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Six Pixels of Separation

Everyone Is Connected.
Connect Your Business to Everyone.

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Is it important to be connected? Well, consider this: If Facebook were a country, it would have the third-largest population in the world.

The truth is, we no longer live in a world of six degrees of separation. In fact, we're now down to only six pixels of separation, which changes everything we know about doing business.

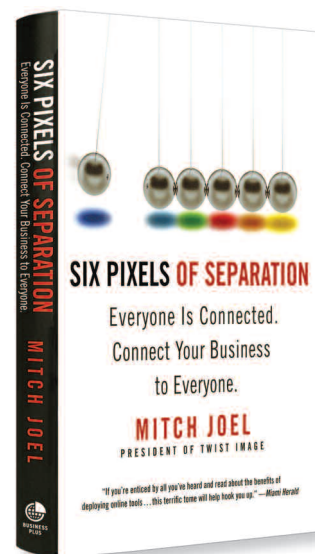
In *Six Pixels of Separation*, digital marketing expert Mitch Joel integrates digital marketing, social media, personal branding and entrepreneurship in a clear, entertaining and instructive way that everyone can understand and apply. Through the use of timely case studies and fascinating stories, he offers a complete set of the latest tactics, insights and tools that will empower you to reach a global audience and consumer base — and, best yet, you can do this pretty much for free.

In today's world of constant tweeting, pinging, poking and Facebooking, connecting your business to your customers is essential. Whether you are a Fortune 500 CEO, an entrepreneur or a college kid dreaming about starting your own business, *Six Pixels of Separation* is an essential road map to intricate and complex social situations.

Everyone is connected. Isn't it time for you and your company to connect to everyone? This summary will show you how.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How real companies carry out powerful transformations.
- How to market in a post-Web 2.0 age.
- What it means to connect online with your customers, your colleagues and even your competitors.
- How to turn conventional wisdom on its head.



by Mitch Joel

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: SIX PIXELS OF SEPARATION

by Mitch Joel

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Introduction

Most businesspeople still see the digital channel as a joke. They don't take it seriously. They think it's nothing more than a time suck. The good news is that the more people think like that, the wider the opportunity is for you to do your thing, make your own noise and grow your online community and business while they look around wondering what's happening to their market share.

Whether the economy is still in a slump or clawing its way back to life, one thing will still be certain: All of us are going to be doing a lot more with a lot less. The digital channels were meant to do just that. Your business has been forced to change over the past couple of years. As a result, there has never been a more important time to understand the myriad digital channels and free publishing tools that are right here in front of you — at your fingertips — and are relatively cheap, or free, and easy to use.

By understanding how this information flows online, by being engaged and connected, and by creating your own content, you will begin to unravel how much more efficient you can be as a business.

From Degrees to Pixels

We all know the story of the six degrees of separation: the idea that we are all connected through fewer than six degrees — meaning that I know someone, who knows someone, who knows someone, who knows someone, who knows someone — who knows you. The theory has been around for ages. It has been tested, refined and tinkered with over the years, but it is no longer relevant. *In the digital world*

there are no degrees of separation between you and your customers. You are connected. You're even connected to those who are potential customers.

The Internet, many online social networks and new media tools have taken the degrees away — and we're down to pixels. This changes everything we know about business and how you can connect your brands, products and services to your community.

Everyone is connected. It's time to connect your business to everyone. ●

I Google You ... Just Like You Google Me

On June 20, 2004, Juan Mann was feeling low. So he did something about it. He made a simple sign that said "Free Hugs" and walked through the Pitt Street Mall in Sydney, Australia, holding it over his head. For about 15 minutes people walked by, stared, snickered and muttered words behind his back.

Then someone — a total stranger — came forward and took him up on his offer. Suddenly, all sorts of people started to follow suit. Folks throughout the mall started to hug spouses, kids, whomever.

Free Hugs

After Mann walked around the open market with the "Free Hugs" sign, other strangers began making their own signs and handing out free hugs alongside him. The movement continued to grow until the authorities stepped in and forced the antics to stop because these people had not acquired the proper permit and licensing. But after accumulating 10,000 names on a petition, the



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free hugs movement was allowed to continue.

