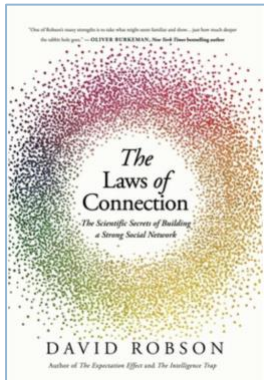


'CliffsNotes' Book Club Recap

DO YOU LOVE BOOKS ON LEADERSHIP, NEUROSCIENCE, AND BUSINESS, BUT NOT HAVE TIME TO READ ALL THE BOOKS?

Join the '**CliffsNotes' club**—where there's no pressure to pre-read the book, no membership required, no cost, and lots of discussion in just 90 minutes. Each month, you will hear a **summary of highlights** from a recently-published business book. This discussion summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. We'll keep you "in the know" on the latest and greatest concepts and models. **Register here** for upcoming events.



September 2024

The Laws of Connection

The Scientific Secrets of Building a Strong Social Network

By David Robson

Discussion Highlights

Presented by Tommy Zarembka

Introduction

Would I recommend this book? Depends. Yes, if you are interested in this subject.

Did I learn something? In a work setting, move away from niceties and try to connect deeper.

- Remember past conversations
- Ask pointed questions
- Have planned questions that could reveal something more about the other person (i.e., if you can go to one concert, what concert would you attend?)
- Focus on listening
- Be curious/interested

Did this book change me? Got me to examine closer interactions/conversations.

+++

- The craving for connection is a universal experience.
- A deep sense of connection comes from constructing a 'shared reality' with another person.
- Shared reality: you have a strong sense of experiencing the same inner life—so that your thoughts, feelings and beliefs coincide.
- Book shows ways we construct a shared reality with the people we meet—and the common psychological barriers that can prevent it from forming.
 - For example, the 'Liking gap' leads us to ignore the potential for connection.
 - Liking gap: a common bias in which we assume that we like another person a lot more than they like us.

Thirteen Laws of Connection – These laws help us establish and maintain stronger relationships.

1. Be consistent in your treatment of others. Avoid becoming a stressful frenemy.

- Ingredients for a good health. The Alameda 7:
 1. Don't smoke
 2. Drink in moderation
 3. Sleep 7-8 hours a night
 4. Exercise
 5. Avoid snacks
 6. Maintain a moderate weight
 7. Eat breakfast

- Added an eighth factor: social connection. The more people feel supported by the people around them, the better their health.
- Three broad categories of relationships:
 1. Supportive relationships
 2. Aversive relationships
 3. Ambivalent relationships
- Our supportive relationships are the most beneficial and the ambivalent are the most harmful.
- Ambivalent connections deserve particular attention. Ambivalent relationships are these members of our social network are highly unreliable; they help or hurt in equal measure, and their unpredictable behavior can trigger stronger stress responses than purely aversive acquaintances.

2. Create a mutual understanding with the people you meet. Ignore superficial similarities and instead focus on your internal world, and the peculiar ways that your thoughts and feelings coincide.

- 'Shared reality' is the foundation upon which all meaningful social connection is built. To feel a shared reality with someone, you have the strong sense of experiencing the same inner life—so that your thoughts, feelings and beliefs coincide.
- We want to know someone is experiencing the world in the same way as we are.
- The data that the brain receives is very ambiguous, and there are many ways that it can interpret what it sees and hears. In isolation, we have no way of knowing whether our understanding of events is valid...someone else provides the necessary reassurance that our experiences are valid, allowing us to have greater faith in our own judgements.
- [In this sense] loneliness is actively looking for validation of thoughts and feelings and not finding them.
- Each of our relationships will be the product of hundreds or even thousands of tiny events that either underline or undermine our sense of a shared reality.
- Self-expansion: the feeling of individual growth that is essential for the maintenance of healthy and supportive relationships. Our most meaningful relationships broaden and build our sense of who we are so that we become a better version of ourselves.
- Feeling of self-expansion is one of the best predictors of closeness and satisfaction for all kinds of relationships. Relationships are strongest when shared reality is combined with a feeling of self-expansion, so that each person is helping the other to grow.

