

Ryan Jenkins: 0:00

Connection isn't new, it's just neglected. And it's neglected now more than ever. And we think that we're connected because we have all these wonderful tools and technology and social media and texting and email. It feels like we're more connected than ever. If you've ever texted I love you to a spouse, that's a wonderful pro-social behavior that we should all be doing more of. But that's only communication and then your brain doesn't click on to connection. Connection we actually process in the back part of our brain, so that I love you text would just be communication. It wouldn't be connection until you felt the embrace of that person, you saw their body language or facial expression or you heard the tone of their voice. These are all things that move from communication to connection.

Ryan Jenkins: 0:42

If listeners think about doing this, let's say tomorrow you wake up and you were to smoke five cigarettes before breakfast and then you were to smoke another five cigarettes before lunch and then you smoked another five cigarettes before dinner and then another five cigarettes before bedtime, so a total of 20 cigarettes in a day. And then you did that for 40 years. 40 years, that 40 years, that that action of smoking all those cigarettes, which turns out to be 292,000 cigarettes. That would actually be healthier for you than lacking social connection. It's just that important. Or, you know, move from communication to connection.

Ryan Jenkins: 1:23

Cause if we talk to people, you know we talk about connection, but it's not really like we know what it is. But I don't think we necessarily have defined it in a meaningful way. And here's how we define team connection collective pull to be all in. So it's not a, it's not a force, it's a feeling, right, it's a feeling. It's like I can't. I can't help, help but lean in and show up for the team. I can't help but be excited to show up at work. I can't help but just lean in, and it compels us to care, even when things are inconvenient. My opinion, the future of work are those that are connectable. These are people that are willing and looking for opportunities to find more connection, and that's really what's really important. But according to the longest study of adult development done by Harvard University, our most significant need is connection. It doesn't take as much time and effort as we think. We just have to prioritize it. Loneliness is not the absence of people, but rather it's the absence of connection.

Jeff Haffner / Introduction: 2:19

Welcome to our crossover show with Anatomy of Leadership and TCNtalks. Now here's our host, Chris Comeaux.

Chris Comeaux: 2:29

Hello and welcome to the Anatomy of Leadership. I'm excited today we have with us Ryan Jenkins. Ryan is a Wall Street Journal bestselling leadership author and a keynote speaker. I'm going to read from his bio, but first, it's good to have you, Ryan, it's really good.

Ryan Jenkins: 2:43

Yeah, looking forward to this. Thanks for having me.

Chris Comeaux: 2:45

Yeah, absolutely so. Let me read from Ryan's bio. So, he's a Wall Street Journal bestselling leadership author on the topics of team connection, which we're going to talk about, generational differences, which we're going to talk about, and the future of work, which we're going to talk about. Ryan's thought leadership has been featured in Forbes, Fast Company, Fortune and CNBC and for over a decade, as a keynote speaker and consultant, he has helped hundreds of world-leading organizations like Salesforce, Coca-Cola, Delta Airlines, State Farm and John Deere, which brings out a lot of cool nostalgic memories growing up of going to some John Deere shows. He's also the owner of Rivet, the AI-powered connection tool trusted by Netflix, Walmart and PepsiCo to strengthen their teams and engage their audiences. Today, Ryan's on a mission to help leaders and organizations be connectable, unlocking the essential trait to move teams from isolated to all in. And Ryan lives in Atlanta, Georgia we were just talking about that with his wife and three children, and also a yellow lab, and so that's cool, Ryan. Is there anything I left out you think would be important?

Ryan Jenkins: 3:47

No, that about, does it? So, looking forward to jumping into this conversation.

Chris Comeaux: 3:51

Well, I always like to start with anatomy of leadership. It was like one of an inspirational moment thing, and then it ends up now becoming a staple of the show, which is asking folks, what's your superpower? And it's always fascinating to see what people say in this, and so I'm looking forward to seeing what you got to say.

Ryan Jenkins: 4:07

I wish I had an actual superpower, but I've got very few really fine-tuned strengths and I would say maybe my greatest strength that I've had, that I've come to know over the years, the years, it's this odd ability to actually draw meaningful application from almost

every or any story that I whether it's I read or I see a story or hear a story talking to a colleague or a friend, and so as a writer and speaker, that's become a really, really helpful strength where I can draw out something valuable. And then for me too, I have this kind of underneath that superpower, that ability to actually spend long amounts of time wrestling with this story to the ground, trying to figure out what is the actual nugget of truth in this that I can pull out and make it applicable for my audiences in the lane that I spend my time in, which is around team connection, generational differences. So again, greatest strength that I think I possess is this ability to draw meaningful application from almost any story.

