The 11 Laws of Likability
Relationship Networking…
Because People Do Business with People They Like
by Michelle Tillis Lederman

Are You Likable?
How to Increase Your Attraction Factor

QUICK OVERVIEW
Schmoozing—the word, just like the actions behind it, seems phony. Sure, you want people to like you, but does getting people to like you require putting on a mask and pretending to be something you’re not? Does it require schmoozing? Absolutely not, says author Michelle Tillis Lederman. In The 11 Laws of Likability, Lederman explains you have a much better chance of connecting with others if your actions, thoughts and words are authentic to you.

Ultimately, Lederman’s book is about networking—connecting with others in a meaningful way. But to attain that goal, she challenges readers to first examine their behaviors and attitudes. Once you get your mindset in check, she shows you how to engage people in conversations and eventually establish long-term relationships. The 11 laws—authenticity, self-image, perception, energy, curiosity, listening, similarity, mood memory, familiarity, giving and patience—work together to create an effective, natural system for creating and maintaining relationships. This summary focuses on four of the 11 laws: authenticity, self-image, energy and familiarity.

With practical applications and real-life stories that make these laws tangible, this book is engaging and extremely helpful. If you ever feel like you’re forcing conversations or missing out on networking opportunities, you’ll appreciate the tools you’ll find in The 11 Laws of Likability.

APPLY AND ACHIEVE
Authenticity is a must-have trait in today’s transparent society. But Lederman cautions that being authentic can be difficult if you’re dealing with people you don’t particularly like. “Our gut reaction may be to try hiding our true feelings, while in our minds we fume about how irritating the person in question is,” she writes. “The problem, of course, is that these attempts to hide our true feelings require us to be fake, and more often than not, such behaviors are completely transparent.”

So, what’s the alternative to plastering on a smile and gritting your teeth? Instead of focusing on the characteristic you dislike about the person, find the good. Lederman asks the following questions to help you gain a new perspective:

SUCCESS Points
In this book you’ll learn:

- You don’t have to be an extrovert to be a great networker
- How to approach new people and start conversations
- To what extent your perception shapes your reality
- How your energy affects the people around you
- How to continue the conversation after the networking event
• Can you find compassion and understanding for the person whose strengths might be your own weaknesses?
• Can you find compassion and understanding for the person who reflects things back to you about yourself that you’d rather not face?
• Just as important, in either situation, can you find compassion and understanding for yourself?

“With unbiased eyes, look at the person who’s under your skin and find something that you can admire or appreciate,” Lederman suggests. Doing so will empower you to interact with that individual from an authentic place.

Many networking experts urge people to be strategic and deliberate to a fault, focusing on how to work a room and get in front of key people. The act of meeting people and seeking connections begins to feel like a dreaded chore, and when it feels like something you have to do rather than want to do, it’s hard to motivate yourself to do it at all, let alone do it well.

Contrary to what many networking experts counsel (and what I, too, used to believe), every interaction does not need to have an intent or a specific objective. We do not need to focus with laserlike precision on what our takeaway from a conversation will be, because building relationships is not about transactions—it’s about connections. It is about creating opportunities for honest and authentic interactions, and making them advantageous for all parties involved. It’s about liking and being liked.

Tapping into likability doesn’t mean making everything all perky and bright and constantly being happy. In some ways it’s just the opposite. Harnessing likability is about uncovering what is authentically likable—in you, in the other person, in your connection. It is through the strength of what is genuine that meaningful connections build into relationships. The term networking is simply another way to think about how to start a relationship. Our relationships are our network. Whether they stem from business or personal situations, our relationships are what support us, connect us, and allow us to progress in all aspects of our lives.

To fully engage the power of likability, we need to understand what it is and how it works: We are all, obviously, different, and that’s a fact to be celebrated and embraced. What makes each of us likable is distinct to us. But the basic drivers of likability are the same for us all. I call them the 11 laws of likability.

