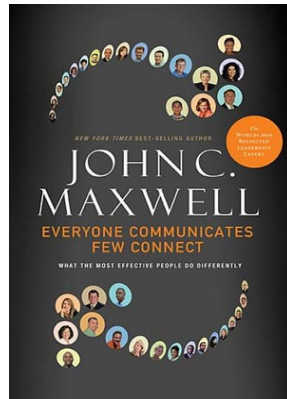


Everyone Communicates, Few Connect

What the Most Effective People Do Differently



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■ The Big Idea

In *Everyone Communicates, Few Connect* John Maxwell suggests five principles of connecting and five practices for becoming a communicator who “connects.” Believing that everyone can learn to connect with work and practice, he provides inspirational words to help communicators enrich the lives of their listeners and in the process, transform their own.

Principles behind connecting:

1. It increases influence in every situation.
2. It is all about focusing on others.
3. It requires communicating beyond using words.
4. It demands energy.
5. It involves skill more than natural talent.

Practices to become a connector:

1. Find common ground.
2. Make communication simple.
3. Create an enjoyable experience.
4. Inspire the audience.
5. Be authentic by living what one communicates.

Features of the Book

Reading Time: 5-7 hours, 262 pages

John Maxwell is an internationally known evangelical preacher and leadership expert. While *Everyone Communicates, Few Connect* is geared toward leaders who want to learn to connect and communicate more effectively, the lessons presented by Maxwell benefit a general audience. According to Maxwell, everyone—from corporate managers to politicians to grandparents—can, and should, learn to connect while communicating.

The connecting principles and practices build upon each other, so the book should be read sequentially. The book highlights key quotes in text boxes throughout each chapter, and each chapter ends with a section called “Connecting With People At All Levels” that provides readers ways to apply Maxwell’s lessons to connect one-on-one, in a group, and with an audience. Throughout his book, Maxwell draws on examples and findings of various experts, and the general public, from blogs to research texts. The Notes section offers an extensive bibliography for further reading.

INTRODUCTION

Some people are clearly much more effective at communicating than others. But why do people tune into some messages, and tune out others? Why do some messages stick? As John Maxwell, internationally respected leadership expert, says: “Talk is easy. Everybody talks. The question is, how can you make your words really count?”

In *Everyone Communicates, Few Connect* Maxwell draws upon his life experience, extensive research, and anecdotal examples to reveal the secret of the most effective communicators: they connect. Learning how to connect can be vital to success in relationships and careers, and Maxwell himself has worked hard to acquire this skill. In this book he suggests five principles of connecting, and five practices to becoming a communicator who connects. Believing that everyone can learn to connect with work and practice, he provides inspirational words to help communicators enrich the lives of their listeners and in the process, transform their own.

CONNECTING PRINCIPLES

How do people know if they are connecting when they are communicating? Sometimes it is easier to spot the disconnection. When a cell phone drops a call, both parties notice it, and feel frustrated by the disruption. Time is wasted in remembering and reestablishing the flow of the conversation.

Although stilted communications like this are all too common in the digital age, they do not have to be. Developing a clear understanding of what creates “a connection” begins with an understanding of five principles.

Principle #1: Connecting Increases Influence in Every Situation

Natural talent and hard work do not amount to much without effective communication in which the speaker and audience connect. Maxwell defines connecting as “the ability to identify with people and relate to them in a way that increases your influence with them,” and suggests that it is in fact “a matter of success or failure.” Leaders, if they want to be successful, must learn to connect. In fact, connecting increases success in all relationships; it reinforces a sense of community and teamwork, and expands influence and productivity.

Maxwell says that he knows that he has connected with an audience when he sees signs of the following: extra effort; unsolicited appreciation; unguarded openness; increased communication; enjoyable experiences; emotional bondedness; positive energy; growing synergy; and unconditional love. He has learned how to elicit these reactions in his audience, and connecting with an audience is now one of his greatest strengths. However, he was not born with this skill. In fact, early in his life and career he noticed many glaring disconnections, and set about to learn the secrets of the most effective communicators.

He believes that effective communication is rooted in a genuine appreciation of people, and that people fundamentally share a deep need to connect with each other. Connecting is not static or defensive, and requires being proactive and taking initiative. In a study of 16,000 executives, Jay Hall of the psychological research and training firm, Teleometrics, “found a direct correlation between achievement and the ability to care for and connect with people.” Most people become who they are and accomplish what they accomplish due to the influence of others on their lives.