Chris Comeaux: 5:08

That's so and just first off, I love the humility in your answer, Ryan, and almost all our guests. That's why this is so hard. Right, it's like folks that have the most impact on the world have some connection with the answer to this question. But it's like this humility, like you're stewarding some gift, and I feel like that's the spirit of your communication. And the other thing that occurs to me we had Daniel Pink on our podcast recently and so fascinating conversation.

Chris Comeaux: 5:34

I know you probably know Daniel and one of his predictions. We focus more on his book A Whole New Mind and with artificial intelligence, and so he's got this framework that he's predicting of the future, which is more right brain superpowers, and you should smile because one of those future superpowers is storytelling. But I love the way you framed it, because I grew up in South Louisiana, so my favorite uncle was a Cajun storyteller, so I think storytelling was in the culture, but I think you take it to a different level in the way you answered it, like sifting and mining through it, and when I think back on just some of the most powerful storytellers, I know the story had multiple layers of meaning and were used in multiple different ways, and my sense is that's what you're kind of poking on with the way you said it.

Ryan Jenkins: 6:23

Yeah ways, and my sense is that's what you're kind of poking on with the way you said it. Yeah, and as a writer a lot of my friends who are writers and perhaps you can relate as well it's a labor of love to write a book and it takes a long time to sit with a specific topic and you can spend years and years and years in a topic and then only to come find out you've only scratched the surface. And so, there is a certain knack and ability to actually sit long-term in an expertise or topic, to really wrestle it to the ground, to figure out all the ins and outs, and I think that's becoming a unique gift, especially nowadays where it's so quick to just jump onto the next topic or point your sights on something else and move

on. And so again, I thought it was such a detriment. I thought I was a slow learner and a slow reader. Turns out I'm just a deep thinker. At least that's how I'm positioning it.

Chris Comeaux: 7:10

And I think that your time has come. It's interesting. So different things have bounced around in my mind. Literally right before we were able to jump on you, before you and I were in the green room and so we had a lot of requests about my book on audio. So, we're recording my book on audio. There's something to sit there and reread your book out loud, and it's forcing me to sit in my own book and the anatomy of leadership is meant to be like a meta framework for what is leadership. You Google the word; you get six billion hits. So, I'm living what you just described as we speak and I'm like this is actually not bad. I really did a lot of research in this book and it's forcing me.

Chris Comeaux: 7:47

And with artificial intelligence, when you literally could sit there and you could have the facade or the misperception that I am now a master at the subject. I use this analogy. Yesterday, one of the hospices we work with and I said, hey, if I did a quick chat, gpt on, tell me what it's like to be a nurse. And I'm like sitting there and I read that and I look at a nurse of 30 years experience and say, yep, I've been there, got the t-shirt. I'm like what would your reaction be? And she didn't say it out loud. I'm like you're thinking bullshit, aren't you? And so, it's like you think you can grasp true learning and knowledge because you read a chat GPT and I think it's the interesting, maybe risk of the age that we live in. So, the fact that you have that, I feel like maybe your time has come, having that superpower of marinating in it, really grasping it and then how to pay it forward to people.

Ryan Jenkins: 8:38

Yeah, I hope so. Yeah, it's a wild world we live in. It seems to go going super-fast and I've got three young kids and they're starting to use AI, or I'm starting to help them with school projects. We're trying to weave it in and I'm trying to teach them, while it seems like I still don't quite understand it.

