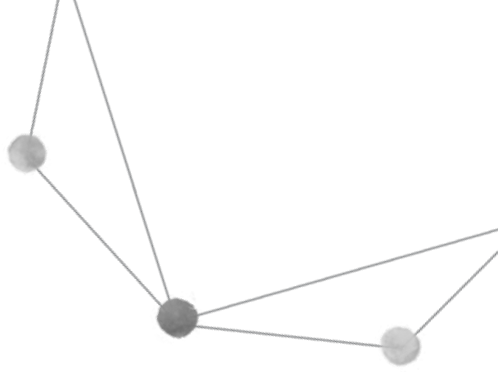


The
BIG
POWER
of
TINY
CONNECTIONS

HOW SMALL
INTERACTIONS SPARK
AWESOME OUTCOMES

Jen Nash



Prologue

My mother talked to strangers a lot. And while I didn't love it as a kid, I got used to it. I accepted the fact that she would strike up a conversation with pretty much anyone, anywhere. Mom would chat with the person next to us on the sidewalk while we were all waiting for the crosswalk light to change. She'd swap stories or recipe tips with the person in front of her in line at the butcher. She'd express interest in the server's childhood in Mumbai, India, or in a passerby's hand-quilted jacket from Little Rock, Arkansas, or in the intricate cane a gentleman in the art gallery was using. She'd share her historical, informational, medical, nutritional, or even spiritual advice with almost anyone, anywhere at any time.

Maybe this doesn't sound that odd, but she'd do it even if she didn't speak their language.

A Vassar graduate who focused her studies on languages, my mother spoke English, French, Spanish and German, picked

up a smattering of Asian languages when we lived in Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Japan. If you didn't know her, watching her talk to random strangers would make you think she was the bravest, least inhibited person you had ever met. In truth, Mom was rather shy, but she buried that shyness under a mantle of bluster and personality.

As an adult, I would often be embarrassed when she would attempt to endear herself to the Asian shopkeepers in my New York City neighborhood. She'd walk into my local bodega and speak to the owners in Cantonese, since they looked Asian, and we'd spent many years living in Hong Kong. It might have worked, however most of the local shopkeepers in my area are Korean—not Chinese. These patient, kind-hearted shopkeepers didn't seem fazed by this elderly woman nattering to them in bits and pieces of some foreign language, as to them she was just another eccentric tourist, but I was mortified.

No matter my protests, Mom would carry on. She was certain she'd eventually not only get it right—but also make someone's day. And sure enough, once in a while she did. The look of surprise and astonishment on their faces would then be priceless. One minute here is the dotty older woman speaking nonsense and the next she's thanking them properly in their mother tongue. I asked my mom what the point of all the back and forth was, after all she could just politely thank them in English. She would just shake her head and point out the fact that by struggling, then making that unexpected connection across languages, she was sprinkling joy everywhere she went. Having seen the smiles some of them beamed at her as she walked away, I think she was onto something! Looking back, I don't know why I felt so impatient when Mom had these exchanges, because it was precisely these small moments that would lead me to understand how powerfully connective, motivating and supporting our interactions with the world can

be— it was these moments that lead me to spend my time talking and coaching about the power of connection all over the world.

Over the years, the way my mother engaged with anyone and everyone, rubbed off on me. I started collecting thank yous in foreign languages: Arigato, Obrigado, Mootsomesk, Kitness—and those became my gateway drug to fast and easy connection. I have an uncanny ability to figure out where people are from, just by paying close attention to their accents. Many people think South Africans are Australian, or Brazilians are Argentinian—and they often don't know that people in Jordan speak Arabic. As I developed this skill, I realized that when I whip out the old “Chokran” (thank you) and “Masalema” (goodbye) in Arabic when I'm walking out of my local deli, the Jordanian deli owner Wadah always breaks into a killer smile. It never fails to put surprise and delight on his face!