Principle #2: Connecting is All About Others

People who see themselves as the center of a conversation will fail to connect. Good teachers and leaders do not use each conversation as an opportunity to demonstrate their vast knowledge. Instead, because they value others, they guide their listeners and help them to learn.

Maxwell started his career as a minister. He recalls failing to connect because he worried more about convincing people to accept his vision than about what they needed. Craving positive feedback, he tried to impress rather than be authentic. Eventually he could tell people were not listening. Speaker Zig Ziglar helped him understand what he was doing wrong, saying “If you will first help people get what they want, they will help you get what you want.” This statement helped him understand that his immaturity, ego, insecurity, and failure to value everyone equally were preventing him from connecting. Maturity, or “the ability to see and act on behalf of others,” enables people to connect with others. Although many teachers and leaders connect with their subject, the content of their communication is not primarily what adds value to people: people add value to each other. As Maxwell says, “In order to add value to others, one must first value others.”

The most difficult obstacle to overcome for most people is to shift from self-centeredness to other-centeredness. It is helpful to ask oneself three questions from the perspective of one’s audience:

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

Leaders will be able to connect if they are willing to surrender their agenda, think about their audience, and understand the desires of their listeners.

Principle #3: Connecting Goes Beyond Words

Being a selfless communicator is not enough, however. Audiences may respond differently to two speakers who deliver the exact same content. Why? Words account for only 10% of a message; a shocking 90% of communication is nonverbal, and is delivered through the body and tone of speaking. Maxwell's mentor, Howard Hendrick, says that three essential components comprise all communication: the intellectual (what we know); the emotional (what we feel); and the volitional (what we do). When any of these components are unsuccessful, the communicator does not connect.

Leaders, speakers, and authors must own their message in a way that makes it authentic and credible to the audience: "Nothing can happen through you until it happens to you." Their message must provide value to the audience, either delivering on a promise or changing their lives. A "connection checklist" may help a communicator assess their success:

- Integrity: Did I do my best?
- Expectation: Did I please my sponsor?
- Relevance: Did I understand and relate to the audience?
- Value: Did I add value to the people?
- Application: Did I give people a game plan?
- Change: Did I make a difference?

However, beyond reviewing this checklist and evaluating the message for authenticity, the most important adjustment a speaker can make is one in their attitude. A selfless attitude enables a connection with the audience.

Communication goes beyond words on four levels: (1) visually, (2) intellectually, (3) emotionally and (4) verbally. First impressions are often created visually, and can make or break a connection in seven seconds; communicators must be attuned to their surroundings, vary their expressions, and move with purpose. In order to connect intellectually, leaders must know themselves, and their subject, using personal experience to connect to their subject and their audience.

The ability to connect emotionally might seem elusive. Although leaders and teachers often rely heavily on their content and intellect to persuade people, more often than not an audience is moved by emotion rather than logic. Maxwell explains, "People may hear your words, but they feel your attitude." Most of the world's most effective leaders throughout history have had charisma, and according to Dan Reiland, a pastor and co-partner of Maxwell, charisma involves an outward focus. They have been able to draw in people emotionally by focusing on what they need, and the key to this ability is positivity, self-confidence, and a focus on others.

Although connecting goes beyond words, communicators should not throw away those words. Words are enormously powerful, and it is important to pay attention to tone, inflection, timing, volume, and pacing.

Most importantly, communicators must learn to be themselves. If they have not honed a style of speaking, they should study other communicators. Ultimately, however, they must make their message, and their style of delivery, their own.

Principle #4: Connecting Requires Energy

Learning to connect is hard work, and connecting demands tireless, intentional work. It requires choosing to expend whatever energy is necessary to focus upon and reach out to others. Speaking to an audience requires extensive preparation, including a call ahead of time to determine the sponsor's expectations, and going out of one's way to spend extra time with the audience both before and after a speaking event. Four "Unpardonable Sins of a Communicator" are: being unprepared, uncommitted, uninteresting, or uncomfortable.

Maxwell spells out five proactive ways to use energy to connect, and reminds that "To accomplish anything of value, you must learn to manage and marshal your energy."