Chris Comeaux: 8:59

Well, I think you are going to be grounding for us today because we're really going to talk about connection. So, I already alluded to my book, the Anatomy of Leadership, and I was thinking first off, kudos to Eric Talsolhoff in Wisconsin at Sheridan Richardson Hospice. He connected us. I got to shadow some of your incredible presentation because they also did it as a webinar where other people could see virtually, and so you do have a superpower of storytelling. And so, I asked Eric after I said, can you give me an intro to Ryan? And so, he was gracious enough to do that and you and I really hit it off. We find out we're both

on the East Coast here. Kind of funny. We met supposedly in Wisconsin. I say supposedly because virtually I got to listen to you. And then here we are today. So, I just want to jump in and thinking about like setting the table First off. You have incredible toolbox of tools Storytelling is already talked about, but poking people on connection and I got to see firsthand and I think Eric would be okay me giving you a shout out Like he literally took to heart what you said and I think he just finished his first round of literally I don't know if he called him coffee with Eric but just like these, really connecting with his team, like individually, every level of the organization, and he was just espousing the fruits.

Chris Comeaux: 10:16

We actually have a one-year leadership certification course and Eric's one of the leaders and he was just paying it forward to all the other leaders in that course of you know how often when we've got all this external stuff, there's so much the rapidity of change, the acceleration, and the thing I feel like I got the most fruits from he's saying, is I spent one-to-one time with our staff and you listen to that and you go. Really, I mean, it's not like the sexy technology thing.

Chris Comeaux: 10:42

And so, I don't know any reaction you have to that.

Ryan Jenkins: 10:45

Oh my gosh, yeah. When he shared that story with me, I just thought you know, that's it. I mean, that's like connection isn't new, it's just neglected. And it's neglected now more than ever. And we think that we're connected because we have all these wonderful tools and technology and social media and texting, and email and it feels like we're more connected than ever. But that is so false. It is so false.

Ryan Jenkins: 11:12

What happens is we actually we're confusing communication with connection. So, a good way to think about it is if you've ever texted, I love you to a spouse, that's a wonderful pro-social behavior that we should all be doing more of, but that's only communication, and your brain processes this in the front part. So, again, that's just communication. And then your brain doesn't click on to connection. Connection we actually process in the back part of our brain, so that I love you text would just be communication. It wouldn't be connection until you felt the embrace of that person, you saw their body language or facial expression, or you heard the tone of their voice. These are all things that move from communication to connection, and so that's all it is.

Ryan Jenkins: 11:52

And so often day-to-day, especially at work, in meetings, what are we mostly doing? We're mostly just communicating, we're just delegating, we're updating, we're pushing around information and we're not actually connecting. And so we have to be intentional, we have to fight for this, because it's just falling through our fingertips, and I think that's what the example of Eric is so profound and it's so useful, because it's so human and it's one of our most significant need. In fact, I'd say it's our most significant need as humans is connection. It's not our most urgent need, you know food, water, shelter that gets the most of our mental capacity and our focus day to day. But according to the longest study of adult development done by Harvard University, our most significant need is connection. It doesn't take as much time and effort as we think, we just have to prioritize it. And that's my mission is just to put this talk about connection to the forefront of so many minds, and that's why I love having conversations with you about it.

Chris Comeaux: 12:48

You know I was listening to. I always try to listen to a podcast when I'm working out. If I could do two and three things at once, I'm always a happy man.

Chris Comeaux: 12:55

And so I was listening to Modern Wisdom with Chris Williamson, and he said something. So, my mentor I think I share with you Ryan was Stephen Covey's mentor, a guy named Dr Lee Thayer, and he would say that Maslow got it wrong, and he's now passed on Dr Thayer, that is, and I never had the opportunity to take him to task on that of like. What do you mean by that? Well, it's interesting. Williamson unpacked it today. He actually had Simon Sinek on his podcast. So, Simon Sinek, Chris Williamson, it was a great show, and Simon Sinek basically said the same thing that Maslow got it wrong.

Chris Comeaux: 13:27

Because self-actualization is just about you and that's important, like the journey of self-mastery.

Chris Comeaux: 13:33

I put that in my book, but the very next chapter is caring for others. You have to be in interaction with others and I feel like they were kind of poking on. I can't remember the name of the book, but it talks about how there's a pendulum in overall society that goes from me to we that there's more of a communal like we're worried, more about the group, the connection, and then the pendulum swings, then it's all about the self and there's a general trend in over, like I think it's a 40-year period or something and they went all back through history and they explained a lot of movements like communism, et cetera. Based upon that, me and we and I was just listening this morning to them and that just felt so profound that sometimes this you know we have the selfie generation and all

that there's so much gravitational pull to just be me and that the basic human need to connect with others, but again the gravitational pull seems to be pulling people so much in that opposite direction.