This new likability-based paradigm for networking and building relationships minimizes moments of inauthenticity and missed opportunities. Instead, I’ll show you how to uncover what is inherently likable about yourself, and how to share those qualities with the people you meet to create relationships that are honest and real, and that lead to win-win situations for everyone involved. By approaching your interactions through the lens of likability, you can expect to be happier, more comfortable, and more successful in establishing meaningful relationships.

**THE LAW OF AUTHENTICITY**

What does it mean to be authentic? The particulars are different for each of us, of course, because we all have different attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, skill sets, knowledge, goals, and values. In a general sense, though, authenticity is the same for everyone: It is about being your true self. This is the *law of authenticity*: The real you is the best you.

What is it that goes through our minds when we are not being ourselves? Over the years I have asked many people this question and the most frequent answers are:

• I don’t like this situation, but I’m trying to be polite about it.
• I don’t like this person, but I’m trying to act in an appropriate way.
• I need to act more like a successful person does.
• If people don’t respond positively to me, at least I’ll have an excuse if I don’t act like myself.
• I am uncomfortable and don’t know what to do about it.

And what is consistent about all these responses? They either represent things we feel we should do or a general fear of feeling vulnerable. We put on a false face when, for whatever reasons, we dread a situation or feel we are not up to it.

Authenticity is the keystone to likability. The real you is the best you, and it’s the most powerful tool for forming real connections.

To start identifying, in an explicit way, what it means to be your authentic self, pay attention to how you feel at the beginning of a new interaction and how you feel at the end of it. Whatever your internal responses to a situation, analyze what they were and why you had them. Your answers should reveal information about the kinds of experiences that prompt you to shy away from representing your true self, and those in which you feel effortlessly authentic. Use these perceptions about what feels naturally right and true as your “home base” knowledge,
The 11 Laws of Likability

returning to it when you need to reconnect with what authenticity means for you.

THE LAW OF SELF-IMAGE

To make meaningful connections in an authentic way, you have to project the best parts of your true self. In other words, before you expect others to like you, you have to like you—that is the law of self-image.

Many of us are aware of our basic strengths, and can often exude confidence in a variety of situations, but even the most self-assured among us have our moments of self-doubt. The trick is learning how to work through them. One top executive I know confided to me that it took him years to feel as if he was really worthy of playing with “the big dogs.” He recounted how, as he rose up the corporate ladder, he would often find himself sitting in a meeting, looking around and thinking, “Wow, my colleagues are really on top of their game. Can I hold my own with them?” Each time, he took these moments of self-doubt as a challenge to reassess his value and worth and strengthen his self-image by reconnecting with what he knew he could contribute to his workplace, not what he couldn’t. Over time he trained himself to embody this awareness of his assets. His career thrived apace with his positive self-image.

Most of us are much harder on ourselves than we are on other people. We would agree that it is not right to be mean or petty or judgmental toward other people, so why is it okay when we do that to ourselves?

Perception is reality, and self-image is self-perception. When we don’t follow up with potential clients because we assume that they have better offers or won’t switch to another business provider, when we don’t pursue a new position because we assume that there are stronger candidates, we are affirming our negative assumptions as our reality.

When you find yourself having self-doubting or self-sabotaging thoughts, you need to ask yourself, “Do I want to be right about this? Right about not landing the client or not getting the job?” If your answer is “No,” then you need to change your reality.

One way to change your reality is to “fake it till you make it real.” At first glance, “Fake it till you make it” seems to counsel inauthenticity, but that’s not the true point of the saying, which is why I like to clear up the confusion by using, “Fake it till you make it real.” The purpose is to try on what it might look and feel like to perceive of ourselves in new ways, or to act differently than we’re accustomed to. By stretching out of our comfort zones—or as some would say, “faking it”—we can grow comfortable with these new modes of thought and action until they eventually become normal or “real” to us.

