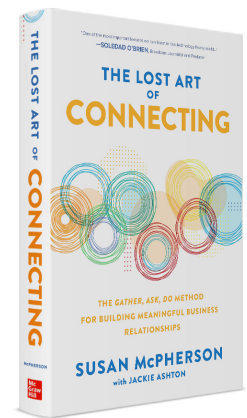


The Lost Art of Connecting

The *Gather, Ask, Do* Method for Building Meaningful Business Relationships

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Contents

Part I: Gather

Page 2

Invite to Get Invited

Page 3

Part II: Ask

Page 4

Pitch Perfect

Page 5

Communication 101

Page 6

Part III: Do

Page 7

Always Take (And Innovate On) the Meeting

Page 8

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Networking is often considered a necessary evil for working professionals. With social media platforms like LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, reaching potential investors or employers is much easier. Yet, these connections often feel transactional, agenda-driven, and dehumanizing, leaving professionals feeling burnt out and stressed out.

Instead, we should connect on a human level and build authentic relationships beyond securing a new job or a new investor for your next big idea—this is especially key as people head back to the workplace after a year of isolation. In *The Lost Art of Connecting*, “serial connector” and communications expert Susan McPherson offers a simple, three-step methodology to help people go back to basics, tap into our humanity, and learn to be more intentional and authentic.

With helpful tips and useful advice on making the most of every step, *The Lost Art of Connecting* is the handbook we all need to foster personal and professional relationships that blur the lines between work and play—and enrich our lives in every way.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The one simple question that defines true connection.
- Why you need to first connect with yourself to connect with others.
- Communication strategies to help you practice relationalism.
- To follow up in ways that deepen your business relationships.

Introduction

To build meaningful relationships you don't need to connect with the 8 billion people on this planet. In fact, you shouldn't.

Instead, let's use the illustration of a constellation. There are 250 billion stars in the galaxy. Not all of them align in just the right way to make that special sight that is the constellation. And like networking, you never know just how you are connected to another person until you put in the work to see the patterns.

Building meaningful relationships involves, first, defining what meaningful means to you; second, seeking others who not only share your values and your vision but also those who challenge you, expose your blind spots, and broaden the diversity and breadth of your network; and third, making those relationships deep and rewarding. That is the art of connecting.

Connecting comes down to one simple question: "How can I help?" Asking this question in any meeting, any introduction—any moment—immediately narrows your focus on how you can be of service and support to others. And isn't that what makes relationships feel meaningful?

Every single person is an introduction to something else: another person, a unique skill, a new project, or something you inevitably will learn about yourself. It should never be about, "What will I get from this person?" But instead, "What can I learn? What can I discover?" Or, "Who could I connect this person with?"

A New Approach to Building Meaningful Connections

There's a method for creating your personal network of stars, for creating magic in relationships by asking "How can I help?" It's called the Gather, Ask, Do method. This method will not only help you create your constellation, but it will give you the tools to help others create constellations, too—many of them. And that is perhaps the most rewarding aspect of this method: not only the deeply nourishing relationships that you will develop but also the ripple effect of connecting others.

In the Gather stage, you will learn how to better connect with yourself, defining your business values and goals, and determine how you can help and whom, and who would help you grow.

In the Ask phase, you will continue to ask "How can I help," as well as deepen your relationships by asking more and more questions, building the depth of your connections and curiosity.

In the Do phase, you will take action—immediately doing the helping in all the ways that you possibly can, building trust, competence, and depth of connections.

PART I: GATHER

In this section, you will learn how to gather the stars of your constellation by first examining your relationship with yourself and clarifying your goals. Then you will learn several tips and strategies to begin to expand your network of connections in ways that feel natural and inspiring and don't zap your energy.

'Help, I Don't Know Anyone!'

We've all been there: a networking event, the first day at a new job, or even just a big meeting. We walk into the room and—panic sets in—"I don't know these people!"

There are ever more ways to connect, but there are exactly as many ways to disconnect. Yet, with a simple mindset reboot, you can drastically improve your ability to build business relationships: Don't discount the possibilities in your current network. Start there and you will reap enormous rewards from what is right in front of you.

Connect with yourself. First and foremost, connect with yourself. Are you an extrovert who loves gatherings and people and derives energy from others? Or are you someone who prefers intimate gatherings and getting together less frequently? Knowing this about yourself is key to implementing the art of connecting in a sustainable way. When you stay intentional, you make the biggest impact—connecting and communicating with people without burnout or fatigue.