Ryan Jenkins: 14:29

Yeah, so well said. It's funny Simon Sinek alluded to that because we talked about the same thing in our book Connectable is. We challenged respectfully Maslow's hierarchy of needs and he put belonging right in the middle and we tried to make the case that it is our most significant need. And you think about, from day one of being born, you're relying on others and you have to be dependent on others in order to thrive in today's modern world. And another good way to perhaps put an exclamation mark on this is if listeners think about doing this. Let's say, tomorrow you wake up and you were to smoke five cigarettes before breakfast, and then you were to smoke another five cigarettes before lunch, and then you smoked another five cigarettes before dinner and then another five cigarettes before bedtime, so a total of 20 cigarettes in a day. And then you did that for 40 years. 40 years, that 40 years, that action of smoking, all those cigarettes, which turns out to be 292,000 cigarettes. That would actually be healthier for you than lacking social connection. It's just that important. And again, because it's invisible, it tends to go in the back of our mind and we don't think about it. And so, now that we're having this renaissance of neuroscience and all this research, we're starting to understand it. And then COVID put a big spotlight on it. So it's advancing.

Ryan Jenkins: 15:56

So much of this conversation, but just simple things you think about. You know the worst of the worst in our societies. What do we do? We put them in jail. And the worst of the worst in jail. What do we do to them? Put them in isolation. We are social beings and we literally think socially Throughout the day. I challenge the listeners when you're trying to learn something, you're constantly in conversation in your head. You're trying to put yourself in conversation with someone else. We're constantly in the gear towards social thinking. Even when we're not around people, we're very much the gear towards social thinking. And even when we're not around people, we're very much in a social mindset. And so, again, this is not new, it's just neglected. And now more than ever, because there's so many modern forces that are pulling you and I apart, we have to be vigilant about fighting for connection.

Chris Comeaux: 16:43

I love the what you just said, fighting for connection. I had a late-night call yesterday with a gentleman who's just brilliant and I'm kind of using him a little bit as a health coach and an AI coach. He's very much a unicorn and some of the things we were talking about batting back and forth. And I just stopped him, and I said I got to ask you a question, the

ability of what you could do with AI, especially with, maybe, how open data sets are becoming. I asked him, I said so what's the purpose of an organization going forward? And it took him a little bit to kind of answer the question. But I love and this is a very left-brain kind of mind at person and he goes, I think, relationship and connection and I thought that's pretty fascinating. And so, you know, is that going to help someone's bottom line? Well, in the long run, it probably will, because my guess is you've got great data right. The lack of connection probably shows up in a bunch of different ways within an organization's data, does it not?

Ryan Jenkins: 17:39

It absolutely does, and so I couldn't agree with that more and again, the reason why we tend to ignore connection is because we can't see it. So, a good analogy, before I share some of the data, is think of a brick wall, and oftentimes I do this with audiences. I'll show them a picture of a brick wall and I ask them is this a strong wall? And many of them, you know it looks like all the bricks are together and they're thinking, yeah, that looks like a strong wall. And then I show them a picture of a brick wall that actually has mortar. You know there's cement connecting the bricks. And then they see the difference Ah, yes, the connection. You know, the wall that has connection is the strong wall. Because if your you know teams just like that brick wall without mortar, without cement, without connection, it's susceptible to just collapsing underneath pressure and so. But a brick wall with mortar, with connection, those are the formidable, resilient teams that are going to stand the test of time. And if we think about the future of work, of course it's going to involve some type of new technology, some new form of AI. That's unquestionable. But we don't know what that's going to look like. And the one thing that we do know that's going to be in the future is human connection. So, while technology will evolve, the thing that will endure for now until the end of humanity is human connection, and so, therefore, I believe the future of work is human connection, to the point that the person that you're speaking of was mentioning, and so, in my opinion, the future of work are those that are connectable. These are people that are willing and looking for opportunities to find more connection, and that's really what's really important.