1. Take the initiative to connect first.
2. Be clear by knowing one's self, one's audience, and one's subject.
3. Exercise patience. Slow down, and move "at the speed of another person."
4. Practice selflessness. Communicate from a position of compassion. Givers energize an audience. As Dan Reiland says, the giver "teaches out of love, grace, gratitude, compassion, and passion."
5. Develop stamina. Take time to recharge by finding activities which are energizing, and schedule them into one's day. The larger the audience, the more energy required to connect.

Principle #5: Connecting is More Skill than Natural Talent

There are some aspects to connecting that fall outside the realm of talent. Leaders and communicators can start with whatever skills and experience they have, harnessing what they know, what they have achieved, and what they have been through to connect with others. The general public gravitates with emotion and empathy toward people who have suffered or made great sacrifices, and who speak from a place of humility.

Maxwell admits that he was not always a good communicator, and that he has worked hard to adopt the style and techniques of effective communicators. His writer, Charlie Wetzel, says that Maxwell practices what he preaches, and that he “exhibits authenticity, prepares thoroughly, utilizes humor, and focuses on others.” Most importantly, he practices “intentional inclusion” by sharing his best experiences and favorite things with others. Wetzel writes, “If you did nothing else but intentionally include others in your best experiences and favorite things, you would become a much better connector overnight.”

People listen to those who are able to add value to their lives. Because achievement is highly valued in American society, people trust those whom they perceive to be successful. When those high achievers speak, others want to feel connected to them. People also listen to those associated with a person whom they already trust; for example, Dr. Phil and Dr. Oz each have largely successful talk shows based on their association with Oprah Winfrey.

CONNECTING PRACTICES

Becoming a great communicator is a process that starts with becoming a great connector. Learning to connect will improve relationships, boost personal success, and allow people to become better leaders. To become better connectors, leaders can observe effective communicators to see what works and try to cultivate those characteristics. Leaders can also follow these five connecting practices.

Practical Skill #1: Find Common Ground

Self-focused communicators and leaders fail to find common ground with their audiences. When audience members sense that a speaker is holding back from them for whatever reason, they disengage. Barriers to a speaker’s ability to find common ground include assuming that they already know what the audience knows, feels, or wants; concluding that they do not need to know what the audience knows, feels, or wants; or deciding that they do not want to know what the audience knows, feels, or wants.

According to Maxwell, “Connecting is a choice.” In order to find common ground, a speaker must first decide they want to connect. To increase the odds of connecting, leaders and speakers must make the following choices every day:

- Availability: They must choose to spend time with others.
- Listening: They must listen their way to common ground.
- Questions: They will be interested enough in others to ask questions.
- Thoughtfulness: They think of others and look for ways to thank them.
- Openness: They let people into their lives.
- Likability: They care about people.
- Humility: They think of themselves less so they can think of others more.
- Adaptability: They move from their world to the world of others.

Connectors take the initiative daily. The secret of finding common ground and of connecting is a “willingness to see things from others’ point of view.” Four questions may help a communicator find common ground with their audience:

1. Do I feel what you feel?
2. Do I see what you see?
3. Do I know what you know?
4. Do I know what you want?

Knowing the answer to three questions allows communicators to find common ground with their audience:

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

Practical Skill #2: Keep Communication Simple

Although audiences often think that speakers and leaders who use big words and dense sentences to explain complex concepts are smart, the hallmark of a good communicator is the ability to simplify the complex. Good communicators explain concepts in simple terms, because “the measure of a great teacher isn’t what he or she knows; it’s what the students know.”

Communicating a message concisely and precisely so that it carries an impact is hard work. The best communicators, and connectors, keep it simple so that the entire audience can relate to the message. Using anecdotes from four categories, (1) humor, (2) heart, (3) hope, and (4) help, will make a message accessible.

Connecting and communicating clearly in today’s global society can require extra energy. To communicate across cultures, follow a “3 S” strategy: “Keep it Simple, Say it Slowly, Have a Smile.”

Five simple guidelines help to keep communication clear:

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

Practical Skill #3: Create an Enjoyable Experience

Just as anyone can learn to connect, anyone can learn to be interesting. If a message falls flat, it is because the speaker fell flat, not because the audience fell flat. It is important for the speaker to show interest in people, use positive body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice to keep people’s interest. If the speaker has fun, the audience will have fun, too.

