

"If you want to be a leader of the future, you must know how to build alliances and partnerships—*The Connector's Advantage* will help you do just that."

MARSHALL GOLDSMITH, two-time Thinkers50 World's #1 Leadership Thinker



THE
CONNECTOR'S
ADVANTAGE

**7 Mindsets to Grow Your
Influence and Impact**

MICHELLE TILLIS LEDERMAN

Foreword by **Ivan Misner**

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What Level Connector Are You?

“I think anything is possible if you have the mindset and the will and desire to do it and put the time in.”

ROGER CLEMENS

I HAD a theory. When I thought about the Connectors I knew, I recognized certain characteristics about how most of them think and act. As a rule, they were often accepting, trusting, and conscientious, to name just a few traits I noticed. In order to validate (or revise) my theory, I conducted an extensive survey on the attributes that I hypothesized led to a Connector approach to relationships. The survey looked at the attributes of self-esteem, conscientiousness, extraversion, emotional intelligence, trust, locus of control, political skill, and authenticity as well as behaviors about appreciation, community, and responsiveness.

In addition to the survey, I conducted extensive interviews with different types of Connectors. What I found is that my hunch was true—Connectors do have certain behaviors, ways of doing things

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and ways of looking at the world, all of which add up to stronger relationships. For example, 98% of Connectors are genuine during their communication with others—they don't put up walls or feign interest in someone to impress. They're also highly emotionally intelligent—Connectors are 5.5 times more likely to know their friends' emotions from their behavior than Non-Connectors.

The next section of the book will share the seven mindsets of a Connector and how you can adopt them into your way of thinking and interacting.

1. Connectors Are Open and Accepting
2. Connectors Have Clear Vision
3. Connectors Believe in Abundance
4. Connectors Trust
5. Connectors Are Social and Curious
6. Connectors Are Conscientious
7. Connectors Have a Generous Spirit

Whether or not the mindsets are already a part of your nature, you will benefit from the advice of the powerhouse experts and Connectors who share their knowledge throughout the book.

The likelihood is that all of us have some of these mindsets as part of our approach to people already. My research with the survey revealed that the differentiation on a few of these mindsets isn't large, which suggests that it's often a subtle tweak in your behavior that can take you to the next level of Connector. First, you have to determine which level you are right now. Then you can decide what type you want to be. Perhaps you are already there and simply want to enhance the level that works for you.

A Connector Defined

A **Connector** is someone with a certain way of thinking and behaving, who acts and gets results with ease because they have a level of

credibility and trust in and from their network. When they ask for something or make an introduction, it carries weight and people respond.

In his book *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell states that the most obvious criterion is that Connectors know a lot of people.¹ He further describes a Connector as someone with an impulse to connect as a personality trait.² Here is where Gladwell and I differ. Though I agree some people have a natural tendency toward this way of thinking and behaving, I believe anyone can infuse these actions into their interactions and, if not born a Connector, become one.

In chapter 1, I described the mindset of a Connector as a person who is people- and relationship-focused. That is the foundation, but that definition needs to be expanded. In my survey, I presented the hypothesis that a Connector is defined by the following characteristics:

- knows a lot or a diverse set of people;
- connects other people frequently and for their benefit, not for self-interest;
- likes people and enjoys meeting new people and collects acquaintances;
- displays listening and caring by remembering information about people; and
- seeks to help others in various ways.

Whereas many characteristics in the survey had moderate variations, there was one area that revealed a dramatic difference in the thinking of a Connector. Nearly 97% of Connectors agreed with the statement “I derive personal satisfaction from creating connections or bringing people together.” No other area of the survey received that overwhelming of a response. What was interesting was how much less Non-Connectors felt the same way. The survey showed Connectors are more than 60% more likely to derive satisfaction from creating connections than Non-Connectors. The result shows the self-fulfilling nature of connection. Connectors simply enjoy connecting others. One basic thing anyone can do to increase their

tendency to connection is find the satisfaction in the act itself, not the result that comes from it.

The Connector Spectrum

We've probably all heard the question, "Do you know so-and-so?" How many times has someone asked you that? Too many to count, probably. It is a great question to ask to find a connection point when you're first meeting someone, because finding out who you know in common can instantly build trust, rapport, and familiarity.

When asked, "Do you know so-and-so?" how often did you say, "Yes!?" Gut check: was your answer "usually yes" or "usually no" or somewhere in between? That may be your first indication as to where you fall on the spectrum from Non-Connector to Super Connector.