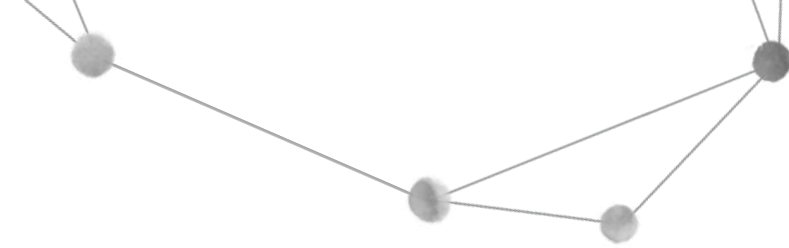
Everything we have in our lives largely depends on the people we know and the people they know. So, the larger and more diverse your network is—the more unique, empowered, and amazing life you can lead. (By a diverse network I mean demographic diversity, paradigm diversity as well as skill and experience diversity.) Mom connected to make people's day. And while I enjoyed the flashes of connection that accompany my thank-you flexing, I realized there was so much more opportunity within those tiny sparks.



What's the Point?

Connection is extremely powerful. Transformative even. More than anything it's a tool we can use—or a muscle we can flex—to create the lives we want to live.





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Tiny Connections ... Made to Be, Not Meant to Be

Liza, a particularly attractive friend of mine, was in a yoga studio waiting for the class to start. After fifteen minutes, it seemed the teacher was a no-show, so all the students started mulling about and chatting to each other. A young man in his mid to late twenties who had been sitting next to Liza, struck up a conversation with her for a few minutes and then casually asked if she had a Tinder handle. Since they were face to face, chatting away, Liza was curious why he wanted her online dating handle and asked him as much directly. He responded, “Well, I’d like to ask you out.”

Let’s think about this for a moment. Here we have a handsome ‘yogi boi’ standing next to Liza, and yet, he’s become so reliant on apps to manage his social life he doesn’t know how to ask a pretty girl out on a date without the intermediary assistance of technology. Liza was bemused and saddened, so she switched the topic of conversation and avoided giving him her number.

Nonetheless, the exchange shocked her enough that when she got home, she posted about the experience on Facebook—which is how I heard about it.

I remember being amazed and sad reading this story. How had dating evolved to such a place? As I thought more about it, I realized that a twenty-something-year-old has always lived in a world where there are dating intermediaries (websites, apps, etc.). He had never seen a personal ad in a newspaper or had to call someone (not text) to ask them out. It probably never even occurred to Yogi Boi to just ask Liza out on the spot. So, it got me wondering, how is a society that's hell bent on retreating into technology going to support creative human connections—the one thing we must have to live amazing, productive, lucrative, healthy, fulfilled lives? From where I'm standing, it seems like we're not only losing the ability to connect in person (sorry, Yogi Boi!) but we're losing the interest to connect at all, and that's really scary.

I Don't Just Talk the Talk: I Live and Breathe Connections

As a human connectivity expert, I travel the world, shifting people's perspective around the critical importance of human connections within their personal and professional lives. Through corporate and one-on-one executive coaching sessions, I focus on connection as the power base for excellence in leadership, inclusion and retention in a corporate world that's struggling with mass splintering.

Whether we're working onsite or remotely, the office culture of the past is just that ... in the past. Now more than ever we must rethink how we connect with friends, family and coworkers as our days are jammed with video meetings and calls. I believe that you can't reap the social and financial

benefits of connecting with others without the right kind of awareness, insights, and solid diligent effort. I know because I don't just talk about the power of connections, I live it.

I've been a creative director and marketing strategist for some of the most well-regarded companies in the world, which means I was paid very well to develop marketing campaigns that built relationships between people and brands. It also means I got very good at understanding human nature, because when you want people to take certain actions you must understand their motivations and make it very easy for them to take the steps you're hoping they'll take. While I was in this role, I was also simultaneously building a multi-million-dollar real estate portfolio. I knew nothing about real estate when I started in my early thirties, but I was extremely driven and focused on owning passive income properties—so I forced myself to meet a lot of people and asked a lot of questions so I could build a network of other real estate experts around me.

Over the years, I've transformed my career, grown my income well past six figures, befriended influential people and gained access to things I would never have seen or known about otherwise—all because I took concrete steps to connect with a wide range of people around me. I live the principles I'm espousing in this book, and as story after story will show you, nothing beats having awesome, life-changing experiences thanks to the connections you've made.