THE LAW OF ENERGY

Think about a recent situation that went well for you. If you had to describe your mood during that moment and your approach to the situation, what would you say? Whatever words you use, describe the vibe you were giving off and the energy you were putting out. Your description should encapsulate the feeling the other person or people were getting from you, perhaps even before you said a word.

Sometimes people might even sum up their natural energy and approach to life as a motto: “Never let them see you sweat,” or “You’re never fully dressed without a smile.” These are their words to live by, and they can encapsulate energy in a distilled, tangible way. Energy is derived from both your natural personality and your actual mood in a moment. You can feel your own energy in your body, your face, your stance, even in the way you are breathing. Other people pick up on these signals and on the words you choose in a given moment. Likewise, you pick up on the energy of others and respond to it in kind.

The real you is the best you, and it’s the most powerful tool for forming real connections.

The kind of energy we bring to a situation impacts the ways our interactions with the world unfold. Energy is contagious—that is the law of energy. Our own output of energy can energize other people or deflate them, contribute to productivity or add to the confusion. Energy affects the course of interactions and facilitates connections.

Your energy during an interaction will be picked up on by others and influence the outcome. What you give off is what you get back, so getting your energy to an optimal place before entering a situation can make all the difference. The key is to enable the energy that is going to best serve the situation. When we understand that energy is something we create, we
can work on driving that energy rather than having it drive us. In other words, know what energy is most useful to bring to a given situation or when dealing with a specific person, and get yourself to that optimal place so that you can better influence the outcome.

Do It, Reframe It, or Delete It

When you make the choices you want to make, not the ones you think you should make, you allow your authentic self to emerge. It’s not just about choosing the situations you want to partake in, but also about deciding how to respond to events once they are in motion.

There are four basic attitudes that we bring to each situation, and they can reaffirm what is authentic for us or help us readjust our approaches to let the authentic in.

Get To: This is how you think about the things that make you feel genuinely giddy, alert, and excited.

Want To: These are the things that you freely choose to do, even though choosing and achieving them is not always easy.

Have To: These are the things you dread, even though they must be done.

Should: These are the things that society, your company, or some other outside force think it would be good for you to do, and even though you may agree with those notions, the things in this category are not ones you want to do, but rather ones you feel obligated to do.

The Networking Application: Another Kind of Energy

Some people have a visceral negative response to the word networking. Others relish it, and some of us, well, our reaction depends on our energy at that moment and what we anticipate of the situation.

Use your energy knowledge of yourself to determine your networking. Under what circumstances does your best authentic energy come through? For instance, do you have the most natural positive energy during lunch or dinner situations, where you talk in a focused way with one or two people at your table? Or is your natural energy best at events such as cocktail receptions, where there is the opportunity to have brief interactions with many different people? Do you connect most positively with others at daytime events, or at those that happen after working hours?

Your Energy Knowledge of You

We all have an energy persona. This persona is driven by our natural personality and general outlook on life—how we tend to view and react to different situations. What do you already know about your own energy? And are you aware of how other people read it? Even when the energy we are transmitting is good, it is important to understand what it is, and to adjust it at times to achieve varying results. “Good” energy doesn’t necessarily mean “happy.”

Rather, it means whatever is productive and authentic for the situation and for you in that situation. For example, my friend Mary is a reporter by profession and naturally inquisitive, often asking lots of questions about what’s going on in her friends’ lives when they get together. But she noticed that frequently her friends didn’t ask questions of her in return. Her energy persona was one of natural, perhaps constant, curiosity, and it was apparent to her friends, but to build the friendships in a way that opened up avenues for more give-and-take, Mary had to consciously adjust her natural tendency to ask questions and insert her own experiences at the right moments. Sure, there were one or two friends who were too self-absorbed to pick up on Mary’s effort to adjust her energy, but most of her friends, whether consciously or not, noticed and began talking to Mary about what was going on in her own life.