There are levels of Connectors—some are natural Connectors, but not all are social butterflies. As I explained, almost everyone has some Connector tendencies. Whether or not we are naturally wired with all the Connector attributes, the likelihood is that we have a few of them. How many you access regularly influences what level of Connector you are.

The difference between the levels of Connectors is based on two spectrums:

1. the breadth and depth of your connections, and
2. your tendency to initiate or respond to others.

The level of Connector you are is not fixed, not an absolute. And being a Super Connector is not necessarily the goal for everyone. Consider the categories of the spectrum, where you are now, and where you want to be.

Super Connectors and Global Super Connectors

This is the highest-level Connector possible, but not everyone needs or wants to be a **Super Connector**. The breadth of your network crosses geographic areas, demographic differences, personal interests,

professional industries, and job titles. The depth of a Super Connector's network takes you up and down the ladder. You know people in all job functions and at all levels in their careers. A **Global Super Connector** has geographic depth and breadth beyond their country's borders.

If this is your level, you have contacts that are more than acquaintances in these different areas, and their reach is varied. You fully embrace the value of relationships and the Connector mindsets, and you are actively connecting—likely on a daily basis.

A misconception about Super Connectors is that they have been in their field for a while or are at the pinnacle of their careers. Not true and by no means necessary. Jared Kleinert is a perfect example. He founded an edtech company at 15 years old. “I didn’t want to get stuck in a cycle of normalcy,” he explains. So he then reached out to David Hassell, founder of 15Five, who ended up mentoring and eventually hiring him, all because Jared simply emailed him and asked. He’s contacted and befriended hundreds of highly successful entrepreneurs by offering to help them with what they’re working on; *USA Today* named him the “Most Connected Millennial.” Jared coauthored the books *2 Billion Under 20: How Millennials Are Breaking Down Age Barriers and Changing the World* and *3 Billion Under 30: How Millennials Continue Redefining Success, Breaking Barriers, and Changing the World*, which profiles millennials from around the globe who have collectively started companies worth billions of dollars and positively impacted millions of people through their work, platform, and advocacy. When I learned all this about him, he was only 22 years old. Jared shares what he learned from millennial outliers in chapter 12. In a way, it was easier for Jared to reach out because he didn’t have family responsibilities or even rent to pay: he was able to offer free assistance and many took him up on it. Teen, graduate, or well into your middle age, there are ways to connect and keep connecting. Don’t let age or circumstance hold you back.

Niche Connectors

Niche Connectors have a concentration in a specific area. It could be a geographic region, industry, or job function. The breadth and depth exist, but only within the area of their niche.

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My sister, April Meyers, is a great example of a Niche Connector. She's an entrepreneur and has owned her own business for more than 25 years. April knows everyone in the real estate foreclosure market in New Jersey and everyone knows her. Whether an investor, lawyer, banker, or broker, they come to April for answers. My sister is not only a Niche Connector in her industry but also in her community. She is the mother of four kids with ages spanning a decade who themselves play multiple sports and are part of diverse clubs. It is rare that someone in her town doesn't know or hasn't at least heard of April.

What makes April a great Connector is that she makes things happen. I wrote a book with NBC after my sister ran into an old elementary-school friend who was head of its digital publishing division. She didn't just have the conversation; she followed it up. She put us in touch and told us why she was doing it. Within 14 months, we landed a sponsor, produced a book, and made a resource available to returning service members for free. From the outside, it looked like I got lucky. But I don't think it was luck: I was the beneficiary of a Connector.

Giana, a woman in my community, is another perfect example. She is the hardest-working unpaid person I know and extremely connected within the area. She's on several local boards, the class parent almost every year, and the president of the PTA for two different schools! She just canceled our lunch plans because of a deadline for one of her many volunteer positions. In this community, Giana knows the what, why, and how. She's an information source and often jokingly referred to as "the mayor." Her network is this community. She doesn't have broad reach across industries or geographies, but here she is connected.

Emerging, Responsive, and Acting Connectors

Most of the world likely lives in this category. As an **Emerging Connector**, you are on the connection path. You may embody some of the behaviors but don't yet embody all the elements and mindset. Or you may embrace all the mindsets but are not consistently applying

them. A **Responsive Connector** is when you are starting to initiate the behaviors, but tend to be more responsive to requests, rather than creating value opportunities. An **Acting Connector** is consistently applying and initiating more often, but has yet to develop the breadth and depth of their network. That may be enough for you and you do not need to advance beyond to be a Niche or Super Connector.