LET ME TELL YOU A STORY:

For my birthday, I historically have loved to go for high tea at a fancy hotel with someone who enjoys that sort of thing. I'm a fan of the petit fours, the tiny sandwiches, the scones, clotted cream and, of course, the excellent champagne. About a decade ago, my mother and I were having high tea at the Pierre Hotel, a classic New York landmark hotel, where I was planning to kick off my birthday week of silliness. We were sitting there

enjoying the last sandwiches with our tea, when an older gentleman sitting nearby interrupted our conversation as he'd overheard us talking about living in Japan.

After asking us some questions about our experiences abroad, he politely begged our forgiveness for interrupting and went back to his drink. My mom and I however didn't want to let him off the hook so easily. He seemed smart, interesting, and fun! So instead of staying in our own lanes and minding our business, we invited him to join us.

It turned out he was not only the former mayor of a nearby large city but also the former governor of that state as well. He was very high energy and fun, and after twenty minutes or so, he invited us to join him for lunch two hours away at his home that was in a different state. Normally I don't drive two hours for lunch, but we were planning to head in that direction, as I lived part-time in New York and part-time in his state as well ... so we accepted his invitation and met him the next day.

Over the following years, we've developed a friendship that has enabled me to meet and spend time at dinner with celebrities such as like Norah Jones, Tony Bennett and his gorgeous wife Susan Crow, as well other notables like the NBA commissioner Adam Silver and financial journalist Maria Bartiromo. I even got to meet Presidential Candidate Mike Bloomberg. It's amazing that one minute you're having tea and chatting and then less than a year later you're hanging out with celebs you normally only read about.

Connections Don't Just Happen

What do I mean by that? Well, for starters you can't just show up at some random bar and expect to be included with all the fun, attractive people. You can't sit back and wait for people to come to you. You must actively look for opportunities to connect and that's what I'm here to show you in this book. Step-by-step, I'm going to make it clear how you can create

positive connections and outcomes in your life. I will help you see opportunities to connect where you currently see none. I'll inspire you to pay more attention to the world around you. To recognize the opportunities that cross your path every day, and to take action to turn those opportunities into amazing outcomes.

Making Tiny Connections Will

Get you a better job

How you interact at work can get you considered for promotions, unique opportunities, or juicy roles you wouldn't have thought possible.

Get you laid

People are more likely to be receptive to advances of any kind from people their peers have vetted. When you're introduced to someone through friends, you're instantly not a stranger and you've got instant street cred because of that lineage. That can make the leap from stranger to partner a much shorter affair. Pardon the pun!

Make you a person worth knowing

When you meet people, one of the first rules of being a good connection is asking yourself, "How can I help them?" "How can I make a positive change in their life?" It may be as small as giving them a tip about a good place to find parking, helping them get a babysitter for Saturday or sitting down over lunch to show them how to use Excel. When you make the world a better place, you'll find connecting gets a lot easier, and you'll likely feel great doing it.

Make you more money

While some of us are working hard to keep food on the table, it's possible some of the people you know (or the people they

know) have access to deals, investment opportunities, IPOs, start-ups, you name it—and through them so do you. If you don't know any of those kinds of people, it's a great time to look at expanding your network.

Make your life more exciting

You weren't planning on ending up at the hottest party in Miami, but you got talking to someone at the bar, and one thing led to another—and there you are! You weren't planning to attend the Aspen Food & Wine Show, but you were open to working out a payment plan with a client, and they suggested taking you as their guest. With the right attitude toward making connections—you're more likely to get the corner office, marry an enviable partner, and have a social life that resembles the best alcohol commercials you've ever seen.

Turn you into a super-connector

When you introduce people for work or pleasure, and you facilitate new opportunities, friendships, or romances, you are supporting real growth and possibilities for those around you. This energy is addictive because it always comes back to support you and your goals.

Connection is Everything

Since 2018, I've been teaching and coaching connection, networking, leadership, and the powerful ways other people can change our lives. It may sound like an outlandish claim but our connection to people and the world around us is everything. Feeling a sense of connection is critical not only for your physical and mental wellbeing, but it's absolutely essential to live your best life. Think about a time a good friend cancelled plans with you last minute. How did you feel? Probably pretty bummed. Or think about how time spent alone in your apartment (perhaps during a pandemic quarantine)

feels versus time spent at an intimate party with some of your closest friends. It's a wildly different experience, right?