Shimon Moore was fascinated with what was happening and spent close to two months video recording the free hugs (and the petition process). To go with hours of footage that he was editing down to just a few minutes, Moore layered over the video a song that his own band, Sick Puppies, had recorded, titled “All the Same.” Ultimately, that video was uploaded to YouTube.

To date, the video has had more than 40 million views and has sparked free hug movements in places like Taipei; Tel Aviv; Boulder, Colorado; Korea; Jordan; and just about anywhere and everywhere in between.

Spread the Message

Like Juan Mann, you and your business have a mission. Juan’s core brand values were about directly connecting to real people in a day and age when people were separating themselves from one another. He decided to use the Pitt Street Mall as a focus group to test-drive his idea and started offering his free hugs to anyone who would take one. Once you know that your product or service resonates with its intended audience, the next phase is to spread the message far and wide.

Mann and Moore did something very interesting. They leveraged the power of the many free and easy-to-use tools online to spread their message to anyone and everyone who would be willing to listen. They used online tools and empowered the people who were connecting with their message to spread it further. They set up groups, responded to comments and became active participants in their self-created community.

One of the biggest challenges that every business faces is figuring out who the target audience is, how to connect to it and how to build on those relationships. ●

The Trust Economy

Those who are part of the *participatory culture* (and give abundantly) tend to build powerful and respected personal brands. They are connected through intricate networks based on information and content as the currency, and their ability to provide value translates into their status in the disjointed hierarchy online. Among all communities, individuals hope to achieve some level of status and reputation. The pecking order online is simply bigger, and it has no face.

This unique trust economy is counter to everything you ever thought about how a business grows. A great salesperson knows that the ultimate customer is one who has given you his or her trust. Trust is earned by an overall great experience with a foundation of authentic-

Eight New Channels

While it is important to understand the more traditional advertising channels, such as display advertising, cross-channel promotion, and e-mail marketing, the more conversational channels include:

- 1. Blog:** Blogs are typically chatty, informative, provocative and written in a very human voice.
- 2. Micro-Blog:** Twitter, Jaiku and Identi.ca are the better-known micro-blogging platforms. These spaces allow people to communicate one short message.
- 3. Podcast:** These are exactly like blogs, only they come in either audio or video formats.
- 4. Online Social Network:** From Facebook and MySpace to LinkedIn, online social networks are where most of the people online are connecting.
- 5. Sharing Sites:** You can upload a video to YouTube or do the same thing with your pictures on Flickr.
- 6. User-generated Content:** One of the highest forms of flattery occurs when your consumers create their own content — it could be text, audio, video or images — about your brand on their own, without your permission.
- 7. Wiki:** A wiki is a website that anybody can edit. Wikipedia is probably one of the best-known wiki-based initiatives.
- 8. Widgets:** A widget is a small application that can be added onto an existing website or blog, downloaded onto your desktop as a stand-alone application, or put on your mobile device.

ty, open communication, knowledge and value from that customer’s perspective.

The Channels, the Opportunities

The primary objectives are, and should be, to drive customers to take action and to keep them engaged. This is accomplished by bringing them from one of the social channels either to your website or to your business in the real world.

The two pillars for building your business through the digital channels will be:

- 1. Permission:** Having consumers give you their explicit permission to connect. When somebody says something in the space you are connected in, treat the conversation as if it were private — even if, in reality, there’s nothing that could be more public about it.

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2. Content: Your ability to create compelling text, audio, video and images is going to build your story and get people excited about staying connected to you. ●

Entrepreneurship 2.0

As you know, the digital revolution has reinvented what it means to be an entrepreneur. We've gone from slugging it out on a local level for small contracts to build credibility to a world where people can make the choice to break clean from a corporate gig, fire up their laptop, develop a website, start joining more social spaces to demonstrate their industry knowledge, hook themselves into some key online social networks to connect with like-minded individuals and even advertise using their specific keywords on a pay-per-click basis on one (or all) of the major search engines. Without even an office or a business card, your business (and your brand) is linked to millions of people and connected to thousands of potential business opportunities.

Global Scale

The big telecom companies are not winning the VoIP (voice over Internet protocol) war; a small startup called Skype is (it was acquired by eBay for \$2.6 billion). Barnes & Noble and Borders do not own the selling of books online; Amazon.com does. And, at last look, people aren't letting their fingers do the walking through the Yellow Pages when they need to find something online — they're clearly using Google, Microsoft or Yahoo!

All of these businesses were once very small startups that saw a change in a certain industry and, without caring about what the No. 1 or No. 2 player in the industry thought, they went after it and used the online channels not only to build their businesses but to communicate and connect.

As an entrepreneur, you don't need to be a pure-play online business, but you do need to be better at creating an online experience. You do need to get more engaged with the online community. ●

Faith-based Initiatives, Viral Expansion Loops and the Long Road

Avinash Kaushik borrowed the term "faith-based initiative" from former U.S. President George W. Bush and then tweaked it. As an analytics evangelist at Google, Kaushik helps Google define which metrics are

important to measure in all of their product offerings, and he helps promote Google Analytics, a free tool for measuring traffic to your website.

Why would Google give away, for free, a tool like Google Analytics?

Google understands the power of a strong faith-based initiative. By giving you, the general public, a free and easy-to-use tool that will help you better understand who is coming to your website, what they are doing, what search engine keywords drive traffic and who is linking to your website, Google realizes that you are more likely to improve how your website converts traffic into consumers. Once you start optimizing your website, odds are that your next logical step will be to advertise with Google. Google has faith that the smarter they make you and the more tools they give you to help you improve your own situation, the more loyal you will be and the more likely you will be to spend money with them.

The secret in creating compelling faith-based initiatives is to forget about how you're going to make money initially and focus instead on what tool or application you can create and give away to add value to the lives of others.

Viral Expansion Loops

A viral expansion loop is what rapidly makes one consumer become 15, or two become 64, or four become 28. A viral expansion loop is enormous growth because it expands through networks. It's what Facebook, MySpace and other hugely successful digital businesses — think eBay, Skype, Twitter and Google — are premised on. It's a dynamic model for growing revenue and market valuation, and for generating more brand evangelists who, in turn, keep growing revenue. ●

Know Control

In May 2007 "Engadget" reported in a blog post that it had received an internal e-mail memo that was leaked from Apple stating that the initial debut of the iPhone, along with the launch of their new operating system, Leopard, would both be delayed. "Engadget" is regarded as one of the highest-trafficked blogs in the world and has the attention of many mainstream media folk. This blog post got passed around to the mass media and sent Apple's stock into a downward tumble that resulted in a loss of more than \$100 million in market value.

Once "Engadget" was informed that the internal memo (which was legit) was retracted shortly thereafter and that there was no delay for Apple's products, the

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blog issued a posting titled “False Alarm: iPhone NOT Delayed Until October, Leopard NOT Delayed Again Until January.” Apple’s stock bounced back within 24 hours.

The Moral of the Story

The Internet used to have brushfires that did not cross over into the real world. Even if bad things were being said, you could dismiss them as coming from those “crazy people on the Internet.” But life on the Internet has changed in a few years. Had Apple not reacted and moved on this blog news, who knows how bad and prolonged the damage could have been? Most companies are doing everything they can to monitor and react to whatever is happening online. A simple glance at Apple’s story demonstrates why it is increasingly important for your business to be paying attention to online channels and even more important to respond when something does flare up. Even the speed at which companies should respond is evolving as the channels evolve. ●

The Real World

There is now a new kind of conference. They’re being created by people who are organizing online but meeting up in the real world. These are not your typical conferences. These are called “unconferences.”

According to Wikipedia, an unconference is “a facilitated participant-driven conference centered on a theme or purpose. The term “unconference” has been applied, or self-applied, to a wide range of gatherings that try to avoid one or more aspects of a conventional conference such as high fees and sponsored presentations.”

Unconferences

Unconferences were created with the sole vision to make meeting up in the real world a valuable networking, learning and sharing experience combined.

One of the first kinds of unconferences was called BarCamp, where people in Silicon Valley decided to come together to discuss technology. This happened back in 2005 and attracted close to 200 people. Since then, BarCamps have been held in more than 350 cities all over the world (some unconferences have had close to 1,000 participants), and the concept has expanded beyond the topics of technology — well beyond. There have been unconferences on marketing, entrepreneurship, the environment, the banking industry and many more subjects.

Unconferences are not just about attending. Everyone

knows that the person speaking gets all the attention, and an unconference is a great place for you to teach the community or to share a case study. *Be forewarned: If you intend to do any kind of sales pitch or self-promotional type of presentations, you will be booted off the stage.*

Think of an unconference as a public meeting: Anyone and everyone is welcome to attend and encouraged to participate. ●

You Are Media

Now more than ever, our personal brand is something all of us need to pay a lot more attention to. *In this digital age, your personal brand will be your most powerful ally (or enemy).*

There’s no trick to nurturing and developing your personal brand. Be yourself. It’s not about being fake. Use digital channels to align yourself with others who are similar or complementary to you. If we’ve learned anything so far, it’s that you have to be able to find that specific online niche that will be the perfect place for you to be you and grow your business accordingly.

In the end, what we’re learning is that the brand comes from within. A strong brand shines when the core values and belief systems of why it was created are as obvious as the logo, packaging, website and supporting marketing materials.

You Can’t Fake Sincerity

As we build our personal brands through the digital channels, it is incumbent on us to know the types of people who fit with our brand and what we are doing and, on a daily basis, to engage with those types of people.

What’s the first step? Live your brand every day by focusing on what you bring to the lives of others, from co-workers and community to clients and customers. That is the culmination of a personal brand, and that is what people feel, think and say about you when others ask. It is also what they will receive when they look you up online or see what you have created.

Your personal brand is unique to you. It is your internal fingerprint and your digital footprint. ●

From Mass Media to Mass Content

Are you going to create a blog, share photography, a video or an audio podcast? Are you going to join the latest and hottest online social networks? Are you going to create your own personal profile and/or make a page

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or a group around your business and brands? *Whatever choice you make, focus initially on where your passion truly lies.*

If you love writing or have a knack for words, consider a blog, Twitter or writing peer reviews. If you love taking pictures, shooting video or creating audio, you now know where you can start planting some seeds. Also, don't focus too much on what others have done or have not done. This space is still relatively new (you will be hard-pressed to find many industry-specific best practices, and even if you do, following in those similar footsteps won't get you where you need to go).

Six Rules for a Healthy Blog

Here are six general rules for a healthy blog (or another form of online content):

1. Be a good community citizen.
2. Respond to comments on your space and on others' spaces quickly.
3. Define your level of privacy — know what you're willing to put out there, and make sure you respect the privacy of your community as well (their level may be different from yours).
4. Some people may be mean and nasty. If you set up a clear blog policy (and post it on your blog) and people don't respect your rules, you can delete, ban or unpublish them.
5. Embrace the long tail of content. Be aware that everything you create will be online forever.
6. Be consistent. Start, continue and finish what you started. ●

Digital Darwinism

Darwin's theory of evolution has been morphed and adapted for any and every type of situation (including business). In the pre-social-media Web, where all you could do was read, look at images and click on links to other pages with similar limitations, websites and companies online "evolved" by adding in functionality. For a time, it was Flash movies that introduced the site (this has become a huge faux pas). Then for a while it was adding video. While all of those tactics worked to keep visitors' attention for a longer period of time, perhaps even encouraging additional clicks on other pages or gathering user information via registering for a white paper, these types of information-acquisition tactics were how corporate brands evolved online. It was the first phase of digital evolution as we pushed our brands beyond being an online corporate brochure.

As these new channels for communicating, connecting

Develop Your Niche

When developing your niche, remember:

- Take the time to develop your own niche. Be the Cirque du Soleil of your industry.
- Use the cloud. The Internet can and should be one of the most powerful channels to convey your ideas and thoughts.
- Embrace the wisdom of crowds. All of us are smarter than any one of us is.
- Be agnostic (not in the religious way). If an avenue doesn't work for you, drop it and move on to one that does.
- Get beyond text. Use everything — images, video, audio and, yes, text too.
- Make the search engines love you. Make sure that whatever you create can be found through the search engines.

and creating began to take hold, we continued on the same path. The general ideology was that if you added Twitter or a blog into the mix, you were able to evolve your digital property by the simple act of having these new channels as a part of your digital ecosystem.

But here's the catch: Digital Darwinism favors the community, not the creator or enabler of the content.

Allow your consumers to connect to one another, with your company being the conduit and the enabler to make this connection. There is no doubt that this is still the primary and best course of action for you to take as you build these new marketing channels. The challenge is this: Digital Darwinism will work for you (as evolution, not extinction) based on what your users, community members and readers do with your content. If you don't have any of those, you won't evolve. If you have readers and users but they're not active (taking part, reading, adding their own comments, passing your information around), again, you will become extinct. ●

From Mass Media to 'Me' Media

In a world where online content choices are endless, being generic or covering too wide a breadth of content holds no strategic advantage. *The real winners in business are the ones who are building and leading communities from micro-niches that expand and grow as more and more people come online.*

"Do one thing great" is, without a doubt, the biggest lesson you should apply to your online endeavors. Even if you're successful at a multitude of products and brands, choose one passion, nurture it and work it.

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Gems

Yes, Technorati tracks over 130 million blogs. Sure, some of them are pure spam, but there are tons of gems. Thousands of individuals are building their business by sharing their unique thoughts and perspectives.

The win is not in creating something that appeals to the masses. Your personal win will be in leveraging the power of a very specific and unique niche that you can serve, protect and call your own. Your personal brand builds your business. You find your own “mass” in your niches. ●

Burn the Ships

In the 1500s, Hernando Cortez was the captain of 11 ships with more than 500 soldiers headed for Mexico to conquer the Aztecs and bring back gold and treasures. As you can well imagine, after Cortez’s ships arrived in Mexico, the sailors and soldiers were not in the best of shape. Some of them fell ill on the journey, some had lost their motivation and their quarters were not exactly shipshape. Several of Cortez’s crewmates wondered what would happen to them in this strange new land. If they faced challenges or resistance, how would the crew return home? The crew asked Cortez what the plan would be to get back home. The captain had the perfect response: He burned the ships.

There was no going back.

The only direction to go was forward.

The old ways of doing things were about to be rethought.

In fact, there were no more “old ways of doing things”; a new way had to be defined.

The story of Hernando Cortez and the burning of the ships ripples through to the present time. So much has changed in terms of what it means to be a business owner, the global economy, how we connect to our consumers and the marketing and communications we create to connect more effectively with them. As we enter this new world of new business, we, as the next breed of entrepreneurs, must do what we can to burn the ships. Every time a new business opportunity arises, be it through blogs, podcasts or Twitter, we are far too fast to look at ways to monetize and commercialize the channel as though it were print, radio or TV (the more traditional media).

New channels and new tools, like new lands, call for new strategies. ●

Tribal Knowledge

“Web 2.0,” “social media” and “online communities” are not just buzzwords. Most business owners are still getting used to banners, search engine marketing, affiliate programs and e-mail marketing. Now we’re all forced to understand better what happens when user-amassed wisdom forms in the shape of communities and meets through the power of technology.

It’s nice to know you can download and listen to a podcast for free, but how does that company really win and make money?

Facebook has a big valuation (some say close to \$15 billion), and when founder Mark Zuckerberg was interviewed on *60 Minutes*, he said that advertising would be the way Facebook would make its money and be able to continue to provide the services it provides for free. Google makes its money from advertising, so it must be the right way.

Think about that for a moment.

Most people will tell you they hate advertising. And most people will tell you that they also expect all of this online stuff to be free.

If that’s the case, advertising eventually will not work.

What does work? Content.

Invest in Content

Investing in creating content — text, images, audio, video — gives consumers not only the information that adds value to their lives, but also food for thought. It keeps them engaged for much longer than a 30-second spot, and it’s a lot easier to remember than that billboard they whizzed by on the freeway. People also like to talk about stuff they’ve read, seen or heard. That’s really what we mean when we use the word “conversation.” Through these digital tubes, we can reach a lot more people than just the person next door. Through these conversations and collaborative environments, we’re seeing the initial formation of real communities in virtual spaces.

The business growth comes because people who are enjoying the valuable content you provide for free are also inclined to follow the theory of reciprocity. It’s built into us. For the first few years, e-commerce models were built around providing the lowest prices with no fee for shipping. This is shifting as well. Consumers are always willing to pay a premium online if what they’re getting has added value.

You need to see and embrace collaboration as a business opportunity, a business development strategy and as part of your long-term growth. ●

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Digital Nomad

Mobile is going to be critical to your business, and there's no time like the present to start thinking about what your mobile strategy needs to be. If you think about it logically, the availability of very high-speed mobile access everywhere is the last mile. Think about the mobile devices you've seen in the past. The limitations were glaringly obvious. Now think about the newer devices. The hardware is there; all that's really missing is the access everywhere.

Because of this mobile usage and the proliferation of connectivity in the standard Internet channels, we're seeing more and more people becoming digital nomads in their professional lives.

Many people are quick to dismiss the power of the mobile device because of its small screen, use of mostly text and very limited graphics. But from the BlackBerry to the iPhone, the next level of engagement and connecting to your customers won't come from a fancy website; it's going to happen in the palms of our hands.

It's Not Mobile Advertising — It's Mobile Marketing

For mobile marketing to truly work, each and every time you run a marketing program, it has to be treated like its own little viral marketing campaign.

Airborne Mobile President and CMO Andy Nulman created his mobile marketing success program in three simple steps. He calls it his N.O.W. system:

- 1. Nearby:** Customers need to be in your radius, close and local. People using their mobile devices are looking for things in their vicinity.
- 2. Only:** There has to be a select limit to the offer. While scarcity has always been used as a marketing ploy, in the mobile landscape it has to be immediate, mostly because that is the nature of how the device is used.
- 3. Wow:** Make it a surprisingly compelling offer (50 percent off everything in the store!) It has to be a jaw-dropper.

No mobile marketing offer can have anything less than all three steps that are 100 percent complete. ●

Participation 2.0

Lulu does not see themselves as book publishers. In fact, their corporate profile states, "It's a digital marketplace guided by a vision of empowerment and accessi-

bility, and built on a business model that has proven wildly successful. ... Lulu eliminates traditional entry barriers to publishing, and enables content creators and owners — authors and educators, videographers and musicians, businesses and nonprofits, professionals and amateurs — to bring their work directly to their audience." Through Lulu anyone can have his work published into a legitimate book. Lulu does not publish one book for 10 million people; Lulu sells 10 million books to 10 million people.

Lulu looked at the shifts in the markets and how consumers were behaving, and then it laid that against how most businesses were fielding the needs and decided on some form of new business model that would be more in line with how consumers were acting.

Welcome to Participation 2.0

Prior to mass media, how did messages spread? People shared stories, they got together, they connected and participated in one another's actual lives.

Welcome to Participation 2.0. Welcome to this very unique moment in time — it's just a pixel past mass media — and now the technology exists to express ourselves freely and to connect not just within our geographical social circles but with anyone, anywhere in the world, who shares our values and thoughts.

The story of six pixels of separation is not about how you can connect your business more efficiently in these online channels to be successful. It's too late for that. We are all intrinsically connected. *In this world of interconnectedness, the bigger question is, How are you going to spread your story, connect and add value to your life and the people whose lives you touch?* How are you going to add tremendous value to a brand, product or service that can always be made cheaper and faster by someone else? How are you going to connect and stay connected?

Everyone is connected. Connect your business to everyone. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Six Pixels of Separation*, you'll also like:

- 1. *Viral Loop* by Adam L. Penenberg.** All kinds of businesses can use the paradigm-busting power of viral loops to enable their businesses through technology.
- 2. *Trust Agents* by Chris Brogan and Julien Smith.** Trust agents are digitally savvy people who use the Web to humanize businesses, using transparency. This summary shows you how to build relationships with them.
- 3. *Everyone Communicates, Few Connect* by John C. Maxwell.** Maxwell offers readers his proven method — Five Principles and Five Practices — so anyone can connect one-on-one, in a group or with an audience.