

THE BIG IDEAS

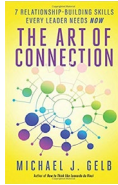
Conjungere Ad Solvendum
Connect before solving.

ADD x 2
Addiction to devices --> Deficit.

Practice Kindness
Find OTLs.

Pygmalion Effect
See the best.

Centering Ourselves
Practice in the dojo of life.



The Art of Connection

7 Relationship-Building Skills Every Leader Needs Now

BY MICHAEL J. GELB · NEW WORLD LIBRARY © 2017 · 280 PAGES

“The art of connection—creating and maintaining genuine rapport with others—is the key to building relationships, resolving conflict, and making creative dreams come true.

This book is for you, if you:

- Are an aspiring leader who wishes to cultivate the relationship-building skills necessary to translate creative visions into practical realities;
- Would like to differentiate yourself from the growing tendency toward shallow and superficial communication;
- Seek a stronger sense of connection and fulfillment in all your relationships;
- Wish to discover, and to help others discover, a deeper sense of meaning, purpose, and connection.

When it comes to learning and developing this art, we all need all the help we can get!”

~ Michael Gelb from *The Art of Connection*

Michael Gelb is one of the world’s leading thinkers on applied creativity. He’s also a dear friend and mentor. And an aikido and qi gong master. (I do [the simple qi gong practice](#) he taught me every morning on Trail.)

This is our fourth Note on his books. We started with one of my favorite books ever: [How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci](#). And, we’ve covered more recent titles like [Brain Power](#) and [Creativity on Demand](#).

In this book, we get to explore 7 skills for mastering the art of connection. (Get a copy [here!](#))

I say we jump straight in!

CONJUNGERE AD SOLVENDUM

“*Conjungere ad solvendum* is Latin for ‘Connect before solving.’ I made up this motto because, through teaching and facilitating innovative thinking for decades, I’ve discovered that the most powerful catalyst for inspiring creative breakthroughs and translating those breakthroughs into sustainable innovation is to guide people to *connect with one another first, before trying to solve a problem*.

When people really listen, when they are fully present with one another, it is, as pioneering psychotherapist Carl Rogers describes, ‘astonishing how elements which seem insoluble become soluble.’ Rogers adds that when genuine connection happens, ‘confusions which seem irremediable turn into relatively clear flowing streams.’

This isn’t just true in therapy. Connection facilitates creativity in all domains. When people truly

“You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.”

~ Dale Carnegie

listen to one another, something reliably magical happens: seemingly irremediable confusions do become clear flowing streams. This is true in a marriage, a friendship, or a professional collaboration.”

We'll start with the “why” connection matters.

As Michael says: “*Connection facilitates creativity in all domains. When people truly listen to one another, something reliably magical happens: seemingly irremediable confusions do become clear flowing streams. This is true in a marriage, a friendship, or a professional collaboration.*”

And...

I'll extend that to parenting as well. As I shared in a recent Note on [Breathe In, Breathe Out](#) where we talked about the power of breath to deal with impatience, it's AMAZING to me what happens when I slow down and, *literally*, connect with our 5-year-old son Emerson. Truly magical stuff.

Alright. So, connection is essential. How do we master the art?

ADD: ADDICTION TO DIGITAL DEVICES

*“A wealth of information
creates a poverty of
attention.”*
~ Herbert Simon

“Five hundred years earlier, the great Italian polymath Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) predicted: ‘Men standing in opposite hemispheres will converse and deride each other and embrace each other and understand each other’s language.’ But even a genius like Leonardo might not have foreseen the pandemic of addiction to digital devices. Overdependence on technology is perverting our ability to develop human relationships and damaging our brains and our bodies.

At a recent CEO summit, Richard J. Davidson, professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, explained, ‘I think if we’re all honest about it, we all suffer from attention deficit disorder, and it’s in part attributable to the kind of exposure we have to digital devices.’ Davidson added, ‘Device dependence is highly reinforcing, so it becomes like a drug. And in fact it co-opts the same brain systems that are indicated in addiction.’ In other words, ADD (attention deficit disorder) is getting worse because of ADD (addiction to digital devices).”