Start with who you know. Oftentimes in networking, we get pigeonholed into reaching out to specific people. But in reality, someone who is already in your immediate network might be able to introduce you to the correct person. One of the most powerful changes you can make right away to improve your business relationships is to change your mindset. Your existing network is your biggest asset—use it.

Clarify your goal. The next step is to clarify your goals. And here's where we start to zoom in on that "connect with

The best way to become a connector—to build a meaningful and robust network—is to take command and be the host.

yourself” mindset: What do you want to accomplish in your career and in your life? An important distinction: This is not the goal of your meeting or even necessarily the subject of your initial conversation. Right now, clarifying your business goals is for you to get clear in your objectives. (The goal of the meeting is to establish or deepen a long-term, reciprocal relationship—but more on that later.)

For now, what do you want to achieve: Are you looking for a new job or promotion? Launching a new business? Looking for a donor or funder? Whatever the case may be, make this very clear and write it down.

Invite to Get Invited

Traditional networking is typically motivated by the desire to acquire something: a business card, an invite, a job, a connection, a partner or client, or funding for your business. But not only is that approach ineffective; it will also leave you frustrated and exhausted.

Instead of throwing business cards at a roomful of people who will likely add them to their recycling bin, consider a simple paradigm shift. The best way to become a connector—to build a meaningful and robust network—is to take command and be the host. Rather than waiting for an invitation (or to “get” anything at all), *do the inviting yourself*.

FOMO Becomes JOMO

Hosting—rather than waiting to be invited—makes connecting easier in a key way. It completely transforms your inner monologue. When you’re doing the inviting, any anxiety, fear, or dread you might have about networking can dissolve. Instead of wondering “Will I be invited?” your thoughts can become “Who should I invite?”

Asking yourself that question immediately puts you into a position of power: You are in control. FOMO (fear of missing out) can transform into JOMO—joy of meeting others. Instead of being a follower, waiting for permission, you become a leader: hosting, connecting, and building relationships, one gathering or call at a time.

Define the purpose of your gathering. Many people skip over this important step. But if you haven’t set an intention or a goal, what’s the point of getting together in the first place? Are you trying to raise awareness? Are you trying to educate people? Are you trying to fundraise for a cause?

Host rather than wait to be invited. Now it’s time to decide how and with whom to do it. It doesn’t need to be a fancy gathering, and it doesn’t need to be a three-hour event. It doesn’t have to be a big group of people. It could be a 20-minute call with a few neighbors to brainstorm ways to reduce wildfire risk in your area.

Keep it simple and start small. Building a network doesn’t have to be overwhelming or draining. Having breakfast with three people sounds pretty easy, right? Let the guests you invite do your legwork for you by inviting a friend. Connections will unfold organically with hardly any effort on your part. All it takes is two committed people to quickly build to four people. Then, the next time you meet, ask each of those four to bring a colleague—and voila, you already have eight people.

Zoom Calls, DMS, IRL Meetings, and Snail Mail, Oh My!

Business meetings used to take place primarily in one of two scenarios: over a meal (coffee, lunch, drinks) or in a conference room. But the pandemic has forever changed the game for meeting dynamics. Deciding where to execute your gathering can cause decision fatigue even for the most skilled executive. Should you gather on Zoom or Microsoft Teams? Or is Google Hangouts better? What about a pop-up event?

As you continue to add to your constellation of contacts, you will begin to develop a knack for knowing which particular medium (in real life, Zoom, phone call, or DM) is best in which instance and for which particular contact. Until then, here are a few suggestions to get you started, offering some scaffolding for knowing which particular venue is best.

In real life (IRL). Whenever possible, it's best to meet someone for the first time IRL. Smiles, interpersonal chemistry, eye contact, the friendly buzz of a new kinship—these subtleties are nearly impossible to replicate online. If you need to have an important negotiation or discussion, or if you are interviewing for a job, in person is also best. You can avoid awkward digital hangups or miscommunication.

Zoom. Presentations (that don't need much discussion), status updates for an ongoing client or partner, or a replacement for an in-person meeting that can't take place due to cost, travel challenges, or distance, a Zoom meeting works best.

To make virtual meetings a bit more personal and connected, startup investor and advisor Fran Hauser recommends starting the meeting by following up on something someone said in the last call. "How did that client pitch go, Susan?"

By phone. For regular check-ins with clients and colleagues, especially if you work remotely. As much as people tend to avoid connecting by phone today, it's the perfect way to follow up with someone you've met with previously in person or by Zoom. Notice the way that you can listen—and be heard—by phone.

Snail mail. For the new business relationships, use snail mail as an opportunity to express gratitude for favors: thank you for the job referral, thank you for reviewing a résumé.

