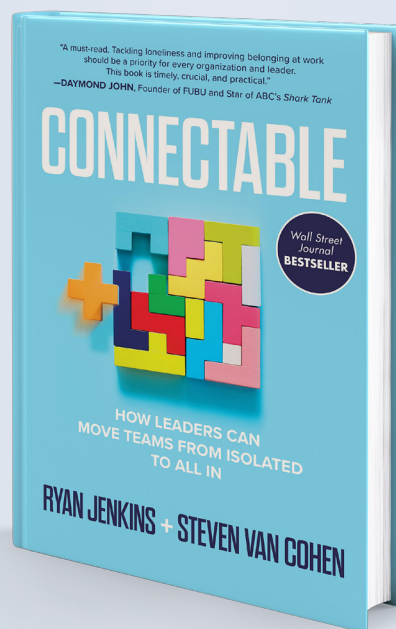


BOOK SNAPS™

Zooming In On Your Next Read



Connectable

By Ryan Jenkins & Steven Van Cohen

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Awaken a Renewed Sense of Connection

Co authors Ryan Jenkins and Steven van Cohen are global leadership speakers and consultants who have helped several large companies prepare for the future of their work. Working alongside organizations like The Home Depot, Liberty Mutual Insurance, and Bruster's Ice Cream, they've helped leaders realize their greatest asset and leverage it for mutual benefit. That greatest asset is their people. Loneliness is universal. We all feel it at some point in our lives. However, in the last few years, loneliness has slowly seeped into the workplace, creating invisible and silent problems. In the last couple of years, Ryan and Steven surveyed over 2,000 people including 50 global leaders to do a deep dive into the role of loneliness in the workforce. Through this research, they've developed strategies and a framework to not only address loneliness, but to also counteract its effect on individuals and the teams they're on. *Connectable* gives us a balance of science, statistics, and stories to demonstrate the role of loneliness in individuals and the role of leaders in navigating that loneliness.

The Loneliness Epidemic

Ryan and Steven define workplace loneliness as, "the distress caused by the perceived inadequacy of a quality connection to teammates, leaders, the organization, and work itself." Each year, as we grow our technologies and ways of work, we lose a sense of connection. This is the same connection that makes us feel better equipped to do our jobs well and with enthusiasm.

A prime example is the ATM. When invented, it was marketed as the only 24 hour bank. You could go to it at any time. You could withdraw the money you need and deposit your checks from work. And best of all, you could skip the wait in a line to do any of your banking needs. ATMs have collectively saved people billions of hours with their convenience. However, there is a cost associated with this ease: social connection. If we're no longer waiting in lines, we're no longer making chit chat. We're no longer communicating with other people. We're no longer connecting like we used to.

Today, over 60% of American adults report that they feel lonely. And when team members show up to work lonely, they feel less



committed to the work they need to do, and they feel less appreciated for the work they actually accomplish. They bottle it up, let it fester, and spread it to others. Loneliness is contagious. The more one person pulls away, the more the whole team pushes, too. Before you know it, you have a team full of lonely people who have dropped their commitment to work and are on the fast track to burnout.

In our culture, it's the norm to feel like you have two separate selves: your work self and your nonwork self: further encouragement to keep that loneliness bottled up and save it for after work periods. Even when you're expected to be accessible at all hours of the day (thanks to our new way of working).

The bottom line: Less engagement, less productivity, and lower retention levels. It forces people to behave the opposite of what we expect them to while at work. Loneliness is the thing that is holding teams back from their full potential. It's time to cut it loose so your team can function on the level they are fully capable of. It starts with leaders. The people who both model the action to take and care about the relationships they are building. It's up to leaders to rescue their workers from loneliness. Not through treatment, but through connection.

The Less Loneliness Framework

After conducting hundreds of interviews authors Ryan and Steven came up with a framework that works with organizations, no matter what industry they're in. It's served Fortune 500 companies and small businesses with less than 10 people. Because loneliness is universal, they wanted a framework that would be just as effective when put into play.

Step 1: Look at Loneliness

Some signs of loneliness are obvious and visible. Others are extremely hidden. As leaders, we need to get the best vantage point to look at the full landscape of loneliness on our teams. The question isn't if the people on our teams are lonely. The question is: how are they lonely? How are they being seen? How are they not being seen? The stigma around this feeling is slowly going away. More people are willing to talk about it. Even more so would be willing if you, their leader, would initiate the conversation and ask: "Where are my people not connecting? How could I help increase that connection?"

However, before you consider someone else making a change, you must consider how loneliness also affects you. Are you in tune with the people around you? How are you connecting with others? A self assessment will help you understand the effects on your team...as individuals and as a whole. Then, assess your team. Look at their loneliness levels. How approachable are they? Get to know the individuals, what their goals are, what they enjoy doing. Having a stronger understanding of the personalities on your team can help you recognize when someone is feeling disconnected and lonely.

