

**You're Invited**

# **What's in it for me? Learn how to make authentic connections and build community.**

By the time he'd reached his late twenties, John Levy was struggling. His start-up had failed, and he was grappling with the turmoil of the financial crash of 2008. He knew he wanted to make a difference in the world, but he just didn't know how. So he hosted a dinner party and invited 12 strangers to cook for him. From those humble beginnings, the Influencers Dinner was born - a network that now comprises thousands of people including Nobel laureates, Olympic champions, and award-winning musicians. Why would any of these people want to cook food for Levy? Because he'd discovered that what people crave the most is connection and community - and he designed the events to maximize both. These blinks will reveal how you, too, can become a behavioral designer. They'll show exactly how to create events that'll strengthen your community and allow for authentic connection. In these blinks, you'll learn

why people value IKEA furniture so much; how to build trust among strangers quickly; and why understanding behavioral psychology can help you become a better leader.

## **Human connection is the key ingredient in any successful business or social movement.**

Have you ever desperately wanted to change your behavior . . . but just couldn't get yourself to do it? That's what happened to Jean Nidetch, a woman desperate to lose weight. She knew she should change her diet and exercise habits. But she didn't know how to make herself commit. Whenever she went to the doctor, he'd just give her a new diet plan. Full of motivation, she'd stick to the diet religiously for a few weeks or months. But eventually she'd get tired, revert to her old eating patterns, and gain back all the weight she'd lost. Jean's breakthrough came when she realized that thousands of women around her were having the same problems - they just weren't talking about it. The key message here is: Human connection is the key ingredient in any successful business or social movement. Jean decided to break the silence. She invited a group of women to her home to discuss their experiences with weight loss and dieting. The women were thrilled to finally have the chance to talk openly and get support. In fact, the event was so successful that more and more people started coming each week. And people who had struggled for years were finally able to lose weight. That group became a little multimillion-dollar business called Weight Watchers. Why was it so successful? Because it tapped into our deep need for connection. Humans evolved in tribes; we've always needed each other for survival. But today many people feel isolated and alienated, which has terrible effects on their well-being. In fact, research by social psychologist Matt Lieberman and his team has shown that social isolation lights up the same areas of the brain that react to physical pain. What's more, loneliness has serious consequences for our physical health - being socially isolated has the same health risks as smoking a pack of cigarettes every day. Successful companies, community movements, and activist protests all have something in common: they give people the

chance to connect with others. They also give them the opportunity to be part of something bigger than themselves. By creating these engaged, trust-filled communities, people and organizations can have real and lasting influence.

## **Building trust quickly is essential to creating community.**

Who do you trust the most in life? Is it your best friend since childhood? Or perhaps your family doctor? Humans are wired to build trusting relationships with other people. After all, it's how we've survived for so long. But trusting other people can also make us vulnerable to getting hurt. So we've developed handy screening mechanisms and biases to make it easier to know who to trust – and who to avoid. For example, we routinely put our trust in experts, like plumbers or doctors. This is especially the case if we think they have expertise that we lack. Or we trust people who are familiar to us. In fact, the longer we're exposed to something, the more likely we are to trust it. A survey of the top 100 trusted companies revealed that only two were founded in the last 20 years. The key message here is: Building trust quickly is essential to creating community. Now, you typically won't have 20-plus years to build trust with new friends, colleagues, or clients. So how do you build trust quickly? One way to do it is to rely on trusted referrals. Cutco Cutlery used this trick to become the leading seller of cutlery in the US over the last 30 years. The company doesn't use advertising or sell in shops. Rather, it sells to a network of people door-to-door. When Cutco sellers visit new clients, they make sure to emphasize that they've been referred by a trusted friend or neighbor. The new client then tends to trust them on the basis that their friends do. This is known as "the halo effect," and it's a powerful shortcut for building trust. Another surefire strategy is to place people in a situation where they're required to be vulnerable with one another. Think of the hazing process at a college sorority, or the extreme training that new military recruits undergo during boot camp. When people reveal vulnerability and mutually receive help, they create what researcher Jeffrey Polzer calls "vulnerability loops," which quickly boost trust within a community. Of course, you probably don't want to attract new friends or clients through a boot camp or hazing ordeal. So be creative; design your own events that draw on the trust-building power of the halo effect and vulnerability loops.