ADD.

We all know it as “attention deficit disorder.”

Let’s add in another way to understand that acronym: “addiction to digital devices.”

As leading neuroscientist Richie Davidson ([see our Notes](#) on his great book *The Emotional Life of Your Brain*) says, we’re ALL experiencing a little ADD.

We echoed Davidson’s thoughts on the subject in another recent Note. Here’s how leading creativity researcher, Scott Barry Kaufman, puts it in [Wired to Create](#): “Neuroscientist Richard Davidson has said that the way we live today is causing a ‘national attention deficit,’ while researcher Linda Stone warns that modern life is increasingly lived within a state of ‘continuous partial attention.’ Most of us know that state all too well—we’re continually having our attention pulled away from the task at hand by notifications, alerts, calls, texts, emails, and other digital stimulation. Stone explains, ‘In large doses, [continuous partial attention] contributes to a stressful lifestyle, to operating in crisis management mode, and to a compromised ability to reflect, to make decisions, and to think creatively. In a 24/7, always-on world, continuous partial attention used as our dominant attention mode contributes to a feeling of overwhelm, overstimulation and to a sense of being unfulfilled.’”

And, of course, we talk about this in more depth in Adam Alter’s [Irresistible](#). He echoes the perspective that using digital devices is a lot like using drugs.

“Leadership is the art of accomplishing more than the science of management says is possible.”

~ Colin Powell

Only he shines a light on the CREATORS of the technology. He tells us about the fact that Steve Jobs and a number of other top attention economy execs don't let their own kids use their own devices. And says: *“It seemed as if the people producing tech products were following the cardinal rule of drug dealing: never get high on your own supply. This is unsettling. Why are the world's greatest public technocrats also its greatest private technophobes? Can you imagine the outcry if religious leaders refused to let their children practice religion?”*

So, what's the effect on this “continuous partial addiction” on our relationships?

Easy. It's toxic.

If we're constantly distracted by a digital device there is NO WAY we'll be able to connect as deeply as we'd like.

So... Step 1. Limit your digital devices when/if you want to connect deeply. Period.

P.S. Michael tells us: *“Public radio host and conversation expert Celeste Headlee advises: ‘Many of you have already heard a lot of advice on this, things like look the person in the eye, ... look, nod, and smile to show that you're paying attention. I want you to forget all of that. It is crap. There is no reason to learn how to show you're paying attention if you are in fact paying attention.’”*

<— That's fantastic. :)

P.P.S. At the beginning of this section on “Overcoming ADD,” Michael shares a brilliant thought from Herbert Simon—a psychologist and Nobel Laureate in Economics who helped create our understanding of “attention economics.”

Simon tells us: *“...information consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it.”*

Guess when he wrote that. 1971. I wasn't born yet. TVs had a few stations. Newspapers were delivered to your door step. VHS hadn't even been invented yet.

What would he say about our situation TODAY?

Now, here's the thing. It's easy to read that quote and say, “Wow. Yah. That guy was wise. So true.” And then go on utterly destroying our attention as we indiscriminately consume an astonishing amount of meaningless incoming data.

Recall that in [The Checklist Manifesto](#) we talked about the reasons we err. We have three basic reasons. 1. Necessary fallibility: Some things are just beyond our capacity; 2. Ignorance: Some times we just don't know how to do something; and, 3. Ineptitude: Some times we KNOW what to do, we just don't do it.

I think it's pretty safe to say we all know some things we *could* be doing to more wisely allocate our attention. So... What are they?

What's ONE thing you know you *could* be doing to Optimize your attention? Is today a good day to move from theory to practice on it? From ineptitude to mastery?