Brené Brown is a research professor at the University of Houston who specializes in social connection. She is also an amazingly wise, funny, and successful best-selling author whose TED talks have been watched tens of millions of times. Brené shared¹:

“A deep sense of love and belonging is an irresistible need of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. When those needs are not met, we don't function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick.”

In a nutshell? Humans are profoundly social creatures. While it can seem like we all want power, money, beauty, fame, an Hermès necklace or a Tesla—at the root of most of these desires is our deep-seated yearning to be accepted, to belong, to be loved, and of course to connect deeply with others around us.

This need for connection starts when we're babies and lasts our whole lives. Babies who are not cuddled or hugged enough may stop growing at normal rates, and if the situation goes on long enough, they can even die. You don't have to look any further than the orphaned kids of Romania² that grew up unloved and uncuddled in orphanages between 1965 and 1989 to see the true nightmare our lives become when we are left alone, disconnected, and unloved from birth. Touch, connection, and real care are non-negotiable for the development of healthy humans.

A lack of connection kills

In the United States, loneliness rates have more than doubled

in the last forty years, and 61 percent of American adults now report that they feel lonely.³ In Japan, the number of seniors living alone increased more than six-fold from 1980 to 2015, and in 2018, over one million adults met the official government definition of hikikomori,⁴ or a complete social recluse who never leaves their home. I don't know about you, but just reading that made me a little sad.

While a lack of connection, or social isolation, is not yet classified as a health condition by the medical community, a growing stack of research shows its astounding impact on our wellbeing. In fact, more and more studies⁵ show that loneliness is the invisible root cause behind many health conditions, including addiction, depression, and heart disease—causing a 32 percent increased risk of stroke and doubling a person's likelihood of developing Alzheimer's.

One study found that social isolation leads to a higher risk of death, and it has an impact on our health that's similar to that of obesity, smoking fifteen cigarettes a day, excessive alcohol consumption, and a lack of physical activity.⁶ Another report concluded that a lack of feeling connected can even make people more vulnerable to viruses like the common cold, the flu, or even COVID-19⁷ because the resulting loneliness causes changes in gene expression in our white blood cells which result in reduced immune defenses.⁸

I think you'll agree that when you take all of this data into consideration—loneliness—or feeling a lack of connection, is a critical health issue. Our ability to connect, and create strong support systems, is linked to our health, our happiness, our success, our longevity, even to our thinner waistlines.⁹ Here are more reasons why it's so important that we all form great connections.¹⁰

Strive for a healthy weight

Social support inversely correlates to your body mass index (BMI)—which is weight divided by height. That means that on average, the bigger your social network—the lower your BMI and weight will be. In a 2014 *Journal of School Health* study of 13,428 adolescents, children who felt more socially connected in their school environments tended to have lower BMI. A study of older Koreans found that those who had larger social networks with whom they interacted regularly had overall healthier weights.¹¹

Boost your immune system

This may sound far-fetched, but human connection can even strengthen your immune system. Several studies have shown that better social support predicts how robust the immune response will be. For example, those who had more close connections, were less likely to catch the common cold.¹² Social support and stronger connections have also been linked to the antibody response that people have after they've gotten their flu shots. Turns out, the more human connection and support they have in their lives—the more antibodies they develop, and the more immunity they enjoy.¹³

Enjoy better mental health

Most of us understand that great relationships are the foundation of a happy life. We don't need science to tell us that. However, scientists have studied the link between human connection and mental health extensively. A 2014 Finnish study found that those with tighter social networks reported less loneliness and more positive emotions in their daily lives.¹⁴ A wealth of other research suggests that loneliness can interfere with mental functioning, sleep, and well-being, which in turn increases the risk of illness and death.¹⁵

Live longer

According to a 2010 deep dive assessment of over 300,000 people, good social relationships were just as important for longevity as the avoidance of excessive smoking or drinking!¹⁶ Nuts, right? Not really. Think about it. Anyone who's connected to a strong social support network is more likely to engage in healthy behaviors like exercise, proper nutrition, and stress management. Strong human connection also fosters positive emotions, which in turn positively impact the body.¹⁷

We should prescribe social connection

Given the huge impact that loneliness and the lack of connection has on our mental and physical health—along with its hidden role in the development of so many chronic conditions—it seems logical that we need to hold the importance of connection in the same esteem as a healthy diet, regular exercise, not smoking, and obesity reduction.