## **People value things they've contributed to more than things they've been given.**

We have a tendency to shower people we want to impress with expensive gifts. Surely, if they see how generous we are, they'll start to care about us or our business – right? The thinking is understandable, but it's also completely wrong. The truth is that people value the opportunity to give more than they value the opportunity to receive. That's something Benjamin Franklin knew very well. He once wanted to gain the support of a political rival. But instead of trying to flatter him, or buy his loyalty, he tried another tack: he asked his rival to lend him a rare book from his library. In those pre-Amazon days, locating the book and getting it to Franklin took quite some effort. The rival gave him the book – and then became a lifelong supporter. The key message here is: People value things they've contributed to more than things they've been given. Why did that tactic work? Because people care about things they put effort into. This insight is

something that furniture giant IKEA has leveraged into an extraordinary business. Think of the last time you shopped there, lugging flat-pack furniture around an enormous warehouse and then going home to spend hours assembling a chest of drawers. Sounds pretty grueling, doesn't it? But it's also an experience – almost a rite of passage. Putting in the effort to assemble those drawers makes us value them much more than if we bought a finished product off the shelf. So, if you want to create an event or experience that friends or clients will value, don't invite them to a fancy dinner. Instead, create an event where they'll be required to make an effort. Think, for example, of volunteering at a soup kitchen together. Or go on a hike. You'll find that these kinds of situations offer much more opportunity for real bonding – and they'll create more actual value for your clients. If you do decide to host a dinner, then make sure that guests have an opportunity to contribute. At the author's famous Influencer Dinners, 12 strangers are brought together to share a meal. But there's a catch: they have to cook it themselves, in under an hour. In the rush to complete the meal, these strangers become united in their common task. As they cook, they chat easily and have the chance to drop their usual social shields. And, at the end, they enjoy a meal that tastes all the better for the work that went into it.

## **When creating community, shared values are important – but diversity is, too.**

In 2008, Iggy Ignatius was a Florida real-estate developer who'd just built a community of retirement homes. It seemed poised for great success. But then America experienced an enormous financial crash. The property market in Florida plummeted, and much bigger homes sold for a fraction of the price that Ignatius was charging. He feared the worst, but, in the end, all of his homes sold out – in spite of the fact that they were so much more expensive. But why? Ignatius's development was targeted at Indian retirees who would have loved to move back to India but were bound to America by family ties. Ignatius created a retirement community that offered Indian food, yoga, and Bollywood movie screenings. In short, it offered the promise of allowing retirees to connect with an Indian community and culture right there in Florida. That prospect was so compelling that it was worth the extra money. The key message here is: When creating community, shared values are important – but diversity is, too. Consider your social circle. Do you hang out with people who share your socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion, tastes, and political beliefs? As comfortable as it is to be surrounded by people who are similar to you, it can also be limiting. Encountering people who are different from you exposes you to new ideas and perspectives. And connecting with a wide range of people is especially important if you want to have broader influence in the world by creating, for example, a business or social movement. The author knew that the movement he wanted to create would need to include a wide range of people like celebrities, industry leaders, and community activists. He wanted to create events where people were surrounded by others who'd achieved remarkable things in their fields. But he didn't know any celebrities, and there hadn't been any industry leaders hanging around his house when he was growing up. So how could he find a way to reach out to them and interest them in attending his events? He realized that he'd need to become an expert at putting himself in other people's shoes and at recognizing the various social pressures they experienced. Even more importantly, he'd have to figure out what they valued, and how he could contribute to their lives.

