



*With Action Steps and a Bonus section:
How to tell when you're becoming a better connector*

"So, besides the impermanence of all things, there remains in my heart a steadiness about the power of connection. Once the heart is touched, something remains."

Meg Riley in the blog, [Inspired Faith, Effective Action](#)

Connection Matters

Show me a successful or highly regarded member of his or her community, organization, or industry, and I'll show you someone who is skilled at cultivating and nurturing strong connections with other people. You'd like to be among them, wouldn't you?

But how do you know if you're an effective connector? Do you find yourself worrying about any of the following?

"I'm at a standstill in my career and keep getting passed over for advancement."

"My children don't care what I think and never listen to me."

"My friends don't seem to want to do things with me."

"No one ever seems to care about my ideas."

"No one ever goes out of their way to help me."

"I'm not getting business referrals from customers."

“I feel like I’m running in place and not getting anywhere.”

If any of these sounds familiar, maybe you’ve never really learned how to connect with others, even though you may be having conversations with them. You may feel you’re just not born to be good at interacting with others...that there’s nothing you can do about it.

The good news is this: even if you’re not a natural “People Person,” even if you feel you’re an introvert, you absolutely can teach yourself to be a better Connector.

Leadership expert John C. Maxwell, in his book [*Everyone Communicates, Few Connect: What the Most Effective People Do Differently*](#), assures us: “The ability to connect with others is a major determining factor in reaching your full potential. It’s no secret! Connecting is a skill you can learn and apply in your personal, professional, and family relationships.”

There’s no question about it: being an effective Connector—someone who helps other and whom others like to help—can resonate in wonderful ways throughout your personal and business life.

So where do you start? Here are a few simple ideas to get you moving in the right direction to becoming better at connecting with others and being perceived as someone worth knowing and helping:

Connection Magic Tip #1:

Develop a Connection mindset.

Decide right now you want to be someone who is warm, genuine, and helpful. This sets your intention and puts your subconscious to work achieving your goal, even when you’re not actively thinking about it.

Action Steps:

- Stop thinking about what YOU need and start focusing on the needs of others. This can be hard if you’re going through a rough patch in your life, but make up your mind to give it a serious try.
- As you interact with others, think about whether there is something you can do for them...and do it as soon as possible.
- Once a day, first thing in the morning or right before you go to bed, write down at least three things for which you’re grateful. Gratitude and thinking of others go hand-in-hand, and an attitude of thankfulness will be like a magnet to connect you with others.

Connection Magic Tip #2:

Take stock and be honest with yourself.

Look in the mirror and ask yourself, “Am I the kind of person with whom others would want to connect or spend time?” The answers to the following questions will give you clues:

1. Are you sour or depressed when you answer the phone or greet someone you see on the street?
2. When someone (other than your doctor) says, “How are you?” do you give a litany of gory details? Very few people are *really* interested in your gastrointestinal distress symptoms.
3. Do you neglect your appearance and your personal hygiene?
4. Are you routinely negative about anything others say or suggest, especially when they’re trying to help you?
5. Do complain more than you express gratitude?
6. Do you whine a great deal about your misfortunes or pet peeves?
7. Do you constantly bicker with your spouse or significant other when you’re around other people?

If the answer to any of these is “Yes,” don’t despair; that means you’ve already identified a place to start. The action steps for each of these are self-evident. Bottom line: Don’t be the person your friends, family, and coworkers want to avoid. Be the person they’re always glad to see.

Connection Magic Tip #3:

Work on your personal greeting technique to convey warmth and sincerity.

Credit for these tips goes straight to my father, Jim Herbert. He taught all five of his children these important tips when we met or greeted someone.

Action Steps:

- Look people in the eye when you’re greeting someone and having a person-to-person conversation. This makes them feel you care.
- Your handshake should be firm (but not bone-crushing!), whether you’re greeting a man or a woman. Women don’t appreciate a “fishy” handshake any more than men! For extra warmth, put your other hand briefly over the two hands grasped in a handshake. This adds intimacy and sincerity to help convey your pleasure at being with the other person.
- Call people by name when you greet them. We all feel more special when someone has remembered our name and uses it.

Connection Magic Tip #4:

Really listen.

You can't help someone if you don't know anything about him or her, and the best way to find out is to listen. Listening is an extremely powerful connection skill.