Ryan Jenkins: 19:13

So back to the data. According to the research that we did, we did global research around workers and we found that eight out of 10, eight out of 10 workers say that they feel disconnected, at least monthly. So, eight out of 10. And then what was? Those same eight out of 10, they want more connection at work. So, this is what's really fascinating. This is a big shift, because in years past and as someone that studied generation, I know this to be true that in generations before us, those generations they always separated connection outside of work. Right? I don't go to work to connect and bond with individuals. That's reserved for outside of work. Right, I don't go to work to connect and bond with

individuals. That's reserved for outside of work. That's changing now and so, again, eight out of 10 people are wanting more connection at work. They're looking towards their leaders, their employers, to facilitate some of this connection.

Ryan Jenkins: 20:02

And then the last data point to round out the state of connection at work is that nine out of 10, so this includes one other person that wouldn't say that they experienced disconnection at work. Nine out of 10 people said that they would not speak up about feeling disconnected at work. So, if anyone in the audience is thinking, gosh, this sounds like a relevant topic and it probably is an important topic, but I don't think it relates to me because I don't hear my colleagues or my direct reports. No one's talking about feeling disconnected, and that's because they won't. One, because I'm convinced that they're not sure that that's actually what they're experiencing. They can't put words to it. And two, there's a lot of shame around it, so that we tend to just bury it and try to move forward and we change organizations around it. And so that we tend to just bury it and try to move forward and we change organizations, or we just mail it in or quiet quit and we don't actually deal with the core issue here, which is disconnection.

Chris Comeaux: 20:56

Wow, the thing just listening to you, Ryan, occurred to me. I mean, this certainly is a workplace issue, but there's the term the loneliness epidemic. A couple of years ago I was able to go to England. They picked some of the top hospice and palliative care leaders in the States to go over to England. That's actually where modern day hospice came out of, was St Christopher's in London, and I had no idea I didn't have a minister of loneliness in England, and so this loneliness issue is so prolific just all over the globe. But then you just kind of alluded to another huge topic I want to unpack with you. So how is the epidemic maybe uniquely impacting different generations, because this is a very interesting phenomenon, whether people know it or not, that we're going into. I think I've heard the term 5G, which is five generations in the workplace that we're on the verge of experiencing or in it just depend upon where you're at in America. So, can you speak on that a little bit?

Ryan Jenkins: 21:55

Sure, yeah, and I'll give you just a little bit of context on my career, that'll kind of frame this. And 15 years ago, I started writing books on generations because I was fascinated with the generational conversation as related to the workplace, and the millennial conversation was really hot. As a millennial, you know, I thought that was a fascinating conversation. And so, 10, 15 years later I was writing a book about Generation Z, which is the youngest generation now entering the workforce. And as I was writing that book, I kept bumping into all this research that was highlighting how disconnected, isolated,

lonely Gen Z was. In fact, they're twice, twice as likely to experience loneliness than our elderly populations. All around the world we're seeing these trends, and so that's the first time we've ever seen that imbalance. And so, alarm bells are going off in my mind. And that's when I started to focus my attention on connection, and I want to figure out why was this emerging generation so disconnected? And then what can organizations and leaders do to actually connect with this emerging workforce? And so, when we went and did all the research, it turns out every generation's experiencing more disconnection than ever before for a variety of reasons, but it's still most acute amongst Gen Z not by as much as we thought, but it's still really highlighted and accentuated amongst the emerging generation.

Ryan Jenkins: 23:17

I think partially part of that is due to this generation just being more aware of some of the mental health challenges that they're faced with and being a little bit more open to having these conversations and raising their hand and saying, yes, I am experiencing more disconnection and loneliness. So, I think that skews the results a little bit, but at the end of the day, loneliness is a universal human condition. It's something we all experience and no matter how introverted or extroverted or which generation you are. And the reason we still have this emotion is because it's not shameful. It's a signal. It's literally a signal to you and I that we are wired for connection, and then when we experience loneliness, that is our nudge to go seek out connection. And so, we should be using it more as a signal as to how we should form organizations and how we should lean into our teams, and not as something that you know looking externally, that you know pointing fingers and looking at ourselves, that something's wrong with us. No, it's just because this is our species. We are wired for connection.

Dragonfly Health Ad: 24:20

Thank you to our Anatomy of Leadership sponsor Dragonfly Health is a leading care-at-home data technology and service platform with a 20-year history. Dragonfly Health is also title sponsor for the Leadership Immersion courses. Dragonfly Health uses advanced technology and robust analytics to manage durable medical equipment and pharmaceutical services as part of a single, efficient solution for caregivers, patients and their families. The company serves millions of patients annually across all 50 states. Thank you, Dragonfly Health, for all the great work that you do.