The Constellation Effect

By now hopefully you are getting a sense of how the constellation analogy applies and how you can use it to cultivate your own relationships. There are synergies to appreciate and enjoy over the course of your professional career or even a lifetime.

Your ideal contact isn't derived by asking, "Who do I know in marketing," for instance, but rather, "Who do I know that cares about helping people?" Or, "Who do I know who cares about my line of work or the particular mission or objective I'm trying to achieve?" The key is to not limit your outreach by job titles, professional experiences, or even geographic locations. Keep your mindset focused on your mission and your overall goals.

The question you should also be asking yourself isn't "How do I build community and connections?" but rather, "Which ones should I focus on?" Which communities should you join, and which ones should you pass on? Which ones don't currently exist? Should you build that communi-

ty? Or let someone else take the reins?

In that sense, you don't need to worry about finding "that" investor, *the* perfect contact. Instead, worry about finding someone who simply cares about your mission and your values. When you do that, there is no shortage of creative ways to reach your ideal networking target through indirect contacts. Since we now know all the ways our existing contacts have value, why not tap them?

Expanding your network through degrees of separation works. And when you have an inspiring mission and purpose—people will want to jump aboard.

Nail Your Story

Making an authentic connection with someone starts with laying the foundation, by figuring out how you might best fit together. A smart first move is to know your own story, your narrative—what skills you bring and where you're headed—like the back of your hand. Because once you do make those connections with others—perhaps even contact your ideal client or partner—what happens then? Once that connection transpires, you need to be ready to make the most of it.

Distill your story down to its essence: What are you trying to accomplish? And how can you elevate your story into a mission that others can rally behind? When your story is polished and clear, it's significantly easier to figure out how you best fit with others—to create a constellation.

PART II: ASK

In this section, you will learn how to start connecting the dots (or stars) that you have gathered together in Part I. The method boils down to the most important ask of all: "How can I help?" But beyond that, we will also narrow in on how asking more (and the right) questions will begin to align the stars of your constellation into the pattern you want.

How Can I Help?

When you become really skilled at asking "How can I help," the magnitude of the constellations that you can build and the great work they can create in this world are truly awe-inspiring.

Reframing the classic "ask" to be nontransactional breaks down the barrier of quid pro quo that often stymies business relationships and makes networking events so unbear-

able. The minute you ask someone how *you* can support them, their ears perk up. It also establishes equality. You no longer give off the impression of a desperate someone who needs something or is afraid of being perceived as lower on the professional totem pole.

Instead, you tip the scale of power and control in your favor. By taking action, you establish yourself in a position to help, support, and guide.

Engage a curious mindset: What does this person in front of you know that you don't?

How It Fuels Learning

It is vitally important that we understand differing perspectives, for our business as well as our broader lives. Our country is in a deep polarization crisis: We don't understand people who we perceive to be different from us. Philosophically, it may be difficult to broker a conversation with someone whose political, social, and environmental views are so vastly different from our own.

But listening fuels understanding. And if you want to succeed in business, you will be infinitely more successful if you deeply understand everything you possibly can about your industry, the people in it, and the major problems that need solving.

Engage a curious mindset: What does this person in front of you know that you don't? It doesn't matter who they are—they know something (likely, a lot of things) that you don't.

Draw the Line

But wait—can't being a giver put you in a position to be a doormat? Where is the line between giving too much versus too little? Adam Grant says that being a giver doesn't mean saying "yes" to every request. Instead, he proposes, it means setting boundaries around who, when, and how you help.

The *who* is about setting boundaries with takers—if someone has a history or reputation of selfish behavior, you're

not obligated to help.

The *when* is about setting boundaries with time. Failed givers drop everything whenever they get a request; successful givers block out time for their own goals and for self-care.

The *how* is about setting boundaries with the types of help you give. The idea is to be what he calls a "generosity specialist": Help in ways that energize you rather than exhaust you, and in situations where you can add unique value.

Know Your Ask: The Who, What, Where of Getting What You Want

Perhaps you've been making deeper business connections using the tools that you have learned. Maybe you've crystallized your offering so you're in a better position to ask for what you want from a specific person—and get it. Most pursuits require preparation, and making an ask is no exception.

Prepare Your Oscars Intro

At the Oscars, or any awards ceremony, the recipient receives a warm introduction before they take the stage. It typically includes a two-minute spiel of that person's life or accolades along with a bit of humor and levity.

