comes from preparation, brings energy. Positivity, which comes from believing in people, brings energy. The more energy you bring to the process, and the better you are at conveying energy to your audience, the better your chances of connecting with them.

**CONNECTING IS MORE SKILL THAN NATURAL TALENT**

**What Makes People Listen?**

If you want to be a better communicator or a better leader, you can’t depend on dumb luck. You must learn to connect with others by making the most of whatever skills and experience you have. When I listen to great communicators, I notice that there are a handful of factors they seem to draw upon that cause people to listen to them.

**Relationships—Who You Know**

One of the quickest ways to gain credibility with an individual, a group or an audience is to borrow it from someone who already has credibility with them. It’s the basis of celebrity endorsements, sales referrals and word-of-mouth advertising. Who you know can open the door for you to connect with someone. Of course, once the door is open, you still have to deliver!

**Insight—What You Know**

Most people want to improve their situation in life. When they find someone who can communicate something of value, they will usually listen.

If you have an area of expertise and generously share it with others, you give people reasons to respect you and develop a sense of connection with you.

**Success—What You Have Done**

America has a success culture. People want to be successful, and they seek out others who have accomplished something to get their advice. If you are successful in anything you do, there will be people who want to listen to you. I think many people assume that if someone can succeed in an area, they possess knowledge that may be valuable to them in their own endeavors.

**Ability—What You Can Do**

Individuals who perform at a high level in their profession often have instant credibility with others. People admire them, they want to be like them, and they feel connected to them.

Excellence connects. If you possess a high level of ability in an area, others may desire to connect with you because of it.

**Sacrifice—How You Have Lived**

I think our hearts naturally go out to people who have sacrificed or suffered. 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.

These five connection factors are just the beginning. Play to your strengths, develop your own style and cultivate whatever skills you can in order to connect with people.

**PART 2: CONNECTING PRACTICES**

**Connectors Connect on Common Ground**

If I had to pick a first rule of communication—the practice
Connecting with People at All Levels

Connecting One on One
How do you connect with people one on one? By making them feel valued. How do you do that?
• Know what they value by being a good listener when you are with them.
• Find out why they value those things by asking questions.
• Share your own values that are similar to theirs.
• Build your relationship on those common values. In that way, value is added to both of you.

Connecting in a Group
The key to making others feel valued in a group or on a team is to invite participation. The smartest person in the room is never as smart as all the people in the room. Input creates synergy, buy-in and connection.

To connect with people in a group setting...
• Discover and identify the strength of each person.
• Acknowledge the value of each person’s strength and potential contribution.
• Invite input and allow people to lead in their area of strength.

Connecting with an Audience
One of the reasons speakers fail to connect is that they give the impression that they and their communication are more important than their audience. That kind of attitude can create a barrier between a speaker and an audience. Instead, show your audience members that they are important to you by doing the following:
• Express your appreciation for them and the occasion as soon as you can.
• Do something special for them if you can, such as preparing unique content for them and letting them know that you have done so.
• See everyone in the audience as a “10,” expecting a great response from them.
• As you finish speaking, tell them how much you enjoyed them.

above all others that opens the door to connection with others—it would be to look for common ground.

Each of us creates a framework for the way we process information. Terry Felber, author of Am I Making Myself Clear?, says that people have different representational systems based on the five senses, which provide the primary basis for their thoughts and feelings. “If you can learn to pinpoint how those around you experience the world, and really try to experience the same world they do, you’ll be amazed at how effective your communication will become.” That’s simply another way to look for common ground.

Cultivating a Common Ground Mindset
Not everyone starts out with the same ability to connect, but I believe that anyone can learn to connect better because connecting is a choice. It is a mindset that can be learned. If you want to increase your odds of connecting with others, then make the following choices every day of your life:

Availability—“I will choose to spend time with others.”
Listening—“I will listen my way to common ground.”
Questions—“I will be interested enough in others to ask questions.”
Thoughtfulness—“I will think of others and look for ways to thank them.”
Openness—“I will let people into my life.”
Likeability—“I will care about people.”
Humility—“I will think of myself less so I can think of others more.”
Adaptability—“I will move from my world to theirs.”

Connectors Do the Difficult Work of Keeping It Simple
I think everyone can agree that many of the issues we face in life can be complex. A professor may legitimately argue that his or her area of expertise is complicated. I won’t contest that. But as leaders and communicators, our job is to bring clarity to a subject, not complexity. 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 his students know. Making things simple is a skill, and it’s a necessary one if you want to connect with people when you communicate.

There’s not a lot to say about keeping things simple. It’s truly a simple concept. However, it’s not always easy to do, is it? Here are five guidelines:
1. Talk to People, Not Above Them  
2. Get to the Point  
3. Say It Over and Over and Over and Over Again  
4. Say It Clearly  
5. Say Less  

In the end, people are persuaded, not by what we say, but what they understand. When you speak clearly and simply, more people can understand what you’re trying to communicate.