Responsive, Emerging, and Acting Connectors understand that connecting is valuable, but it doesn't necessarily come naturally. If this is you, fantastic! You are already infusing the mindsets and some of the behaviors into your activities. Remember, this is the largest category and it is a spectrum. My husband, Michael, is a great example of how you can move and advance through this category.

When I first met Michael, a natural introvert, I would have put him at the beginning of this category as an Emerging Connector. I remember when he started business school and relied on my extroverted nature to help him break into conversations. I had graduated from the same school years earlier, but I took a back seat to let him take the lead. He understood the value of relationships and his ability to initiate and prioritize them emerged.

After business school, Michael held the same job for seven years—a job he had heard about from a connection I went to business school with who referred him for the position. When he was ready to move on, he realized he needed to grow his small, but solid network. He was getting out there and people were making introductions for him; it was going well. When I encouragingly inquired, “What have you done for your network?” He responded, “Nothing yet, but I'd do anything I could if I was asked.” That is a common mindset of a Responsive Connector. They are open and willing, but don't always recognize how and when they can add value and therefore don't initiate it.

During that time and through his next position, Michael joined an industry organization for people in high-level technology positions. Eventually he took a board position in the organization. He became known among his peers and often proactively shared job postings he had heard about with the members in the transition

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group. It became part of his thinking to consider how he could help those in his network with introductions and information. He evolved into an Acting Connector. When he was looking for that next role, he had multiple people clamoring with ideas and leads. He landed his most recent position very shortly after he began his search. When he started connecting and helping others, it made all the difference.

Non-Connectors

The last type of Connector is a **Non-Connector**—someone who doesn't see the value in it or is really uncomfortable with the idea. Those types can benefit from all of this as well—connecting doesn't have to be big, ugly, or scary. I've said it before and I'll say it again: *anyone can be a Connector.*

If you are putting yourself in the Non-Connector category, I have a few questions for you.

- *Are you being too hard on yourself?* Often we don't give ourselves credit for the things that we do. Would other people put you in this category? All of us connect, though we don't always associate the relationships we have with "being connected."
- *Do you see the value in connecting?* Perhaps this is your norm because you haven't seen the value in a different approach. Perhaps you are a bit gun-shy—a past relationship didn't work out or you didn't receive the response you'd hoped for. With a new approach and a new connection, you may get a different reaction.
- *What is one place where (or type of person with whom) you feel comfortable connecting?* You are likely already connecting but don't recognize it as such; it is just what you do. Whether it is social or professional, start where you are already. Acknowledge what works for you and build from there.

SO WHAT level Connector are you, what level do you want to be, and how do you move up? There are Connectors in every age group and region, from every background, and of all dispositions. Some have

had multiple careers or been a part of multiple communities that broadened their reach. Religious organizations, volunteer groups, camps, schools, and hobbies are all places connections naturally form and develop.

You can be a Connector. Confidence and trust in yourself will bolster your ability and willingness. And—this goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway—you have to be open to different experiences and to broadening your network. Your goal shouldn't necessarily be to become a Super Connector—determine which level *you* aspire to. For example, my sister is exactly where she needs to be as a Niche Connector. If you're a Non-Connector, go for Emerging. If you're Responsive, work toward Acting. If you want to go global and become a Super Connector, do it! Honestly, if this book helps you become more of a Connector than you already are, it will be a success.

Ultimately, being a Connector is a mindset. It's not doing something; it's *being* someone. The next section of the book will examine the seven mindsets of a Connector and how you can infuse these ways of thinking and acting into your approach to people and relationships.



Refresh Your Memory

Global Super Connectors: These Super Connectors have a broad network with geographic depth beyond their country's borders. Not everyone should strive to be this highest level of Connector.

Super Connectors: The breadth of your network crosses geographic areas, demographic differences, personal interests, professional industry, job functions, titles, and levels.

Niche Connectors: Niche Connectors have a concentration in a specific area. It could be a geographic region, industry, or job function. The breadth and depth exist, but only within the area of their niche.

Acting Connectors: Connecting has become part of your thinking. You consider how to help those in your network with introductions and information. Your network's breadth and depth are growing.

Responsive Connectors: This level is open and willing, but does not always recognize how and when you can add value and therefore you don't initiate the connection or offer of assistance.

Emerging Connectors: This is the start of connecting. An Emerging Connector embodies some of the behaviors, but not yet all of the elements and mindsets. Or you are not yet consistently applying them.

Non-Connectors: A Non-Connector doesn't see the value in or is really uncomfortable with the idea of connecting.