- For example, couples who regularly engage in new activities together tend to have a greater satisfaction and score more highly on the Inclusion-of-Other-in-Self scale.
- Our usual predictions of who we will or will not like are often severely misguided.
- To tell if someone shares our experience of the world, we have to give them a chance to reveal themselves to us, and we need to be willing to expose our own thoughts and feelings in return.
- Anything that focuses your attention on the same thing at the same time as another person, and provokes the same reaction, will help strengthen bonds. For instance, a comedy show or sports game.
- We can occupy different shared realities with different people, each one bringing out different qualities within us.

3. Trust that others, on average, will like you as much as you like them, and be prepared to practice your social skills to build your self-confidence.

- The liking gap: a common bias in which we assume that we like another person a lot more than they like us. The liking gap can discourage us from building on an initial spark or sense of connection.
- We see ourselves with rose tinted spectacles but assume that other view us through darkened shades that filter out all our good qualities.
- Other's judgements of our mistakes will be half as severe as we assume.
- Cognitive restructuring: questioning your assumptions and the ways you frame events.

4. Check your assumptions; engage in 'perspective-getting' rather than 'perspective-taking' to avoid egocentric thinking and misunderstanding.

- Egocentric thinking: our tendency to assume that other people are experiencing the world through our perspective.
- Without recognizing our bias, we may ground our perceptions of others in our own experiences and fail to fully adjust for differences in knowledge or circumstance that might lead them to take very different views.
- Overestimating our similarity to the general population may soothe our fears of existential isolation.
- Illusion of transparency: Our tendency to overestimate how visible our emotions are to other people around us. We believe that our emotional state is more obvious than it is.
- Illusion of understanding: Our tendency to overestimate how well others can understand the meaning behind our ambiguous messages, and how well we can understand theirs.
- Closeness communication bias: We tend to be overconfident in our capacity to take the perspective of our friends or family members, whereas we are much humbler about our knowledge of total strangers. The closeness communication bias may explain why we often take our loved ones for granted.

5. In conversation, demonstrate active attention, engage in self-disclosure, and avoid the novelty penalty, to build mutual understanding and contribute to the merging of our minds.

"There is no such thing as conversation...There are intersecting monologues." Rebecca West

- How to make someone feel their conversation has left an impression?
ASK MORE QUESTIONS.
- Given shared reality theory, it's easy to understand why questions are so charming: they demonstrate your wish to build mutual understanding and give you the chance to validate each other's experiences.
- Art of Attention
 - Ask follow-up questions that focus on high disclosure instead of low.
 - No cell phones. Out of sight.
 - Eye contact.
- Novelty Penalty: People often find it hard to process new information about unfamiliar ideas or experiences, and so they prefer to talk about things that they already know.



"Behold, as I guide our conversation to my narrow area of expertise."

- The listener does not have enough knowledge to immerse themselves in your descriptions and understand why the trip was so special to you. The informational gaps could create a feeling of distance that undermines the sense of a shared reality—compared to conversations about familiar topics.
- The other person has no way of linking what you say to their own experiences and knowledge.
- Looking for shared interests or common experiences to discuss is much healthier.
- As you move onto less familiar terrain provide enough details to avoid creating unnecessary informational gaps. The importance of crafting a narrative.
- Asking relevant questions and showing signs of careful listening are two of the easiest ways to build connection.
- Self-disclosure is more effective than small talk.

6. Praise people generously but be highly specific in your words of appreciation.

- This law of connection concerns the ways we show our appreciation of others.
- People often value words of appreciation and praise as much as physical gifts.
- Compliment-givers consistently underestimate how good the compliment-receiver would feel.
- All too often, we assume that others know how much their actions mean to us but our sentiments are rarely as obvious as we believe.
- Thank you notes. People who wrote thank you notes over a three-week period reported a higher level of life satisfaction.
- Witnessing effect: simply observing gratitude directed at another person can promote altruism in onlookers and primes warmer feelings towards the people giving and receiving praise.
- Demonstrating appreciation for others shows that we are responsive and supportive to the people within our social network.
- Two ways to demonstrate thanks:
 - By describing the benefits of an action for us
 - By praising the personal qualities that contributed to the act of generosity.
- To build a sense of connection, your expressions of appreciation must be grounded in your shared reality with the other person.