Connectors Create an Experience Everyone Enjoys  
How to Be Interesting  

After giving thousands of speeches and communicating for decades, I have learned some things about how to be interesting to others and make communication an experience everyone enjoys. Try to do as many of these seven things as possible:  

1. Take Responsibility for Your Listeners  
Great communicators take responsibility for others’ responses to them, even in tough settings under difficult conditions.  

Almost everyone has heard the expression, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.” That may be true. But it’s also true that you can feed a horse salt and make him thirsty. In other words, you can work to keep your listeners engaged.  

When I am speaking to people, I feel it is my responsibility to make it an enjoyable learning experience. How can I capture their attention? What is necessary to make this speech memorable? How can I capture their attention and keep them with me to the very end?  

2. Communicate in Their World  
Talk at me and you’ll talk alone.  
Talk to me and I’ll listen.  
Talk about me and I’ll listen for hours.  
Anything you can do to relate to your listeners and meet them on their terms is going to help you connect—as long as you maintain authenticity. You can’t pretend to be someone you’re not. You have to be yourself while speaking someone else’s language.

3. Capture People’s Attention from the Start  
Start with a comment about the situation or setting.  
Introduce yourself.  
Relax.  
Begin with humor.  
Create a sense of anticipation.

4. Activate Your Audience  
Ask questions.  
Get people moving.  
Ask people to interact.

5. Say It So It Sticks  
Link what you say with what people need.  
Find a way to be original.  
Use humor.  
Use a shocking statement or statistic.  
Say things in an interesting way.  
Learn to pause for emphasis.

6. Be Visual  
I also use words to try to stimulate the imagination of my listeners. I want to encourage them to paint vivid pictures in their minds. When people begin to create their own visuals, they engage, and they stayed interested.

7. Tell Stories  
Cold facts rarely connect with people. But good stories have an incredible impact and can help even the weakest communicator improve and begin to connect with people. When we share stories, we help people understand us, themselves and their world.

Connectors Inspire People  

As I have watched effective communicators inspire people, I have come to the conclusion that there is a kind of formula, which I call the Inspiration Equation, that comes into play. It works like this:

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. And from that place of inspiration, you can often lead people to take action.  

Interestingly, according to some scholars, there hasn’t always been such a divide between understanding and action. One linguist says that in up to 20 primitive languages, the words for “hearing” and “doing” are the same word. Only in our modern context have we divided them.

As communicators, we need to bring those two ideas back together for our listeners. And that requires a commitment to continually connect with others, inspiring them and encouraging them to take action.
CONNECTORS LIVE WHAT THEY COMMUNICATE

To connect with people, you must have credibility. But how much credibility can you maintain when you make mistakes? That depends on how you respond. Failure to admit mistakes causes the message to be questioned, which causes the integrity of the leader to be questioned!

Everybody makes mistakes. I’ve made mistakes as a leader, communicator, husband and parent. To be human is to mess up; to connect, you must fess up. That’s how you maintain your integrity and regain your credibility. You must be willing to acknowledge your mistakes, apologize and make amends.

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, in part, because of how they live. Where some people see a message as a lesson to be given, connectors look at a message as a life to be lived. Where some offer a message that is an exception of how they live, connectors communicate messages that are extensions of how they live. For some communicators, content is the most important issue. For connectors, credibility is the most important issue.

CONCLUSION

Start Connecting Today!

What can you do with the talent you have? Whatever is in you can be put to better use if you learn to connect with people. You can learn to increase your influence in every situation because connecting is more skill than natural talent. And you can learn to do it. So start taking steps. Embrace the connecting principles. Start using the connecting practices. And do something positive in your corner of the world.

Recommended Reading

If you enjoyed this summary of Everyone Communicates, Few Connect, please visit your favorite bookseller to purchase a copy for your library. You may also want to check out:

Developing the Leader Within You by John C. Maxwell
Above All Else by Chris Widener
Life Is a Series of Presentations by Tony Jeary

About the Author

John C. Maxwell is an author who speaks from experience. In writing Everyone Communicates, Few Connect, he posted the contents of the as-yet-unpublished manuscript on his blog, asking readers for feedback. His connection with his readers was apparent in the more than 100,000 responses he received.

Many of his books are considered leadership classics, and he has become one of today’s prominent leadership experts. As such, he frequently speaks to Fortune 500 companies as well as international government leaders.

Maxwell has written more than 30 books; has been a New York Times, Wall Street Journal and BusinessWeek best-selling author; and three of his books have sold more than a million copies each. Still, Maxwell considers himself first and foremost a speaker—and a cornerstone of his success is his ability to connect with his audience.