One U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine report suggested it was high time that health care professionals screened for loneliness. That it was time that governments and insurers fund research into loneliness' causes, effects, and cures; and that we needed to launch loneliness awareness campaigns targeted at people of all ages. There's also value in the idea that doctors and therapists need to 'prescribe' social connection in an effort to better link people to the resources and activities that can help them be less isolated.

Experts are predicting a skyrocketing loneliness crisis that will create a wave of mental illness, suicide, substance abuse, and violence borne of social isolation, especially for our loneliest populations: the young, the old, the poor, and immigrants. Knowing that, it would be helpful if we could destigmatize loneliness so that we are able to talk more openly about it when we feel disconnected—because this feeling is an expression of

our innate human need to belong and connect. Loneliness is not a failure and should be something we feel comfortable talking to our family and friends about; doctors and therapists should bring it up too, and we probably could use some national campaigns to normalize and address the issue.

Connections Change Lives

Your personal human connections (the people you know from school, church, work, or your socials feeds) can not only keep you healthier and happier, they also have the power to get you a better job, a bigger paycheck, a better social network, or even just a better weekend. They may help you meet your future life partner, introduce you to your new best friend, or turn you on to the hobby that becomes your passion. Who you know dictates your life.

Love connections

According to a Facebook study, about 28 percent of college alumni ended up marrying their college boyfriend or girlfriend.¹⁸ Princeton tour guides are often asked about their college cohorts' matrimonial prospects and they are known to offer up outlandish statistics. They'll happily exaggerate to prospective students by telling them that they're 75 percent likely to marry a Princetonian if they attend. However, with an insular campus social scene, annual reunions, and a network of alumni organizations in most major cities, realistic opportunities to find a special someone wearing Princeton orange are plentiful.¹⁹

Think college is a good place to connect to a mate? Wait until you get into the workplace. Almost 36 percent of employees have had a romantic relationship with a coworker and a third of work relationships result in marriage. Compared to relationships that start in bars or clubs, workplace romances are the most likely to end in a long-term commitment.

Work connections

LinkedIn research shows that a whopping 70 percent of people were hired at a company where they already had a connection in place.²⁰ That should be all the motivation you need to learn how to leverage your network to get referred by someone. At the most desirable companies such as Apple, Google, Facebook, Microsoft, or Instagram the number is even higher, with 95 percent landing jobs because of their connections. It makes sense when you think about it. Everyone wants to work with good people, so if you used to like working with someone at another company a few years ago it's easy for you to recommend them for a position at your current company. Plus, when people get a referral from someone they liked working with, they tend to take it more seriously. Your past experience with the candidate gives them a certain cachet if you will. Candidates whose resumes are submitted by someone the company knows have 20 times more chance of getting hired over someone who applied online. Anecdotally, it is logical that well-liked people get ahead. People who are known are hired faster than people who are not.

Lastly, networking at your company among other employees, makes you a better-known candidate when a promotion opportunity comes up. If recruiters can put a face to the name on the CV and already know your strengths from previous meetings, you're starting your application on a strong footing.²¹

As you dig deeper into understanding connection, you'll come to see how the humans around you have the power to make life so much more interesting, entertaining, and enriching, so it's critical you don't ignore or avoid your connection opportunities. In the next chapter, we'll delve into why so many of us hate talking to people we don't know well and why we'd rather get our nether regions waxed than hit that work function with our new team members. Why do we shy away from connecting

with others and often opt for easy nights at home? I will map out ways to help you address those feelings of discomfort around meeting new people, and I'll provide simple strategies for overcoming that pesky imposter syndrome. (You know, when you feel like a fraud despite being smart, talented, and 100 percent capable.) I'll also address all the excuses that hold us back from really jumping into the mix of life.



What's the Point?

When you put effort into being curious about people, and work to get to know them, you'll uncover connections that can create unexpected, meaningful, and even magical bonds.