When you're preparing for a meeting, do you research as though you were preparing an Oscars intro for that person? Ask yourself: Could I stand up to introduce this person and hit their key five data points? The key five are age, school, passion projects, media, and company news. As digital sleuthing and research tools abound, there's no excuse not to have their bio down.

Your job now is to consider how they may like to interact. Some colleagues are huggers. Others are hand shakers, and with COVID-19, some prefer phone, others Zoom, others text.

Consider the geographic, social, and ethnic backgrounds of who you are meeting. The way that you build rapport with a 65-year-old board member in New York is very different than the way you will connect with a 26-year-old actress in Los Angeles. The way you build a relationship with someone in Michigan might be different than the way you would do it in Florida or Italy or Japan.

Pitch Perfect

You've been reaching out to your contacts and have the per-

fect person to pitch or have started writing that ideal cover letter for that dream job. Maybe you need to hire a team member or find a producer for a television show or podcast you want to create.

But maybe you don't need to make the ask at all. Maybe what you need isn't permission or funding but courage and scrappiness.

Baratunde Thurston is a writer, comedian, commentator, and author of the book *How to Be Black*. He says that on a Saturday after he took his last flight back to California from New York before lockdown in March 2020, he woke up with three words in his head: live on lockdown. He wanted to make an entertaining, interactive, and participatory show about the pandemic that was informative and fun and also driven by the people who are in it—in the audience.

Had he not been quarantined at the time, he would have put the wheels in motion to get all of the right approvals and people, funding, production, and hair and makeup. But since none of that was possible, he just started making the show. And people loved it. Instead of waiting for all the right pieces to fall into place—he just did it.

From that experience, he developed excellent technical skills: editing video, sound, and imagery and all sorts of things he hadn't done in a very long time. Don't get trapped in limiting your thoughts or beliefs; ask yourself tough questions about whether or not the ask needs to happen in the first place.

Nail Your 4/4/4

For those asks that do need to occur, how do you handle them?

Nail the 4/4/4. First, your bigger vision, which you should always be thinking about: What do you need in four years? Next, what are your priorities for the next four months? Then bring it back to the next four weeks (or even four days). What's most critical?

When you're making an ask, be very clear in what you want before you even step into the room, send an email, or make a call. And once there, be abundantly clear in stating it.

Your ask should be specific, measurable, and time-bound: What exactly are you asking them to do and by what date? "Could you review my cover letter by next Friday?" "Could you lend 10 minutes of your expertise and hear my elevator pitch?" Whatever your ask is and however you deliver it, be assertive in communicating what you want.

Communication 101

Pings, bleeps, blurts—these sounds pepper the landscape of our days. We live in a world of nonstop communication that happens across a head-spinning number of channels, time zones, and even languages.

The challenges are many: How do you communicate in a way that is efficient but not terse? How do you make your communications authentic and deep without inadvertently crossing a professional or cultural line? How do you draw boundaries to allow for critical personal time to avoid burn-out but also make yourself flexible and available?

Striking the right balance in each of these pursuits requires prioritizing openness and transparency, as well as seeing the humanity of each person—valuing the relationship above all else, including the one with yourself.

Practice Relationalism

When you communicate with others, regardless of the medium, keep the focus on the bigger picture. Viewing communication channels, styles, and messages through the lens of relationalism places the priority not on how many relationships you have but, rather, on their thickness and depth.

Every single human relationship you have in business—and every communication you send—should strengthen the notion that you see this person as a whole human.

Any email, text, or message you write and don't deliver face to face can be misconstrued. When you don't know someone's personality, it is easy to misunderstand the intention or meaning behind the words.

For sensitive or important conversations, reach out by phone. And if you feel put off by someone else's email, consider the fact that it could be a misinterpretation. Remember, you can always ask the recipient which format they prefer.

Be explicitly kind. Communicating with kindness pays off. Research on psychology, leadership, management, and neuroscience shows that meaning, joy, and satisfaction can come from the very relationships and communication we build with others in our work.

Give feedback when needed. Clear, effective, and authentic communication also includes feedback, a critical component of healthy business relationships. It's a step in the relationship that requires vulnerability: telling someone what you don't like about something they've said, done, or created.

For any relationship where there are potential synergies to help each other in business and in life, it's worthwhile to take the relationship deeper.

But when you learn how to skillfully say hard things well, feelings of closeness, connection, and respect can transpire. Especially when it's delivered with skill and with kindness, giving feedback can be—somewhat counterintuitively—a gateway to greater intimacy.

PART III: DO

You made new contacts at events, through your volunteer work, through the gatherings you've hosted yourself, and even all the Zoom happy hours you joined. Now what? How do you take those connections from the realm of an acquaintance into a connection that is meaningful and deep? Through several small actions that build up over time.

