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Book Summary

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Connectable

How Leaders Can Move Teams from Isolated to All In

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Key Takeaways

- *Relationship gaps occur when emotional needs aren't met.* From generational differences to cancel culture, there are many forces challenging workplace connections. You must show up differently to connect across the gap, move your workplace relationships forward, and improve communication.

- *Communication breakdowns result from toxic relationship dynamics.* Egos, negative inner speech, and toxic behavioral roles damage connection, collaboration, and communication. You need to identify and change these harmful dynamics to encourage effective communication.

- *Showing up clean and curious can help you bridge the munication gap.* A pure intention to disrupt toxic relationship

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dynamics is critical to improving communication. Be sure to listen with curiosity, suspend your bias, and use positive nonverbal communication to better engage with others.

- *Being interruptible can move your team from isolated to all in.* Relationships are stronger when people respond to one another's requests for connection. You must be present with the people in front of you to help them feel seen, appreciated, and included.

Overview

Today's global workforce is lonelier than ever before, resulting in disengaged, dissatisfied, and disloyal employees. In **Connectable**, global leadership speakers and consultants Ryan Jenkins and Steven Van Cohen explore the modern causes of loneliness at work and present strategies leaders can use to reduce loneliness in their teams. A team on a mission is a powerful force, and by using their framework, you can create an environment where people feel valued and able to perform at their best. Cultivating a culture of belonging takes intentional effort, but that effort will pay off for your organization.

Part One: Loneliness, a Silent Sweeping Epidemic

The Loneliness Lowdown

Loneliness is a subjective feeling stemming from lack of trust, closeness, and affection from loved ones and community. It's categorized into three dimensions that are defined by the type of relationship that's missing:

1. *Intimate*: The absence of a significant someone.
2. *Relational*: The absence of quality friendships and family connections.
3. *Collective*: The absence of community, social identities, or active networks.

People are getting lonelier, but before you can recharge your team, you must understand why individuals are feeling so lonely in the first place.

The Modern Causes of Loneliness

Situational factors determine our levels of engagement with others, and today's never-ending flow of information has transformed these factors in ways that are subtly pulling people apart. Loneliness is spreading, due to eight major contributors:

1. *Busyness*. Time constraints can severely limit your willingness to engage with others.

2. *Technology.* The distraction of technology can reduce your quality human interactions.

3. *Dependency shift*. Decentralized information can cause you to seek knowledge or help individually.

4. *Immediacy*. Today's on-demand culture and insatiable need for immediacy can hinder fellowship.

5. *Remote work*. Mobile technology, telecommuting, and the gig economy allow you to be less dependent on your community, which can invite isolation and disconnection.

6. *Always-on work*. Work has shifted from a place to a space, and that technology shift can encourage an always-available work culture.

7. *Professionalism*. Focusing on projects and tasks can habituate us to connect with colleagues only if we need something.

8. *Lack of purpose*. Not understanding how your work impacts the greater community can be demoralizing.

By having a better understanding of loneliness and its causes, you can focus on how loneliness is showing up at work and impacting business results.

Loneliness at Work

In the new information age, technology has empowered workers to get much more done without depending on or interacting with others. That disconnect can encourage loneliness to manifest in different ways:

- *Situational loneliness* occurs because of a specific change in circumstances, such as switching to a new department, losing a close teammate, or moving to a new location.

- *Differential loneliness* occurs inadvertently when a discrepancy exists between a person and a larger group, including not having a similar amount of time to speak at a meeting, traveling more than others in a similar role, or not being as proficient with a new technology compared to peers.

- *Intentional loneliness* occurs because of a deliberate and malicious act, such as blatantly disregarding someone's feedback, purposefully excluding someone from a team event, and deliberately overlooking someone for a promotion.

Loneliness wreaks havoc on business. It impacts organizations in specific ways, including the following:

- *Employee engagement plummets.* Loneliness is a major contributor to employee burnout. Lonely workers are more likely to miss work due to illness and are more inclined to believe their work is lower quality.

- *Employee retention declines.* The lonelier employees feel, the less loyal they are. Lonely workers are less committed to their organizations, more likely to quit their jobs, and more likely to leave because of mental health reasons.

- *Employee performance suffers.* Without interpersonal networks at work, employee job performance dips. Lonely workers are limited in their executive mental functions and are more likely to be fatigued and irritable.

- *Employee collaboration diminishes.* The willingness to collaborate and communicate evaporates when social ties begin to fray among team members. Lonely workers are more likely to struggle with introducing themselves, are slower to respond during conversation, and tend to be less creative.

While lessening loneliness may not be in your job description as a leader, you have an opportunity to provide an environment where employees can be the best versions of themselves.

Part Two: Belonging, the Antidote to Loneliness

The Science of Belonging

Being excluded pushes people to the social perimeter, decreasing their sense of belonging and increasing feelings of loneliness. Left unaddressed, loneliness will wreak havoc on your team's ability to collaborate, innovate, and communicate. Social fitness should be promoted and practiced, and there are certain ways belonging should look at work.

Belonging at Work

There are three keys to living a long and healthy life:

1. *Loneliness kills; social connections heal*. People who are more socially connected to family, friends, and community live happier, healthier, and longer lives.

2. *Close and high-quality relationships really matter*. Living amid good, warm relationships buffers you from the trials of aging.

3. *Healthy relationships protect your brain*. When you have someone in your life you can really count on, your memory stays sharper longer.

The secret to living a long and healthy life is investing in your relationships, and the workplace is a great place to seek or deliver belonging. Creating belonging at work embraces three mutually reinforcing attributes:

1. *Feeling comfortable*. A sense of belonging means people can bring their full selves to work.

2. *Being connected*. Effective connection occurs when workers have strong relationships with their team members and feel connected with an organization's purpose and goals.