Speakers must learn to communicate in the language of the audience, and this is rooted in being giving and selfless. Speakers who are either unwilling or unable to speak from the perspective of their listeners create a distance from their audience. It is important to be specific, use concrete terms, address the audience directly, and maintain authenticity.

The following techniques can help establish an immediate rapport with the audience:

- Start with a comment about the situation or setting
- Introduce yourself
- Relax
- Begin with humor
- Create a sense of anticipation

Activating an audience requires work. Audiences who are engaged will lean in, take notes, make eye contact, nod in approval or with understanding, or laugh and applaud. What if the speaker finds that the audience is exhibiting none of these behaviors? They may use techniques such as:

- ask questions
- get people moving
- use humor or a shocking statement or statistic
- say things in an interesting way
- learn to pause.

Visuals also help engage an audience. If a speaker does not have access to audiovisual materials or equipment, they may consider exaggerating facial expressions and movement, or asking the audience to take notes. Using words like “imagine” can stimulate an audience, and stories and anecdotes, especially relatable and personal ones, always capture people’s attention because “people connect with stories, not statistics.” It is useful to keep a collection of favorite stories on laminated cards to share when the moment calls. Although it is impossible to please every person in an audience, the longer the audience remains engaged, the more likely the speaker will be able to add value to their lives.

Maxwell takes it one step further. He suggests that becoming a better communicator is not just about giving engaging presentations, and instead is about self-transformation: “It’s about becoming the kind of person others want to connect with.”

Practical Skill #4: Inspire People

When a speaker and audience engage, the audience begins to question what they will learn from the speaker. They ask: Is this person worth paying attention to? Is this person credible? After establishing common ground with an audience, and convincing them that they care about them, effective communicators will next inspire their audiences. An “Inspiration Equation,” is:

What They Know + What They See + What They Feel = Inspiration

Inspiring communicators have high expectations for their listeners, and most of the time people will respond to these expectations. Most people want—and need—enthusiasm and encouragement, and a connector will deliver this to the audience. A connector believes in the potential of their audience, and will “challenge, motivate and encourage them to be all they can be.” Moreover, an inspirational communicator “strives to be the message.”

More than remembering actual words, audiences remember how the speaker makes them feel. Passion comes from a deeper place than words, or even emotions. Communicators with passion and confidence, especially those with confidence who feel good about themselves, will help inspire an audience. To determine whether or not they have passion, speakers should ask themselves four questions:

1. Do I believe what I say?
2. Has it changed me?
3. Do I believe it will help others?
4. Have I seen it change others?

Inspirational communicators will also be grateful to their audiences for listening, always understanding and acknowledging their dependence on them. Gratitude, like connecting, can be cultivated.

The best measure of whether or not an audience has been inspired is whether or not they are moved to action. This requires helping people move from “know how” to “do now”; the speaker must deliver the right words at the right time, and give the audience an action plan. The ACT action plan may be useful: Apply, Change, Teach. To trigger this process, encourage an audience to pick one thing to take action on in 24 hours, and then to share something they learned with another person.

Practical Skill #5: Live What You Communicate

Most people want new leaders to succeed. They find hope in the continued leadership of those who have connected with them effectively. Although most communicators and leaders do not set out with the intention of “being” their message, this is ultimately how people connect. The character of the messenger has enormous impact on how effective their message is. A messenger who embodies and lives what they communicate will establish credibility and create trust. According to Maxwell, a new leader with good communication skills may connect initially, but after about six months “credibility overrides communication.” If they fail to establish credibility, they will not continue to connect.

Connectors know themselves. They are able to admit to, and accept, their strengths and weaknesses. They regularly assess who they are and what they believe in, are able to maintain a positive outlook, and have learned to like themselves. Connectors know what value they can add to an audience, and this makes them trustworthy and credible to any audience. These credible connectors “right their wrongs” by acknowledging their mistakes, apologizing when necessary, and making amends. They tell the truth, remain vulnerable, and follow the Golden Rule, treating others as they want to be treated. In other words, effective communicators connect by living what they communicate.

Communicators who strive on a daily basis to follow the outlined principles and practices of connecting with others will make a difference in the lives of those around them. And, in the process, they may transform their own lives as well.

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