Action Steps:

- Resist the urge to multitask when you're having a conversation, even on the telephone. Don't check your Smartphone or read an article or play solitaire on your computer. If you do, you're not really listening.
- Start carrying a pocket notebook or use an app to record key points after every important conversation. What was their name? What were the main things they told you that might be good to know later? I use Evernote to capture notes and ideas.
- Let the other person know you're listening by repeating things back and nodding your head. This also ensures you have understood them correctly and helps you remember what they've said. Examples:
 - “Mary, you must be so proud of your daughter for being promoted to manager.”
 - “Jerry, I had no idea you had relatives on the west coast.”
 - “John, so you're finally launching your own business?”
- Ask questions in response to what the other person has said. This will affirm your interest and help you understand their situation better. For instance:
 - “John, do you think your revenues are down because fewer people are buying or because everyone is spending less money when they do buy?”
 - “Sally, are you more worried about being able to find someone to fix that roof leak or is it the cost that's worrying you?”
- Follow up substantive conversations with an email or personal note or letter, especially if you've promised information, referrals, or follow-up. Put it on your calendar or to-do list if you need a memory jogger.

Connection Magic Tip #5:

Demonstrate your thoughtfulness.

Find ways to let your friends, family, and associates know you're thinking of them. This can be an email, snail mail, or phone call, but I'm partial to the more rare personal, handwritten note. When someone receives such a note, it stands out and is remembered.

Action Steps:

- When you read an article in the paper about someone's promotion, election, or recognition—or see an article you think would interest or help someone—cut it out and send it to him or her. People love getting newspaper clippings about themselves, their families, or their business. It adds extra good will to a note or comment of congratulations.
- Tell business associates about events you think might interest or help them. Your local caterer will appreciate your letting her know about the bridal fair you just read about in the paper.
- Write thank you notes for gifts received, kindness shown, or referrals made.
- Write notes of condolence to friends and acquaintances.
- Write “out-of-the-blue” notes to friends, family, clients, and prospects to inquire about their well being and let them know you're thinking of them.

Connection Magic Tip #6:

Be a problem solver.

Theologian and author Frederick Buechner made a powerful statement: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.” Everyone—every single one of us—has wants, needs, and problems. When those wants, needs, and problems are deep or intense, you can imagine the value placed on whomever can provide an answer or solution. When you can be a problem solver, you are automatically delivering great value to the relationship.

Action Steps:

- Let your customers know you're concerned about them or are interested in helping them, even when there's nothing in it for you. Your client with asthma might like to know about the free Respiratory Health evaluation at the upcoming Health Fair in your town. Your prospect with a son in Austin, Texas, might be thrilled to learn of an airfare special you read about in the paper.
- Put people together who can help each other. The local arts nonprofit group would be so grateful for information about the Foundation you heard about on the radio that is seeking grant applications in the arts. Referrals are always appreciated.
- Jump on board when you become aware of a community need. Volunteer to help or make a donation. Show up when help is called for. This is the best kind of visibility.

BONUS SECTION:
How to tell when you're becoming a better connector

You'll know you're getting better at making connections when people start calling to ask for your opinion, ask if you'll serve on a board, ask if you know where they can find something or some information, or just invite you to more social events. These are good signs you're perceived as being helpful, knowledgeable, and good company. You know you're making progress towards when you hear these kinds of comments:

- “Thank you for the beautiful note you wrote when my husband died.”
- “Thank you for sending me the article about my child’s achievement in school.”
- “Thank you for sharing that book that you knew I’d be interested in.”
- “You were so thoughtful to remember my birthday (or the anniversary of my wife’s death, etc.).”
- “Thank you for asking about the results of my lab tests.”
- “Thank you for asking if our house was still on the market.”
- “Thank you for the note of encouragement you sent after I lost my job.”
- “Thank you for introducing me to someone who might need my services.”
- “Thank you for sending my nonprofit the link to a potential grant source for their new project.”
- “Thank you for calling to check on me after the snowstorm.”

Start doing at least one thing every day to improve your connection skills, and miracle of miracles, you'll find the old adage “What goes around comes around” is really true!

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Elizabeth H. Cottrell (aka [RiverwoodWriter](#)) is a freelance writer and blogger, master encourager, and note writing authority who teaches fellow seekers how to strengthen the four connections essential to a wholehearted life: connection with God, with self, with others, and with nature. Learn more at [RiverwoodWriter.com](#) and [Heartspoken.com](#).

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