3. *Contributing*. Workers feel a sense of contribution when they can see how their individual efforts and talents are making meaningful impacts on organizational outcomes and advancing their teams.

Good relationships keep you happier and healthier. Leaders can use the *Less Loneliness Framework* to create work environments where relationships flourish. It can help boost belonging at work, improve employee well-being, and elevate organizational excellence. Each step of the framework can be executed virtually or in person.

Part Three: How to Lesson Loneliness and Boost Belonging

Step One: Look at Loneliness

As a leader, your team members' well-being becomes your business. To get the best vantage point to look at the full loneliness landscape in your workplace, take the following three steps:

1. *Look at loneliness.* Acknowledge the likelihood that loneliness is present and work to understand it.

2. *Look inward.* To help others lessen loneliness most effectively, look at your own personal experience with loneliness and cultivate a healthy relationship with it.

3. *Look outward.* Common indicators of worker loneliness are sloppy work, lack of learning and development, change in routine, unwillingness to talk about non-work-related items, limited interactions with coworkers, apathetic attitude, unkempt appearance, and excessive working.

Looking at loneliness, reflecting inward, and observing outward will give you the necessary awareness to begin taking action to lessen loneliness and boost belonging among your team.

Step Two: Invest in Connection

As a leader, you must prioritize making the proper investments for connection to occur among your team. There are three ways to invest in connection:

1. *Safe connections.* Ensure an environment exists where team members feel comfortable to connect. When you create psychological safety, people feel free to ask questions, raise concerns, and pitch ideas without unnecessary repercussions.

2. *Personal connections.* Instantly boost your emotional intelligence by resisting the urge to let technology divide your attention. When you allow your attention to deviate from the person in front of you, you hinder your ability to connect, build trust, and influence.

3. *Team connections*. Get creative with the ways people connect. To encourage and solidify connections, you might consider creating micro-communities where people connect based on similar interests, developing an onboarding scavenger hunt, or introducing a weekly show and tell.

Investing in connections that are safe, personal, and teamwide will create a sense of belonging that loneliness can't easily penetrate. The next step is to discover the nonnegotiable things you must encourage to sustain a less lonely team.

Step Three: Narrow the Focus

It takes intentional focus to illuminate what matters most at work. Loneliness is lessened when a team narrows its focus on the following three areas:

1. *Purpose*. Common purpose creates camaraderie. Contributing to a worthwhile goal and feeling a part of something bigger than oneself builds togetherness, so the most impactful way to counteract loneliness is to create shared meaning among your team.

2. *Direction*. Having clarity around what your team does and the daily tasks at hand will help team members become engaged. To create clear direction, break up big goals into smaller ones, include pertinent information, create specific deadlines, and get confirmation that your employees understand the intended message.

3. *Growth*. Learning starves loneliness. When the brain is engrossed in learning something new, loneliness is absent. Learning also provides reassurance to individuals that they can or will contribute value. To grow your team, model what learning looks like, encourage learning, schedule time to learn together, and scale your learning efforts by empowering your team to teach others.

Step Four: Kindle the Momentum

As a leader, it's your job to kindle the momentum you've generated toward lessening loneliness among your team. You can drive momentum in three ways:

1. *Re-looking*. Create structures that continually look for loneliness and proactively address any growing concerns.

2. *Re-investing*. Feelings anchor people to specific moments in time, so use meaningful moments to reinvest in relationships.

3. *Re-narrowing*. Use captivation to direct your team's attention to what's most important at work.

Be Interruptible

The world's most valuable resource is attention, and where you spend your attention defines you. *Interruptibility* is allowing the unexpected and unprecedented to collide with your busy life. Being interruptible is about intentionally placing your focus, productivity, and priority in the right place and on the organization's top asset: people. Leadership focused on people requires a willingness to be interrupted and do the following:

- *Ensure people feel safe*. Make sure that team members feel safe to interrupt without consequence.

- *Set expectations*. Identify and communicate to your team any absolute distraction-free times.

- *Transition well*. If the task at hand requires you to complete your thought, ask the interrupter for a moment to transition your full attention.

- *Provide a preview*. Ask good questions, speak little or last during conversations, and be aware of your body language.

- *Clarify your role*. To engage most effectively, clarify the role the interrupter would like you to play.

- *Know when to cut it short*. If you sense that the interruption topic requires more time than you have, graciously end the interruption.

Interruptibility is the mark of a confident, compassionate, and admired leader. Relationships grow stronger when people respond to one another's requests for connection. By making your attention available to your team, you can move a lonely workforce from isolated to all in.

About the Authors

Ryan Jenkins

, CSP (Certified Speaking Professional)™, is an internationally recognized keynote speaker and author. He speaks all over the world to companies such as State Farm, Wells Fargo, FedEx, Liberty Mutual, and John Deere. For a decade, he has been helping organizations create engaged, inclusive, and high-performing teams by lessening worker loneliness and closing generational gaps. Jenkins's top-ranked insights have been featured in *Forbes, Fast Company*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. He's also cofounder of LessLonely.com, the world's first resource fully dedicated to reducing worker isolation and strengthening team connections. He holds a BS from Miami University (Ohio).

Steven Van Cohen

is a global leadership consultant, executive coach, and author. He has worked with hundreds of leaders from organizations such as Salesforce, The Home Depot, Komatsu, Bank of America, and Bridgestone. He has spent his career helping organizations humanize their businesses by creating workplaces where people come first. Van Cohen has been featured in *Forbes*, the Association for Talent Development, and *Training* magazine. He's also cofounder of LessLonely.com, the premier resource dedicated to lessening worker loneliness. He holds a BA from the University of Illinois and an MS from Pepperdine University.

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