Chris Comeaux: 25:08

You know, one of the things that occurs to me, Ryan I'm just sitting here just reflecting because you're so good in your communication skills.

Chris Comeaux: 25:14

So, one of the blessings but challenges that came out of COVID for us is we had a hypothesis we could be a virtual organization, but because of COVID we had to go there in spades, just like a whole bunch of other people. But we were an early believer that we could do this, even though Elon Musk would say you can't. We were trying it in pockets and then COVID just forced us to go this route. So now we have team members all over the country. There's a few of us at what we consider our headquarters in North Carolina. So, it brings a unique challenge, right? I mean I love just connecting with you right now, but I imagine if you and I sat down in Atlanta and had a beer somewhere and a meal, there'd be a whole different level of connection. Many organizations are finding some aspect of interacting virtually with their teams. Can you talk about that a little bit, because that just brings a whole different challenge.

Ryan Jenkins: 26:05

Yeah, it's a hot topic. We work with organizations big and small all around the world Fortune 500 companies, medium small businesses all of them are faced with this. None of them seem to have any answers, and this is what a lot of our audiences and a lot of our readers of our book told us was perhaps the most aha moment for them. And here's the definition Loneliness is not the absence of people, but rather it's the absence of connection. So, I'll say that one more time Loneliness is not the absence of people, it's the absence of connection. So, think of it this way, especially in the context of remote work. As it relates to your question If we're looking at our team and our organizations and we think, gosh, everyone seems super disconnected and there's a bunch of silos, let's just get everybody in the same room, let's bring everybody back to the office. That could be part of a solution, but it's not the full solution because it's not about the presence of people, it's about connection. And so, we've all experienced this. Right, if you go to a conference and you don't know anybody at that conference, you could be in a room full of hundreds of people but still feel isolated and alone and disconnected because you don't have connection with those individuals. So, it's not about the presence of people as much as it is about the connection that we develop and nurture and maintain between people. And so now that we have that mindset or kind of that new lens as it relates to this conversation, we can still build connection in the digital world. It's harder to do and it takes more work and effort, but we can still do it. And on the other side of that coin is yes to your point if we were to be in the same room and having a beer, yes, we'd have much more opportunity and we could drive deeper connection faster. But it's not necessarily has to be done in that regard, and if we're going to get in those environments, we have to be that much more intentional. And so here's a good way to think about it.

Ryan Jenkins: 28:08

Some of the research we've shown a light on in the book was around social media and how is that positive or negative towards our behaviors and is it good or bad for us?

Ryan Jenkins: 28:18

And the research that we pointed a spotlight on was showing that the good side of social media, when it's beneficial to us, is when it's beneficial to us is when it's supplementing in-person, in-real-life relationships.

Ryan Jenkins: 28:32

Social media becomes detrimental when it's in substitution of real-life in-person relationships, and so I think there's a lot of parallels to be made as it relates to this conversation about remote work or in-person. If you're going to choose to do hybrid or fully remote work or in person. If you're going to choose to do hybrid or fully remote, there still should be some type of in-person component to it as a way for us to spark the conversation, drive some depth as it relates to connection, and then we can use remote work to actually supplement those relationships versus using it as a substitute. So, a good way to kind of think about it in summation here remote work shouldn't substitute, it should supplement our connections, and so I think that's a good way to think about it. And of course, there's some unique situations where we just can't get in the same room with people, and that's fine. We have to spend extra effort in some of these remote environments actually drawing on more connection and going more personal in some regards to develop this connection.

Chris Comeaux: 29:33

Right, I wonder if this would be a good time to talk about Rivets.

Ryan Jenkins: 29:37

Yeah, yeah. So, we you know we had three goals when we wrote the book. When I say we my co-author, Stephen Van Cohn, who's my business partner we, developed this and the tools that I'm about to share, and so we had a three-pronged approach. One was to do the research, write the book, and now we do lots of speeches and trainings as it relates to how to cultivate more connection at work and create really strong, high-performing teams. Step two was then; how do we help organizations measure connection? So, we actually developed tools that are empirically validated to actually measure how the connection levels inside of a team, so you can figure out where you might need to spend some more effort building connection. But then the third and final step was when how do we scale it? When we leave an organization, how do we help organizations scale connection at work?

Ryan Jenkins: 30:24

And we developed a product called Rivet. So, think of Rivet like a mechanism that connects two things to make them stronger. It's exactly what it does. So it's an AI-powered connection tool where folks take an assessment and then they actually get paired with someone on their team or inside the organization that they're scientifically proven to develop a strong bond and the data is very, very clear that if you just have one strong connection, just one other person at work that you have a really strong connection with, all these benefits occur. We're more engaged, we're more satisfied at work, we're more resilient. We tend to stick around a lot longer inside an organization and oftentimes when we think about connection, we think I have to have connection with everybody on my team and the organization. It just feels overwhelming. No, it's just one other person you've got to have a strong connection with, and so that's all that we focus on is how do we get connected folks individually, one-on-one, and then we actually kick off a customized connection journey between those two individuals, creating really useful conversations between those individuals.

Ryan Jenkins: 31:30

And since developing the product, we now Netflix is using it for onboarding, right. So, any new employee that comes in the organization takes Rivet, gets connected with someone within those first 90 days to kind of cement their onboarding process and then coming into the organization. Walmart is relocating thousands of folks to their new Bentonville headquarters and so that's another period of isolation, right. When we move somewhere new and we don't have, we're not acclimated, we don't know anybody in the community high point of isolation in our career. So, they're using Rivet to get connected with someone that's already established in that community to actually help draw them into the organization and help them receive all the benefits of connection. So, there's a lot of really cool and unique use cases that a lot of our organizations and clients are finding as it relates to Rivet. But all that to say is there's so many points in our career at work when we find ourselves highly isolated and we're trying to pinpoint those times and actually alleviate that sense of disconnection and isolation with Rivet.

Chris Comeaux: 32:33

Is there any multi-generational wisdom or strategy that goes into Rivet Like would you want? Does it have to be same generation, does it have to be cross-generation, or do you not get to that level of specificity?

Ryan Jenkins: 32:46

The engine of Rivet is Hexico, which is the most widely scientifically accepted personality model, and a small component of that is life stage, which typically hinges on age. So typically someone that's in the same life stage or typically around your same age we tend

to have a stronger pull towards and connection with. So, age or generation plays a small component in the matching, but not as significant as one might think.

Chris Comeaux: 33:18

Without revealing anything proprietary. What are some of the stronger determinants?

Ryan Jenkins: 33:24

Yeah, so life stage, you know personality. So, the Hexaco, there's five personality identifiers, and so we work closely with the chief scientific officer at eHarmony. So, his name is Dr Galen Buckwalter, revolutionary scientific officer, and he's credited with making over 2 million connections through eHarmony. I'm sure, Chris, you and many others remember eHarmony. It's one of the most widely successful matchmaking platforms out there.

Ryan Jenkins: 34:08

Real science to this and at the end of the day, we're drawn to certain personalities and we're trying to take it to another level as well and really start to get in the nitty gritty of how do we start to define connection between individuals on a team and how do we identify where there might be some growth opportunities. So, we're starting to inch into the space around mentorship and how do we pair people that might not connect on the surface level and feel like there might be less opportunities to connect? How do we nurture those and draw people in closer? So that's another angle we're trying to view as well. So, there's a lot of components, a lot more science than I ever thought went into this, and so I'm glad we've got some really technical-minded and science-based folks on our team to think through all this stuff.

Chris Comeaux: 34:51

Have you ever bumped into a guy named Chad Littlefield? He's actually out of Asheville.

Ryan Jenkins: 34:55

That name rings a bell.

Chris Comeaux: 34:57

I feel I almost need to. I don't know him. I know of him. He actually does many products, he has a lot of YouTube videos, but he has this box of we Connect cards and they're brilliant questions and they're organized. There's a shallow level but there's the much deeper questions. We have used them with some of our virtual training and you're making me reflect Our feedback on our virtual leadership immersion course is just off the charts and it's interesting how we've kind of created what we've created.

Chris Comeaux: 35:30

It wasn't like we had this master blueprint; it was really more that listen, improve, listen, improve. And then I think we've put together this power pack. But you're making me reflect these WeConnect cards, which it's a box, and I always joke and like you can purchase this because this is great for date night, because they're just great questions, and so you get these folks that never met each other but in the context of their working, same general. I always hate calling hospice and pedicure an industry, I'd much rather call it a field. So, we're working in the hospice and pedicure field. They've got that in common.