Understanding our own energy lets us know when it’s working for us and when it’s working against us. Adjustments to that energy at critical times can alter the energy of a given situation, making it more productive and fulfilling for all involved, increasing likability and the opportunities for connections.
The energy persona is naturally boisterous and you find that you are often at the center of conversations in networking situations, you may want to show that you can also be a good listener. If you more naturally assume a thoughtful, measured approach, look for opportunities to display how you can drive conversations too. By expanding the limits of when and how we can emit our authentic energy, we increase our potential for making and building meaningful connections.

THE LAW OF FAMILIARITY

The laws of likability build on one another. After you have already fostered connections and initiated familiarity with someone during an interaction, you can continue to develop that familiarity when the encounter is over. Once you’ve met and decided that you like a person, and established a great mood memory, that’s precisely the time you want to stay in touch and sustain the conversation.

There are obvious instances where it’s clear that we can and should follow up. Even more critical, though, is to increase our frequency of reaching out. When we regularly extend ourselves, in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons, we allow connections to continue unfolding, which strengthens familiarity and likability. Each time you reach out to another person, employ language that fosters positive mood memory; even stating something as simple as “we” in your follow-up reinforces the connection.

Here is just a short list of some of the things I may learn about someone during a conversation and that could become part of my follow-up communication later:

- Upcoming work event, client meeting, training, conference, or workshop
- Alma mater or favorite sports team’s recent game or newsworthy event
- Upcoming vacation destination or staycation plans
- Battling an illness/aiding a sick parent, spouse, friend, or child
- New baby arrived or on the way; announcement of whether it’s a boy or a girl
- The person’s own birthday or child’s birthday; plans to attend or throw a birthday party

Don’t worry that the topic you settle on might be unrelated to your common interest, or even if it refers to a small detail that was part of a much larger conversation. Following up with a congratulatory message is a simple way to show other people that you were thinking of them, and it increases familiarity and the positive mood memory associated with your shared connection.

Get Out There

Hearing someone’s name mentioned again and again in positive contexts can build professional credibility and help establish comfortable rapport and ease. Creating familiarity doesn’t require scheduled meetings or planned conversations, either. It can be done without having actual face time or giving the impression that you are hounding someone. By simply following up on shared details and harnessing electronic resources, it is possible to steadily create familiarity and associate your name with appropriate ideas and events. Remember to pursue these strategies in ways that feel true and authentic to you, and that aren’t obtrusive or pushy. Don’t get in someone’s face, just be in their circle.

CONCLUSION

Likability is more than a nice idea, or a concept of which you should stay mindful—it is an approach to your life and the people in it. The point isn’t for you to like everyone and for everyone to like you. Instead, the point is to create meaningful connections that strengthen your relationships, your self-awareness, your productivity, and inevitably, your results. Apply the laws with openness and authenticity in mind, and you will become more connected.
ACTION STEPS
Get more out of this SUCCESS Book Summary by applying what you’ve learned to your life. Here are a few thoughts and questions to get you started.

1. Do an authenticity check. Are you speaking and acting in a way that is authentic, or are you trying to be someone or something you are not?

2. List five assets—personal qualities you possess.

3. Begin creating your desired reality by taking one positive action that requires you to step out of your comfort zone today.

4. Identify a recent situation during which you had a high level of positive energy. What about that circumstance influenced your energy?

5. Who brings your energy level down? Can you decrease the amount of time you spend with this person?

6. Make a list of five people you connected with in the past two weeks.

7. Send an email or make a call to each of the people on the list above before the end of the week.

About the Author
Michelle Tillis Lederman’s specialty is teaching people how to communicate and connect. She is an adjunct professor at NYU’s Stern School of Business and a faculty member of the American Management Association. She is also the founder and CEO of Executive Essentials, a company that provides communication and leadership programs.

Recommended Reading
If you enjoyed this summary of The 11 Laws of Likability, you may also want to check out:

- Love Is the Killer App by Tim Sanders
- People Buy You by Jeb Blount
- How to Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie