

Connect First

52 Simple Ways to Ignite Success, Meaning, and Joy at Work

by **Melanie A. Katzman, Ph.D.**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Technology has enabled us to be more interconnected today than ever before. So why do so many of us feel isolated and undervalued at work? In these rapidly changing, challenging times, how do we develop the intuition, self-awareness, and interpersonal agility required to prosper?

Strong relationships are the bedrock of lasting success, meaning, and joy at work. In *Connect First*, Dr. Melanie Katzman shows you an impactful approach to connect first as fellow humans, then as co-workers and colleagues, to forge the deep bonds that make a significant difference.

Katzman presents 52 actions, 19 of which are summarized here, that you can take immediately to create a deeply rewarding work life by connecting to yourself, your organization, and the world at large. These are the same life-changing techniques she uses with leaders and employees at the world's top companies to enhance productivity and foster fulfillment and joy at work—the hallmarks of true success. Let *Connect First* help you share in that success.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why emotions matter at work and how to use them as a source of energy.
- Key strategies to establish respect, use your senses, and be self-aware.
- To foster loyalty, harmony, and courage.
- To dream big so you can have a big impact.

Introduction

Corporate life assumes a convenient fiction: If we assign roles and responsibilities, create flowcharts and project plans, and delineate deadlines and deliverables, then somehow magically, coolly, and calmly, the work will get done.

Wrong! The truth is that organizations are run by people, and people run on emotions. Our feelings supply the energy to fuel our pursuit of profit and purpose. They are formidable and universal. They can't be ignored. Yet, to our great detriment, we have long pretended that emotions have no place in the office.

Achieving in business is often falsely equated with being rational, and efforts to be emotionally expressive can seem to make us too vulnerable. Yet, CEOs or fresh graduates, office workers or telecommuters—regardless of role, all seek security, cherish praise, and fear shame. We care, and we want to matter.

The future of work demands we recognize that emotions don't make us weak. Instead, they are our power tool, they're processed in the most primal, "animal" part of our brain, and they're critical to our existence.

Being "natural" at work just doesn't come naturally. Corporate titles and positions define us. We've lost the ability to really be ourselves. But it can be relearned.

Connect First as Humans

What we need is a professional, practical way of establishing quality relationships by connecting first as fellow humans, and then as co-workers and collaborators. From this personal foundation, great teams are formed, and goals are realized.

Here is a guide to unleash personal capacity, increase organizational effectiveness, and, for those who dare, drive large-scale change. The ideas are divided into seven parts and take just a few moments to implement, yet have a lasting effect. Most of the suggestions cost nothing and don't take more than five minutes to implement.

Some of the recommendations may seem quite basic. That's precisely the point! Because too often we get the "basics" wrong, success, meaning, and joy are sucked out of the modern workplace. By attending to the simple but significant moments between people, you will secure your reputation and experience the beauty of how easily and quickly relationships can be improved.

Part I: Establish Respect

Interpersonal niceties aren't superficial; they're essential. They are the quickest and easiest ways to connect first as people. Present yourself as the person people want to support because you won't take anyone's efforts for granted, no matter their position. Whether you are the CEO or the assistant, the manager or the associate, ignite joy by being your best and helping others do their best.

Smile: Activate Immediate Connection

Smiling is a great example of a simple act that's powerful, controversial, and often omitted from our daily repertoire, potentially to our own detriment.

"Smile more" can seem like a command. Strangers demanding that you "Smile!" can feel patronizing, but that is not the intent here. Make an active choice to smile because it benefits you as well as the recipient of your warmth. Smiling is free and efficient. It asserts your intention to form a mutual, shared, equal connection.

A study from Penn State University found that people who smile appear to be more likeable, courteous, and even competent. Smile as you enter the building, walk the halls, or join a meeting room. Put your phone in your pocket and make eye (and smile) contact as you transition from place to place.

Find the balance that works for you. Smiling is effective, but being overly cheerful, especially for women, can undermine your authority.

Call People By Their Names: Ignite Attention and Recognize Individuality

Hearing your own name is a neural ignition key, activating attention and engaging you in the interaction to follow. Names acknowledge existence, provide an identity, and are a passport to services and opportunities. Learning the names of people at work demonstrates respect and confirms that they have been noticed and are valued as people. If you want to connect first, start by calling people by their names!

To learn a name, to truly recognize who's around you, you must invest some intellectual capital. Get up from your desk now and walk for five minutes around the office. Do you know everyone's name? Now's a good time to ask. When introducing yourself, ask for the other person's name. Always. Make sure people know each other's names, whether in a meeting or walking a factory floor. When in doubt, make introductions.

At the start of a meeting, try welcoming everyone in, and then invite participants to join you in reflective silence.

There is no way to fake it. You either know a person's name or you don't. If you forget, apologize and ask to be reminded. You might want to describe when you met last: "I recall we had a lovely discussion about the sculpture in the lobby, but I'm afraid I don't remember your name."

Got It? Then Say So! Help Co-Workers Manage Their Time

Do your part to stamp out undue worry and avoid the diminishment people experience when they feel ignored. When colleagues send completed projects, make requests, or share important announcements over email, reply with "Got it." This easy addition to your daily routine provides the psychological assurance that your colleagues have caught your attention—that you have received their message and they don't have to stress.

No one wants to send notes into the ether. "Got it" is a superfast point of personal connection indicating that there's a human on the other side of the electronic communication. Saying "Got it" shows respect for superiors, subordinates, and peers.

Respond with "Got it" as soon as you receive a request, special announcement, or finished project. Don't wait until you have read through lengthy documents or completed time-consuming tasks. First acknowledge receipt.

Part II: Engage All of Your Senses

Knowledge is your competitive edge. What you don't know *can* hurt you. Hiding behind roles and computer screens won't cut it. To really excel, to deeply connect, you want office dynamics to unfold in Technicolor and surround sound. Invest a few minutes to shift your senses from automatic to manual and learn how to be *with* the people around you.

See Everybody: Those on the Margins Often Have Greater Perspective

Attention is an anapologetic discriminator. To avert one's gaze from a fellow human being erases that person's existence. To lock eyes, even briefly, creates a connection, a

validation that in this instant, we are here together.

Unfortunately, the privilege of being seen is not equally distributed in organizational life. Failing to acknowledge the presence of the people we work with reinforces a destructive hierarchy. In today's digitally connected world, many workers are out of sight, yet we recognize their contributions and value them as team members. But the flesh-and-blood janitors polishing your floor and cleaning your lavatory mirrors may remain invisible. They see you, but do you see them?

To connect first, open your eyes to all that surrounds you. As you enter and exit your building, take a second to catch the gaze of the people opening your door, sorting the mail, or cleaning the floor. Can you describe the design of their uniforms or recall what color their shirts were? Go back and reenter. Pretend you forgot something in the car.

Before you begin a meeting, scan the room. Have you made eye contact with everyone? Be intentional with your focus. Ask yourself if you would be proud if a secret camera in your retina played back what you have been watching.

Silence: Be Quiet Together

Here's a surefire way to improve the quality of your meetings: Don't say anything for five minutes. Really. You can employ this technique to center colleagues at the start of a session or at the end of a meeting to ensure that you reach a productive conclusion. Studies show that inserting a few seconds of mental space between an event or stimulus and our response to it is the difference between an automatic aggressive reaction and a more considered and often collaborative solution.

At the start of a meeting, try welcoming everyone in, and then invite participants to join you in reflective silence. Say, "To get fully ready for today's discussion we will be doing something a bit different. We will be taking five minutes to be quiet together, to center ourselves as a group and make space for new ideas. Please put down your pens, mute your phones, and get comfortable in your seats. If you would like, you may close your eyes. Here's a chance to breathe together and release tension with each exhale. Let any thoughts that come into your mind go in one ear and out

the other. Practice focusing on your breathing.”

Once the exercise is complete, invite any reactions. Don't be surprised if some people express discomfort. That's OK. Not everyone's a buyer at first. Remain confident that some colleagues will express a sense of connection, a release of anxiety, and a readiness to work.

Eat Together: Food Is Bait for Conversation and Creates Connection

Breaking bread together is a time-honored tradition, demonstrating positive intentions to further a relationship. Carving out time to share a coffee, snack, or meal with co-workers is an obvious yet often missed chance to get information, expand networks, and resolve tensions.

Kevin Kniffin and his colleagues at Cornell's Food and Brand Lab have demonstrated the positive effect of eating as a unit. For example, cooperation among firefighters was almost twice as high among team members who ate with one another than among those who didn't. The behaviors underlying the firefighters' meal practices—collecting money, planning, talking, cleaning, and, of course, eating—all enhanced group performance on the job.

Encourage your co-workers to bring a beloved dish—perhaps a comfort food from their childhood (this is especially valuable when working with multicultural groups). Try being strategic with your invitations. Set aside a day each week to dine with someone at your company that you don't know well. Be aware of, but not constrained by, co-workers' food restrictions.

Part III: Become Popular

In a rapidly changing world, the requisite skills for success are in constant flux; yet self-awareness (an appreciation of your impact on others) continues to predict career advancement. This part builds on the competencies discussed above by showing you how to be the person others want to connect with first. When you are the person people want to be with, opportunities multiply, and you are happier and more successful.

Be Present: Showing Up Is Just the Start

We forget or don't even realize that those around us are often deeply impacted by our presence (or lack of it). It's a misconception that executive presence is about commanding a room. It's not about you being the star. Power results from your ability to tune in to the needs of the people around you.

It seems pretty obvious, but it's worth stating: Attending to others is impossible if you are not actually in the right place!

OK. You showed up. Now what? Here's a chance to implement the suggestions discussed above. Make eye contact, silence your internal chatter, listen deeply, and relax into the moment. Manage your mood, facial expressions, and body language to send the right signals. Be intentional with your attention. Identify colleagues and constituents who need face time.

Keep in mind that a Google Hangout or company hashtag does not replace in-person conversations.

Be a Magnet: Become the Person People Want to Be With

When you are a magnet, your comrades are walking toward you at corporate gatherings. When teams are assembled and new opportunities explored, your name is at the top of the list. Impromptu office outings? You get an invite.

Being magnetic doesn't mean you are always extroverted, constantly lauded, or never alone. But it does mean that in your presence, people relax, feel safe, and know that you are on their side.

Magnetism isn't just a term of art. Our nervous systems transmit information through electromagnetic waves that are influenced by the people around us. This unconscious process opens the door to communal connection. We are drawn to people who provide a safe, reliable rhythm. Whether you own the company or answer the phones for the executives on the fourth floor, make biology work for you.

To ignite joy at work, radiate wonder, a readiness to engage, and a comfort with whatever the day brings, and observe how individuals (and their limbic systems) are drawn to you.

Prepare conversational gifts. Don't just race to the next meeting. Stop and think about your audience. How can you catalyze a quality discussion? What thought-provoking questions might you ask to ensure the conversation is keeping up with current events?

Have a Point of View: Cultivate an Informed Perspective

Developing and continually refreshing an informed perspective makes you an organizational asset no matter where you sit in the hierarchy. When all you do is repeat what's already known, you run the risk of becoming an expendable corporate commodity—and a dull companion.

Dare to differentiate yourself: Expand your knowledge about topics that matter to your organization. Broaden your company's awareness about topics that should matter to them but aren't on their radar. Express an informed view about material that you are responsible for.

Stay curious. Use travel time to read blogs and listen to podcasts outside your field. Download or carry a book. Make it a point to read material from sources you don't agree with.

Talk directly to the people impacted by strategies and products you may be promoting, and bring those insights back to your team. Come to work prepared to teach people something new as a way of helping them feel smarter and more informed.

Part IV: Grow Loyalty

Whether the office is a glass skyscraper or your parents' garage, you can't achieve your goals alone. Getting the most out of the people you work with takes more than just money. Tap into what makes your colleagues tick. When you're plowing through the to-do list, it's easy to forget about them—your co-workers; the recipients of your latest request who are missing their kids' soccer games, forgoing a date, or skipping sleep, just to help you hit another deadline.

The questions co-workers ask you may be about the project at hand, but the questions they ask themselves are, "Do I matter?" "Does my work matter?" At the heart of contagiously positive group cultures are people working because they care and feel cared for.

Connect Jobs to the Larger Mission: There's Always a Why

We are not hardwired to pursue money. Money can't buy meaning, but work can offer it. Connecting our jobs to a higher purpose makes a meaningful difference in recruitment and productivity. McKinsey Co. reported that highly sought-after talent opted to work for companies with an inspiring mission. Bain Consultancy's study of 300 companies worldwide demonstrated it would take 2.25 satisfied employees to generate the same output as one inspired worker.

Connecting first as people, and then to the mission, is a renewable source of institutional energy. Construct positive identities. When introducing others, contextualize their jobs, illustrating the importance of their efforts in achieving larger objectives. Don't just say, "This is Meg, our night manager."

Try "Meet Meg. She's the reason why our hotel has the highest number of bookings from travelers arriving after 9 p.m."

Take a field trip. Are you raising money to provide glasses to impoverished communities? If so, set up a time to meet and hear about how the restored ability to see has enabled the women to make money as seamstresses—and buy fresh food for their families. Try to meet the kids and learn about the changes in their lives since their parents' eyesight improved.

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Bank Social Collateral: Give Now to Succeed in the Future

Think more about what you can do for others than what you can get in return. It feels good and it's good for you. Many acts of great import to your peers take just a few moments. Making a well-placed introduction, pointing a colleague to pertinent research, or sharing an invitation to a relevant but lesser known professional conference all take about five minutes.

People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. That's a key reason to connect first. To gain an audience for your ideas, first capture your co-workers' hearts.

Build a network of goodwill by paying it forward. Do a five-minute favor for anyone who asks. Yes, anyone. Try being generously attentive to those with whom you are in conflict. It may seem counterintuitive—it's hard and destabilizing but very effective. Our opponents are often the ones we watch most closely, so you are likely an expert in what they need. Rather than compete, reverse tactics: Offer to help.

Generate Joy and Laughter: Energize Your Workplace

Do you want a bigger bonus, a boost in creative thinking, increased credibility, and greater opportunity? Humor at work is a serious business advantage. All things being equal,

89 percent of CEOs believe they'd rather hire someone with a good sense of humor. Managers displaying a good sense of humor are given more opportunities in organizations than those who take themselves too seriously.

Instilling joy and laughter at the office doesn't require a pocket full of jokes or a stream of one-liners. It's about relinquishing the relentless sense of urgency. Greater self-awareness is associated with occupational success. Be the first to joke about your idiosyncrasies. Be the source of levity, rather than the font of office tension.

You can't mandate humor, but you can model it. Start small. Share a joke or a funny passage, make a play on words, or create an unexpected acronym for the latest project. If you get a smile from one person today, that's success. Keep in mind that not every form of humor is appropriate. Work is no place for locker room and bathroom humor or political, sexist, malicious, religious, homophobic, and xenophobic jokes.

Part V: Resolve Conflict

Deep connections are forged from, not in spite of, conflict. Your ability to work through differences allows you to engage a wider set of collaborators and learn more by experimenting with new ideas.

Stand in Someone Else's Shoes: Experience Their Point of View

The resolution of any conflict comes down to the question, What really matters? The answer is seldom one you can ascertain alone. What was once crystal-clear blurs out of focus when you stand in someone else's shoes and see the view from that person's point. Standing in someone else's shoes helps you solve their problems, offers a new perspective on your challenges, and generates lasting goodwill.

Start a conference call by asking what everyone is seeing out their windows. This anchors you in their reality. Restrict the response to one sentence. It won't take long, and it literally "places" your remote team. The quick opening question humanizes the conversation that follows.

Did you just have the second tense phone call after five increasingly hostile email exchanges? Don't just sit there; do something. Ask the person you are sparring with if you can meet at a place that matters to them. It may be their office, the building site that's raising blood pressures, or the music shop that brings that person joy. No matter the choice, you will learn a great deal and connect more.

Ask open-ended questions, and be prepared for answers you didn't expect. Don't be afraid to ask for explanations of jargon, abbreviations, or words you don't understand.

Apologize: Don't Justify or Explain Why

Openness about your mistakes sets the stage for others to share their errors. The gurus of regret concur on the recipe for an effective apology. It should demonstrate humility and, when possible, be delivered face to face. While email can be a tempting alternative, if you can't look a person in the eye, at least pick up the phone.

It's important to say the words "I'm sorry" or "I apologize" and to provide a clear, succinct indication of exactly what you're apologizing for. Endure the awkwardness. Incomplete or insincere efforts can backfire. Offer suggestions on how you will work to avoid the mistake in the future, propose ways to make amends, and then sit back and let the other person vent if needed.

Don't make excuses for yourself. Don't interrupt, argue, refute, or correct. Resist bringing up your own criticisms and complaints. Even when the offended party is largely at fault, apologize for your part in the incident, however small it may be. Once you've expressed your regret, put it behind you and move on. We are all fallible—no need to beat yourself up.

Part VI: Fight Fear

Fear. It's pervasive. The organization is under pressure to innovate, and you dread being left behind. Downsizing? You might lose your job. Maybe there will be a merger or a new acquisition. The robots are coming. The company's computing platforms aren't competitive enough. You aren't keeping up with the systems.

You can't know what you don't know if you keep on talking to the same people. It's lonely at the top. And at the bottom. And in the middle. Survival in volatile, ambiguous environments requires agility and wisdom. Here's the moment to secure a place for new voices (from inside and outside of your organization) and create true partnerships through shared experience. No matter where you sit at the office, work is more fun when you are not afraid.

Step Outside Your Comfort Zone: Being a Little Terrified Is Good for You

Resting in a place where stress is minimal, where you know what's coming next and can plan accordingly, may at first seem like a good plan, but the negative impacts are

Be brave. Be messy. Luxuriate in the not knowing. At the root of innovation is the courage to ask a beautiful question.

insidious. You didn't sign up for the coding course when it was offered by the company because no one you knew was taking the class; you opted out of the entrepreneurs support group because you prefer playing video games with your brothers online; and you didn't take the time to get to know the new hires who have now been promoted over you. You've stagnated while everyone is moving on.

In an increasingly ambiguous and accelerated world, those who jump into the unknown, experiment, embarrass themselves, bruise their egos, and start again, position themselves for some of the biggest rewards. Being slightly on edge kicks your system into gear.

Try saying yes to three things you usually say no to, and then say no to three things you usually say yes to.

Create a personal mission statement about why you're stepping out of your comfort zone, such as "to build courage" or "to become more creative." Start a list on your phone, in a notebook, or on your office wall of ways you want to challenge yourself. Try putting a date beside each goal. If you have posted your list in your office, invite others to make suggestions or to join you.

Be a Person First! Help Strangers Feel Less Strange

When it comes to small talk, your words may be forgotten, but how you make people feel will be remembered. Light chatter may seem trite, but it's the small talk that leads to the big talk. Studies show that tossing in a bit of interpersonal prattle builds bonds at the office, engenders a feeling of well-being, and creates a welcome break. The goal is not to become best friends; it's simply the enjoyment of sharing a topic of mutual interest—for a few minutes.

Management by walking around is the practice of wandering in an unstructured manner through the workplace to engage in unscripted, unplanned conversations. Promoted by Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman in 1982, the timelessness of this technique is ever more apparent as co-workers are communicating and being managed electronically, even when they work in the same building. Rather than being

distracting, the judicious unannounced visit builds rapport and can facilitate the exchange of productive ideas.

Be pro-social in your chatter. Spread positive news about others. Research areas of potential mutual interest before you meet someone for the first time. You may uncover a shared hobby or cause. Come prepared to ask about it. Take a minute before diving into a business discussion to find that common bond.

Part VII: Have a Big Impact

Time to be joyfully courageous. Most of us want to make a difference but get overwhelmed when confronted with the enormity of the problems before us. This part provides the tools to broaden your definition of success, to work across generations, to consider how you want to leave a mark, to be significant.

Explore the Unknown: The Future Depends on It

It takes courage to say, "I don't know" or "We don't know." When employees are paid to perform, competency is too often equated with having the answer—on demand. We fear that not knowing will make us appear weak. Even more anxiety-inducing, sometimes we don't know how to formulate the question. We just know something is wrong—or we anticipate it will be.

Be brave. Be messy. Luxuriate in the not knowing. At the root of innovation is the courage to ask a beautiful question. Sometimes it's as simple as, "Why isn't someone doing this?" or "What if I tried to do that?"

Run toward, not away, from the question without an obvious answer. As you read the latest memo or sit in yet another meeting, stop to ask, "What are we avoiding because we don't know?" Bring people together to explore, not solve the dilemma.

Don't get lost in the details of execution while you're still toying with concepts. Examine your question from a distance. What patterns can you recognize?

Leverage Your Platform: Make a Difference

Organizations no longer choose between social impact or profit. Governments *and* businesses are being called on to shape society. And it's easier than ever to collaborate across geographic regions. Businesses will increasingly be judged not only by the value they bring to their shareholders but also by their positive impact on society.

Whether you are a CEO or the newest associate, consider how your position provides you a chance to make a big decision or perform small tasks that will alter the world around you (for the better). This is not necessarily about investing more money, it's about investing attentional capital.

It begins with a desire to act with intention and an inventorying of your nonmaterial assets, such as the ability to speak up, share access, and be generous with your relationships. Our choices can have inadvertent negative or purposely positive civic, environmental, and financial consequences.

Make sure your choices are aligned with the person you want to be and what you want to achieve. Whether your company is big or just getting started, include a "social cost" when evaluating your financial budgets. Make reading the news an active exercise. What's getting you excited or frustrated? How can you support people working for causes you care about?

Dream Audaciously: Move Beyond Success to Significance

How big a life do you want to live? This is not a prompt to consider how many acres of land you will own or parties with celebrities you will attend. Dr. Aravind Srinivasan, head of the purpose-led and profitable Aravind Eye Hospitals in India, put it well: "Success is what happens to you. Significance is what happens through you. Success is what

comes to you. Significance is what you give away to others."

Treat yourself to some space and silence. How do you want to be in the world? What do you want to be known for? Legacies are not the province of the rich. We all have a chance to leave our mark through small daily actions that do make a difference.

By being intentional in who we choose to look at, listen to, eat with, and invite in, we solve problems and shift mindsets. Our jobs can be the source of community and pride; they can provide a platform for personal growth and social change.

Entertain the dream. It will give you energy. Think big. You can always crop the picture to fit reality. Trust yourself and others. Don't be afraid to share your dream. Saying it out loud starts to make it real.

Success, meaning, and joy are minted at the office in the interactions among people, by people just like you. We all have the power to connect first and significantly impact the future of work.

IF YOU LIKED THIS SUMMARY, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE:

- *Master Your Motivation: Three Scientific Truths for Achieving Your Goals* by Susan Fowler
- *Dark Horse: Achieving Success Through the Pursuit of Fulfillment* by Todd Rose, Ogi Ogas



Melanie Katzman, Ph.D., is a business psychologist, advisor, and consultant to the world's top public and private companies, as well as governmental and nonprofit institutions. A sought-after expert in executive development, group dynamics, and leadership diversity, she founded Katzman Consulting in 1999 and has worked with businesses—including Accenture, Bain Consulting, Goldman Sachs, MTV, PwC, and Viacom—in 31 countries. A busy speaker, Katzman is also a founding partner of the global social enterprise Leaders' Quest, which serves a community of 12,000 members and facilitates cross-sector strategic discussions on economic and social problems.

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