The Art of the Follow-Up

For any relationship where there are potential synergies to help each other in business and in life, it's worthwhile to take the relationship deeper. And what people so often ask is, how? How do you *do* that? How do you deepen a business relationship without feeling awkward or stiff?

Here are some simple tricks and strategies that you can use to make “following up” more dynamic, less rote, and not so much of a chore.

Sew the first line of connecting thread. When you first meet someone—especially if it's someone you feel a connection with or a shared passion or goal in business—you want to act right away once the doorway to the relationship has been opened to deepen that connection. What did you talk about? Is there a passion you share? Here are a few examples of follow-up emails:

“It was wonderful to meet you. I'm fascinated by the work you're doing in _____ field. Please keep me posted on your work. I'd love to find ways to support you and your endeavors.”

“I saw this article on _____ and thought of you—it was great to connect! Let's keep in touch.”

Do the thing they told you to do. Did you meet someone new who suggested a book you should read? Pick it up from your local library or the bookstore—and then write them to say you did so and to thank them for the tip. Did the person mention that they were just on a podcast? Listen to the episode and send a brief note, or better yet, promote the podcast on Instagram or Twitter.

Not only will these actions provide context into their work and their personality, you will also have another reason to connect. After you listen to the podcast you can write: “Fascinating podcast about impact direct-to-consumer marketing—I have some friends in this space I'd love to connect you to, if you'd like?”

Find their chief differentiating factor (CDF). Each person has a chief differentiating factor, or CDF. This is each person's specific expertise or “secret sauce” that makes them unique. Once you learn what someone's CDF is, it's your job to *remind them of it*. If you reflect back on someone's specialness in a way that they can clearly see it—they will be forever grateful. The rewards for both of you will be huge.

Spread the Wealth

It may come as a surprise that money can engender connection. But whether it's talking about money (hello, vulnerability) or putting your dollars where your passions are, even the tricky territory of giving, receiving, or talking about money, when used skillfully, can pave the way to greater closeness.

Whether it's a small contribution to a crowdfunding site or a larger investment in a business, putting your money behind the organizations and people you want to support is a great way to build relationships in a truly meaningful way.

You truly don't need to have a large savings account to do this. Just 10 dollars to a crowdsourced campaign could connect you to an organization you may care about for life, and that can introduce you to fascinating people.

Similarly, every frank and open conversation you're willing

to have about money is another way to engender depth, openness, and transparency in your business relationships.

How to Ask For It

Let's say you're getting a new business off the ground. How do you ask for funding? Now there are these great vehicles, whether it's Kickstarter or iFundWomen.com, where you can raise that first 20, or 30, or 40,000 dollars. Yes, it's hard work. But that could get you to a place where you would have some cushion to bring on a programmer or a consultant to create your websites and your collateral.

When you have deep, meaningful relationships, it's a lot easier to generate support if you've already built the types of relationships you will need to fund your company.

Always Take (And Innovate On) The Meeting

"Always take the meeting" is a quip that runs through many networking guides. You'll never know where a connection will lead, even if it takes you somewhere you didn't expect.

But let's take this advice one step further by encouraging you to constantly push yourself to innovate on what "meetings" even mean, in addition to saying "yes" to potential meetings as much as you can (without burning out, of course).

Every new mode of communication or gathering is an opportunity to learn something about how human beings operate and thrive. Some of the most common tools are Zoom, Slack, and email, but did you know that there are hundreds of other platforms and tools for connecting? Keep your eyes open for new platforms for connection, and be willing to try

them out, even the new or unpopular ones.

"Always take the meeting" really means perpetually having your meeting hat on. This doesn't mean always be working; rather, keep the possibility of a fortuitous connection afloat in your mind.

While you may not meet a king as a result of any last-minute trips to the convenience store, you will no doubt make an untold number of friends, colleagues, collaborators, and partners in similar instances where you will be in some place for one thing but make a connection that can help or segue into an entirely different thing altogether.

If you pay attention to and cherish the people you meet at those various pit stops along your life's path, you will create enduring friendships. And if you are human, vulnerable, and kind—people will be much more willing to support you in the good as well as the more challenging moments.

Remember, it's so often the detours rather than the destination that matter most.

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- *Connection Culture: The Competitive Advantage of Shared Identity, Empathy, and Understanding at Work* by Michael Lee Stallard
- *The Connector's Advantage: 7 Mindsets to Grow Your Influence and Impact* by Michelle Tillis Lederman



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