KINDNESS + OTLS

“One of the simplest ways to practice the art of connection is to look for opportunities to perform acts of intentional, deliberate connection and kindness in daily life. Smile and make eye contact with the teller at the bank and the clerk at the pharmacy. Hold a door open, slow down to allow another driver to enter your lane, offer your seat on a crowded subway, help someone get carry-on luggage down from the overhead bin. Notice how you feel when you do these simple acts. You'll delight others, but you'll also find that you feel better, more energized and connected.”

That's from the chapter called "Embrace Humility"—which happens to be the first of the 7 relationship-building skills Michael walks us through in the book.

All those little ways to connect? Barbara Fredrickson would call them "micro-moments of positivity resonance." They form the heart of *Love 2.0*.

Each little act of "intentional, deliberate connection and kindness in daily life" takes us out of what Barbara calls our "cocoon of self-absorption." We move from *disconnection* to CONNECTION.

Her research is unequivocal: We're wired to experience those micro-moments of positivity resonance. Our job? We need to deliberately find opportunities to connect.

[Michelle Segar](#) is a leading researcher on the science of doing the things that are good for us—like exercising, eating well, sleeping enough, etc. As we discuss in [Movement 101](#), she tells us that one of the things we want to do to boost our well-being is to find "opportunities to move." She abbreviates that to OTMs and reminds us that it's the MICRO moments of movement during the day that add up quickly to help us Optimize our energy.

I like to apply that to these micro moments of love. "Opportunities to love." OTLs.

(If we ever create a daily journal to help us Optimize a) It will be called "Carpe Diem" and b) It will include OTL boxes to check to remind us to find these Opportunities to Love.)

So... Here's a check box.

[] OTL ← Go find a way to be kind today. :)

THE PYGMALION EFFECT

"A man should never be appointed to a managerial position if his vision focuses on people's weaknesses rather than on their strengths."

~ Peter Drucker

"The notion that positive expectations tend to elevate performance is known as the Pygmalion effect. It is also called the Rosenthal effect, after Robert Rosenthal, the pioneer of research into interpersonal self-fulfilling prophecies. After almost fifty years of study in both the laboratory and the field, Rosenthal observes: 'We have learned that when teachers have been led to expect better intellectual performance from their students, they tend to get it. When coaches are led to expect better athletic performance from their athletes, they tend to get it.'

In one of the original studies at an elementary school in the San Francisco area, Rosenthal chose a few children randomly and told their teachers that these children would demonstrate dramatic improvements in IQ. After two years the children's IQ conformed to the teachers' expectations.

Was the improvement the result of some mystical transference? No. The effect is mediated through nonverbal cues. Rosenthal explains, 'It's not magic, it's not mental telepathy.' He found that 'expectations affect teachers' moment-to-moment interactions with the children they teach in a thousand almost invisible ways. Teachers give the students that they expect to succeed more time to answer questions, more specific feedback, and more approval: they consistently touch, nod, and smile at those kids more.'

In other words, there's valid research behind the idea that if you look for the best in others, you will usually find it."

Want to deepen your connection with others? Look for the best in them.

In addition to both SEEING the good that's already in them *and* *helping create* even more good that you believe is there, you also become the type of person people want to be around.

Right?

Who wants to hang out with someone who's constantly seeing the worst in them? And, stated positively, how refreshing and inspiring is it to connect with someone who sees and values our potential?

*"Treat a man as he is, and he
will remain as he is.
Treat a man as he ought to
be, and you help him become
what he is capable of
becoming."*

~ Johan Wolfgang von Goethe

Reminds me of Tal Ben-Shahar's wisdom from [The Pursuit of Perfect](#) where he tells us about the double goodness of appreciating people: "The word appreciate has two meanings. The first meaning is 'to be thankful,' the opposite of taking something for granted. The second meaning is 'to increase in value' (as money appreciates in the bank). Combined, these two meanings point to a truth that has been proved repeatedly in research on gratitude: when we appreciate the good in our lives, the good grows and we have more of it. The opposite, sadly, is also true: when we fail to appreciate the good—when we take the good in our lives for granted—the good depreciates."

So... Who's important in your life? Know that your EXPECTATION of them is creating a self-fulfilling prophecy—for the good or for the not so good.