# **You can connect with anyone if you learn to put yourself in their shoes.**

Let's say you're designing an event, and you'd love for Oprah to be a VIP guest. Or perhaps you want to invite the CEO of a Fortune 500 company you admire. Or a community activist. But none of these people are in your immediate social circles. So how do you go about connecting with them? And, even more importantly, how can you make sure that they'll actually want to come to your event? The truth is, you can connect with anyone if you approach them with empathy and consideration. But you need to understand the unique social pressures that different groups of people face – and then develop tailor-made invitations that contribute to their lives. The key message here is: You can connect with anyone if you learn to put yourself in their shoes. Global influencers, like Oprah, are so strapped for time that it's fruitless to reach out to them directly. It's much better to build relationships with people in their orbit – like friends or personal assistants – and then ask for an introduction from someone they trust. Industry leaders are more approachable, but they're also extremely busy. You have to make sure that you offer them an opportunity to participate in an event with real value. TED Conferences are so popular with industry leaders because they offer just that. They're generous in that they provide valuable chances for exposure and learning. They're novel compared to stodgy traditional conferences, and they're well-curated: the organizers always make sure that attendees are at least as interesting as the people talking on stage. Finally, they offer the opportunity for the audience to experience moments of awe. Events designed along these principles will always be very appealing to leaders. Connecting with community influencers requires a slightly different approach. Red Bull wanted to reach out to artists and club-goers. Most companies would sponsor a trendy music festival, or pay a celebrity for endorsement. But Red Bull took another approach: it set up its own music academy. Over the last two decades, the academy has trained over one thousand musicians and spawned a music festival and radio station. These initiatives provide real skills, opportunities, and resources for young musicians. Channeling its funds into direct community support has allowed Red Bull to build intense brand loyalty. Next time you're thinking about who you'd like to connect with, take some time to put yourself in their shoes. How can you offer an invitation that will make a real contribution to their lives?

# **Strong communities make people feel like they belong.**

The word “community” is bandied around all the time. But what does it actually mean? Communities are more than just groups of people. They're people who feel a special sense of belonging to one another – and to a common cause. Researchers David McMillan and Davis Chavis studied all kinds of communities and defined four key pillars. The key message here is: Strong communities make people feel like they belong. The first pillar of a community is membership. There needs to be a clear demarcation between the people within a community and those who are outside. That could be defined by officially signing up for a club, being selected for an academic committee, or demonstrating allegiance by wearing a particular uniform – like for a sports team or Girl Scouts. Less tangibly, membership is created when people feel emotional safety within a community. That's something Jake White, the coach of the Springboks rugby team,



understood very well. He was tasked with helping the ailing South African team prepare for the World Cup in 2007. One of his first moves was to guarantee the members of his team that they wouldn't be kicked out before the World Cup – even if they played badly. This was very unusual, but it communicated to the team that the coach had their backs. The team rallied together with a new spirit of collaboration and commitment. And, ultimately, the strategy paid off. Against all odds, the Springboks won the World Cup. The second pillar of community is influence. Having influence means that community members all have the chance to help determine what happens within the community – and to make a contribution. It's a reciprocal interaction; they're also able to receive contributions. That's why, for example, the Instagram followers of a celebrity are a fan base rather than a community. It's a one-directional interaction. The third characteristic of a community is that it embodies the shared values, or needs, of everybody involved. For example, a religious community will embody the shared commitment of practicing devotion to God, while a shared professional community could fulfill the core aim of furthering everybody's career. These shared desires are the fuel that maintains a community over time. Last, but definitely not least, community members share an emotional connection. Rather than practicing their faith or fighting for a political cause alone, they come together to share the experience. This could be online or offline, but it involves genuine interaction and building trust between members.

## **Understanding behavioral psychology will allow you to design better events.**

If you go to Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, you'll notice something strange. After you pay for your tickets, you can't walk straight into the park. Instead, you need to take a 23-minute boat or bus ride that ferries you to the main gates. Why would the park designers have created this seemingly impractical setup? Because they understand behavioral psychology very well. Tickets to Disney World are expensive. Specifically, four-day passes for a family will set you back around \$1,200. Many people experience instant buyer's remorse after handing over the money – even though they'd planned to spend it. So the park designers factored in the boat ride as a breather that allows people to relax and get into a better mood before entering the park. That way, the outing starts out on a better note, and everyone wins. The key message here is: Understanding behavioral psychology will allow you to design better events. People are, as psychologist Dan Ariely says, “predictably irrational.” In fact we have over 180 cognitive biases that we're not even aware of. That means we're often not in charge of how we make decisions – even though we'd like to think we are. We can't change this predictable irrationality, but, like the Disney park, we can design around it. We can use our understanding of human behavior to create events designed to help people connect, and to put them at ease. For example, the author was inspired by the Disney example and gives the guests at his Influencer Dinners a transition period to get comfortable in their new environment. Instead of handing them a drink and forcing them to chat, the guests always start with a relaxing activity like touring the house together. However you design your experience, make sure you always behave ethically; don't use your knowledge of human behavior to take advantage of people. Remember: to build a long-lasting, trusting relationship with other people, you need to be competent, honest, and benevolent – you always need to have their best interests at heart. Always be transparent about your motivations for hosting an event, and make sure to be upfront if you're collaborating with a brand or receiving sponsorship. In the next blink, you'll discover how to apply your skills to design not only events but also thriving

communities that are in line with your values and ideals.