7. Be open about your vulnerabilities, and value honesty over kindness (but practice both, if possible).

- Porcupine's dilemma: It describes a situation where a group of porcupines attempt to huddle together for warmth during cold weather but are forced to maintain a distance due to their sharp quills.
 - **Desire for Closeness:** Like the porcupines seeking warmth, humans have a natural desire for intimacy and social connection.
 - **Risk of Harm:** However, getting too close to others can lead to emotional pain or discomfort, symbolized by the porcupines' quills.
 - **Balancing Act:** The challenge lies in finding the optimal distance that allows for connection without causing harm
- Beautiful mess effect: We fear showing our flaws yet appreciate others' candor about their vulnerabilities. The beautiful mess effect describes how the honest acknowledgement of our failings can bring about greater social connections.
- Consider whether you offer a safe space for others to do the same.
- We consistently underestimate people's desire for honest feedback and this bias is particularly pronounced in the situation where truthful insights could have the largest consequences.

8. Do no fear envy. Disclose your successes but be accurate in your statements and avoid comparing yourself to others. Enjoy 'confelicity.'

- Natural to want respect from others.
- Question the motives behind your self-praise. If you simply wish to underline your status, it may be better to keep quiet.
- Dunning-Kruger Effect: it is often the people who are least talented who are the most over-confident. Most of us overestimate some of our skills.
- Hubris hypothesis: people are far more likely to object to self-praise if it implies a negative judgement of others.
- If someone explicitly makes a social comparison about others in general, we assume that they will have a negative view of us personally.

9. Ask for help when you need it, in the expectation that your pleas for support can build a stronger long-term bond.

- Knowing how to phrase our pleas, so that the other person can make a genuine offer of assistance without feeling pressured or unduly inconvenienced, is one of the most important skills we can learn to enhance our social lives.
- Our aversion to help-seeking prevents our friends and family from relieving our stresses.
- We consistently underestimate others' willingness to cooperate.
- We pay too much attention to the trouble we might be causing the other person and not enough attention to people's genuine concern for our happiness and desire to please. The people being asked the favor want to appear kind and trusting.
- We must be selective about the favors that we ask and we should listen carefully to their concerns or displays of discomfort.
- Studies have shown that the more generous someone's behavior, the healthier their heart.
- Amae: Japanese concept to describe someone's tendency to depend and presume upon another's love or bask in another's indulgence.
- Concerns a task that the requester is perfectly capable of doing on their own and if the fulfilment of the task will underline the bond between the two people.
- People like us more after we've asked them for a favor. This is known as the Benjamin Franklin effect.

10. Offer emotional support to those in need, but do not force it upon them. Validate their feelings while providing an alternative perspective on their problems.

- Around 80% of people believe can release negative feelings by sharing them with others.
- We keep reactivating the same neural circuits associated with the hurt; rather than releasing the bad feelings...leads them to become more deeply embedded in our minds so that they occupy our thoughts for longer and longer.
- The healthiest conversations will help the person to move beyond their immediate pain by encouraging greater wisdom and insight into their problems.
- Co-reflection: involves looking for new insights and perspectives on the problems at hand.
- Motivate them to take small steps to improve their situation.
- Think more reflectively about the issue and draw new conclusions.
- Gently encourage a change of perspective.
- The quality of someone's personal narrative is often linked to their mental health.
- To help people process their feelings, we must validate their experiences and help them to reconstruct the situation so that they can gain insight into their problems

11. Be civil and curious in disagreements; show interest in the other side's viewpoint; share personal experiences; and translate your opinions into moral language.

- 40% of voters do not have a single friend across the political divide.
- Social networks become echo chambers.
- People have an enormous desire to be heard and understood. When you express interest in another's opinion, you lower their psychological defenses which subsequently opens their mind to your argument—resulting in a more constructive dialogue.

12. For your wellbeing, choose forgiveness over spite.

- When others treat us unfairly, we lose our sense of agency and our recognition of our own humanity.
- Forgiveness is tightly linked to better mental and physical health.

13. Reach out to the people who are missing in your life.

- We mark wedding anniversaries—make effort to celebrate our many other ties.

About the Book Club In this monthly club, a presenter shares highlights from a book related to leadership, business, neuroscience, or coaching. Membership is not required, and there's no obligation to pre-read the book. This discussion summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. [Register here](#) for upcoming events. For the full set of discussion summaries, [click here](#).