Let's shine a light of love on them. Let's treat them like they're amazing.

P.S. As Michael said in our interview: You need to discover the potential within *yourself* before you're going to be able to consistently see it in others.

P.P.S. [Eknath Easwaran](#) gives us a great tool to practice seeing the best in those moments when we feel frustrated: "To give one small illustration, whenever somebody is unkind to me, I can immediately unroll the panorama of that person's good qualities. Instantly the balance is set right. As with most skills, this is a matter of practice. When you are having trouble getting along with someone, a simple first step is to sit down quietly and recall how many times that person has given you support. You are using positive memories to drive out negative ones before they have a chance to crowd together and form a mob, which is all resentment really is."

CENTERING OURSELVES

*"Anyone can hold the helm
when the sea is calm."*

~ Publilius Syrus

"In the 1990s I trained regularly at the dojo of Mitsugo Saotome Shihan, one of the great contemporary aikido masters. A resident student with O-Sensei for fifteen years before being sent to the United States to represent the art, Saotome shared many stories of his time with Ueshiba. He recounted the awe with which all the resident students beheld their master.

On one occasion Saotome exclaimed to his teacher: 'Your techniques are perfect! You never make any mistakes. You never lose your center!'

O-Sensei replied, 'I lose my center frequently. I just find it again so quickly that you can't see it.'"

First, Morihei Ueshiba. The founder of Aikido.

He was one of the greatest martial artists and spiritual sages ever. And, even HE lost his center. But... He was *really* good at recovering it. :)

Reminds me of Marcus Aurelius and Michael Beckwith.

In [Meditations](#), Aurelius tells us that we WILL lose our center. The trick is to see how quickly we can recover it: "When force of circumstance upsets your equanimity, lose no time in recovering your self-control, and do not remain out of tune longer than you can help. Habitual recurrence to the harmony will increase your mastery of it."

And, in [Spiritual Liberation](#), Beckwith tells us that even enlightened beings burn their bagels on occasion. "A conscious realization of our innate oneness with the Ineffable does not mean that we will never make a mistake again. Even enlightened beings burn their bagels once in a while. It's important to maintain a sense of humor because this is how you will stop being afraid of making a mistake. You'll make some, but so what? That's why they're called mis-takes. Humor relaxes the uptight ego. You get a new cue from your inner Self and simply say, 'I missed my cue, so let's do a second take.' Your willingness to take the risk of making a mistake is actually an expression of courage and a willingness to grow from them. Mistakes are about getting the blessing in the lesson and the lesson in the blessing."

"When we quit thinking primarily about ourselves and our own self-preservation, we undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness."

~ Joseph Campbell

So... How does this apply to the art of connection?

Well, first we need to know that we WILL lose our center in our relationships.

As Craig Malkin puts it in [Rethinking Narcissism](#): "You can't get close enough to touch someone without stepping on their toes.' We inevitably hurt the people we love. The key to happy relationships with our children—or with anyone, for that matter—isn't being perfect. It's having the courage to acknowledge when we screw up. That's repair work, and it's central to developing healthy narcissism."

The trick, of course, is to see how quickly we can REGAIN our centered connection in those moments of disconnection.

How? Michael tells us: "The key to developing centering skill is to practice every day in the nonthreatening situations, so you can call on the skill when you're under stress."

Sounds a lot like [The Equanimity Game](#). Practice with the TINY things and, over time, it's amazing how that "Habitual recurrence to the harmony will increase your mastery of it." For the little AND the "big things."

Ueshiba would agree. In [The Art of Peace](#) he tells us: "One does not need buildings, money, power, or status to practice the Art of Peace. Heaven is right where you are standing, and this is the place to train."

Here's to our moment-to-moment training in the Art of Connection in the dojo that is our lives.

I appreciate you and your support and I'm sending lots of love to you and your Loves!

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives so they can actualize their potential as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + practical tools. Learn more and optimize your life at optimize.me.