## **When you're trying to create a community, start where you want to end up.**

Traditionally, organizations that are looking to attract new members, or businesses seeking customers, have a recruitment model that focuses on three moments. First, there's the moment of discovery, when people first encounter the organization. Then there's engagement, where people get to know it. And last, there's membership when people sign on to become part of the community. These phases are very important, but there's a problem: they're usually approached in the wrong order. When we're creating communities, we need to design backward. We need to figure out what kind of community we want to create and what our key values are. Put simply, we need to define what kind of membership we're offering people. The answer to that will influence our engagement, which will determine how we recruit. The key message here is: When you're trying to create a community, start where you want to end up. Tina Roth-Eisenberg's community-building efforts in the fields of art and design have been so successful precisely because she started with the end in mind. The Swiss designer was lonely and isolated upon arrival in the United States. She found it hard to meet other artists and designers. Apart from the language barrier, she noticed that people from different creative disciplines tended to stick to themselves. And professional conferences were so expensive that she couldn't afford to go. Tina decided to make a space for the creative community to get inspired and collaborate in an accessible setting. She designed an event series called CreativeMornings and put out a call on her blog. With her key goals in mind, she made sure that the events were free, so anyone could attend. She made the events creatively inspiring by including talks and performances. And she created many opportunities for people to meet and collaborate with each other. Perhaps most importantly of all, she was consistent. She hosted the event every month instead of having a one-off affair, so people could build on their encounters and feel a sense of belonging to a larger movement. This type of consistency is essential when you're trying to grow a community. The format was so successful that CreativeMornings are now hosted in 216 cities across 67 countries. The events are still free, and they represent the spirit of creative collaboration that Tina originally envisioned.

## **The most powerful social movements started over a cup of coffee.**

The prospect of creating your own community might be intimidating. You may be thinking that you could never mobilize a network of thousands of people or start a multimillion-dollar business. And you might be right. But, remember, many of these movements started out very small. Jean Nidetch simply invited a few people over to talk about weight loss. Tina Roth-Eisenberg looked for a way to make more artist friends. These communities grew from an authentic personal need, and they expanded because lots of people shared that need. The key message here is: The most powerful social movements started over a cup of coffee. When you're creating your own events,

start small. Identify something you care about, and then think of how you would like to contribute to a community of people. Perhaps you're a bit lonely and are craving deep connections with the people around you. Or maybe you want to mobilize your peers around a political cause, like raising money to support refugees. Once you've identified what you care about, you can give some thought to designing an event using the principles you've learned about human behavior. For example, if you're craving deep connection, think about activities that'll maximize vulnerability loops and good discussion. Going to a noisy bar probably won't be the right activity, but climbing a mountain together or doing a cooking workshop could fit the bill. If you want to build a community around a social cause, like supporting cancer survivors, then give some thought to the specific contribution you'd like to make. Do you want to create a social forum where survivors can discuss their experiences freely? Or do you actually want to raise money for people who can't afford ongoing check-ups and treatment? Depending on your answers to these questions, you can work out who you need to connect with and how to design your events. And if you're starting a business, drawing on these principles can help you engage with and recruit the right people in a competitive hiring market. Remember that people value company culture almost as much as their paycheck. Think about the culture you're creating and how you're communicating your company's core values through every aspect of recruitment and training. Whatever you're designing, remember that the key is to issue an invitation – an invitation for people to connect and become part of something larger than themselves.

## Final summary

The key message in these blinks is that: The secret to all successful companies and social movements is that they mobilize groups of people to bond with one another and form strong communities. Understanding behavioral psychology will allow you to design events that maximize the potential for connection and collaboration. Through these events, you can create social, corporate, or cause-based communities that reflect your key values. And here's some more actionable advice: Abandon networking. Networking events are ubiquitous in corporate culture. But they're also universally hated because they're so awkward. And they usually don't help your career very much, either – there are too many people crowded together for you to identify the few that could really influence your business. Instead of going to networking events, choose activities you love, where you have the chance to make genuine connections with people. Not only will these interactions prove more helpful in the long run; you'll also have much more fun! Got feedback? We'd love to hear what you think about our content! Just drop an email to [email protected] with You're Invited as the subject line and share your thoughts!