The authors detail a list of 10 common loneliness identifiers to help you look at loneliness on your team. They are as followed:

- Sloppy Work
- Lack of Learning and Development
- Change in Routine
- Stops Offering Input
- Skips or Resents Meetings
- Only Talks Work
- Limited Interaction with Coworkers
- An Apathetic Attitude
- Unkempt Appearance
- Excessive Working

The next step to the framework is to invest in the one thing that will "cure" loneliness: connection.

Step 2: Invest in connection

Leaders are the key to all of this. They are shepherds at work. They are the ones who tend to their employees' needs and guide them to a better future. They're "invested in their flock because the flock is tied to their financial and social livelihood." The one thing that flock needs most of all is connection. This part of the framework is broken down into three different types of connection leaders should invest in: Safe, personal, and team connections.

First and foremost, authors Steven and Ryan say at the heart of everything, humans want one thing: to be safe. And in order to be safe, people need to be fed and protected. They need to feel that they're growing into their potential, and they need to be valued. Leaders need to provide psychological safety to their team members in order to provide a place where they feel they can speak up and contribute to their working environment.

The key to psychological safety is active listening, something all leaders need to understand the individuals on their team on a deeper level. Ryan and Steven suggest we all purposefully turn away from our smartphones and devices to practice active listening. But our connections are a two-way street, and leaders also need to practice ways to be relatable as a person, and not just the figurehead at work. The three ways others can relate to you as a person (not just a professional) are:

- Tell your story. They can be about discomfort or doubts or delightful anecdotes. But they must be authentic. The authors say, "People listen autobiographically to storytellers. So when you tell a personal story, others are listening through the lens of their own life."
- Ask to hear a story. People want to be seen and heard. Make it practice to ask open ended questions to hear their stories and relate back to them.
- Selectively share. Long ago are the days where professionals left their emotions at the door. It's okay to share them



... team connections fight against loneliness and create a better drive and purpose for work.”

at work with information you're comfortable sharing. You don't have to go into details, but acknowledge and naming that feeling is an easy way to be relatable.

It's your job to invest in the connections of your team, because team connections fight against loneliness and create a better drive and purpose for work.

Step 3: Narrow the focus

One of the strongest ways to lessen loneliness is to get your team to narrow their focus on purpose, clear direction, and growth. A common and shared purpose creates camaraderie at work. As authors Steven and Ryan say, "Nothing squashes loneliness quite like contributing to a worthwhile goal and feeling a part of something bigger than oneself."

Purpose gives meaning. A shared purpose brings togetherness. Getting your team engaged in the wider impact of their work is one of the most impactful things you can do as a leader. This is because when employees see the impact, they perform better and demonstrate behaviors that are above and beyond the minimum requirement for their job.

Once you find the purpose, it's time to narrow down to clarity. Engage in your team to understand their daily tasks and reasoning for them. This creates an understanding of direction - what those tasks accomplish and where each team member sees themselves applying their expertise.

The last piece to narrow down on is learning. "Learning starves loneliness." If your mind is actively working, there's no room to be lonely. Learning gives hope. It gives us a sense that the future can be better. It provides reassurance that there's value in what each individual can contribute. And when your team sees that you, a leader, is constantly learning, it provides reassurance that you are also improving yourself. Lastly, the authors mention that learning is a social tool within itself. Whenever you learn something new, you have a natural tendency to want to share what you learned. If you learn an instrument, you want to share music with a listening audience. If you learn a new joke, you want to share it to make someone laugh. Learning brings us together.

The key to this, Steven and Ryan say, is "As a leader, you go first. You have to model what learning looks like. Grant permission to your team to explore more by sharing with your team a book you're reading, a video you found fascinating, a podcast that reframed your perspective, or a conference you're excited to attend." By modeling it, you encourage your team to do their own learning and sharing.

Step 4: Kindle the momentum

At eight hours a day five days a week, most of us spend more time at work and with our teammates than with our own families. We work for the security of a paycheck and a future or legacy. But we also crave security of something else entirely: social connection with our team members. If you've gone this far into the framework, you've done the easy part. You've started. Now comes the part that's more difficult: amplifying the connections and sustaining them to continue to lessen loneliness in your team. This takes consistency in the following:

- **Re-looking:** Make sure you have a structure in place that will continue connection with everyone on the team.
- **Re-Investing:** Make use of the moments, big and small. Search for the milestones to celebrate and make them meaningful to your team.
- **Re-Narrowing:** Acknowledge your team's progress and celebrate with them. Encourage them to ask the three questions: What are we doing? Why are we doing this? And how does each individual fit in?

LINK to fight loneliness

As we continue to create items and technology for the sake of ease, we're pulling away from social connections, creating more loneliness for ourselves. Technology isn't going anywhere, and no one is going to suggest that we get rid of the things that make tasks easier. So, we need to make a conscious effort to rehumanize our work environments.

Look at loneliness

Invest in connection

Narrow the focus

Kindle the momentum

As a leader, you have the power and responsibility to be the driving force to link with your team and create deeper connections with the people you work with. Ultimately, this will improve productivity to work, encouraging your people to not only go above and beyond, but to do so with enthusiasm. And enthusiastic employees are employees who stick around. Continue to improve themselves, improve their learning, and improve the future of business.

But we can only do that if we intentionally work to kick loneliness.