Chris Comeaux: 36:00

But then these questions, some of which are funny, some of which are somewhat mid-level and some of which are fairly deep, and we sprinkle those over the three days where we use that Zoom breakout function and it does create like a networking thing on the back end, and so I wonder if we just like, by dumb luck, just kind of put something that creates WeConnect. So, I wonder, do you use, like, what are some of the tools that maybe you use? And I also would wonder if you could take to the generations Gen Z, Millennials just tools, tactics that you've seen.

Ryan Jenkins: 36:32

Yeah, you know that you say those WeConnect cards. I am familiar with Chad's work and yeah, he does extraordinary work in that space, and I've heard multiple clients and their folks that have used those WeConnect cards and I want to just speak to that just really quick, because I think so often what we need is just permission. Right, we need a little bit of guardrails to create more connection, and so what tends to happen is we fall into social scripts, and the one we use here in the US is how's it going? We're constantly saying how's it going and we're not actually asking or wondering or truly curious about how is it going with that other individual. It's essentially we're just saying hi. And so, one of the small things I use is we've got to break the social scripts, and one of the things I use constantly is how's your day going? It's such a small subtle tweak on a question, but it's enough to where it kind of pulls people out of that social script and then, once they turn your attention to you and they see that I'm ready and excited to hear, like, how's their day actually going? We have this small exchange and and that's the other thing people tend to um overestimate is it takes as little as 40 seconds to actually cultivate a connection between two individuals 40 seconds. So, I travel a lot, I'm gonna speak at a lot of wonderful events and I find myself in hotel elevators constantly and as an introvert um, I used to use see those opportunities as, oh, let me just try to not make eye contact with this person and keep to ourselves and go about our business. And now that I've immersed myself in all this connection research, that small little question is something I use constantly in elevators to just both just ignite a little spark of connection to where we

both exit the elevator with a slightly boosted well-being. But you asked your question around kind of what are some of the things we can be doing?

Ryan Jenkins: 38:23

Here's a really simple practice leaders can use within their teams, and we call it Connect Five. So, at the top of your meeting and this can be hybrid, virtual or fully in person you spend five minutes where one person on the team shares one non-work-related picture. That's it Just five minutes, one picture, and they just share it, and they just talk through. Whatever the picture is it could be about their marathon training, home brewing, family member pet, whatever it might be, and it really busts down any silos across generations as well, because we find that we have way more similarities across generations than we do differences, and so it's such a simple practice. But here's what's really important about it is that we have to put it at the top of our meetings.

Ryan Jenkins: 39:06

We've been talking about fighting for connection. Typically, what happens is we put connection exercises at the back of our meeting. Connection excuse me, busyness will just bulldoze connection right out of our meetings, and we'll tend to just communicate and not connect. Like we talked about earlier, we'll just communicate, communicate, communicate and then conclude our meeting. So we have to spend those subtle little time and it doesn't take a lot of time at the top end to really prioritize connection, and then we can really start to see some of these cross-generational connections flourish, because people tend to think, oh my gosh, I'm two generations above you, but we like the same thing, and that can cause a couple of data points to move a little bit closer and cause some connection that those two individuals didn't think was there. I hope that's helpful.

Chris Comeaux: 39:51

That's very helpful. Actually, I'm trying to sit here and play a little bit devil's advocate and so, just because of Me Too and some horrible things that have happened, how do leaders listen to what you're saying? I could see that other side in their voice going but wait a minute, how do I not cross boundaries? But then maybe the other guardrail is. But then also, how do I not seem inauthentic in some of these wonderful tips? Because I also am just reflecting on using those, we Connect cards. You see that hesitation, but once that first brave person. It reminds me of when we were kids and everybody's at the top of the hill on their bikes and it just took that one brave soul to go over the hill and then everybody kind of followed them. It kind of feels a little bit like that. But then how do you make sure you don't cross any boundaries? Any advice there?

Ryan Jenkins: 40:40

Yeah, yeah, great question. And we hear that a lot and I totally get that. And I think leaders that are listening to this, they're constantly hearing the message of be vulnerable, be vulnerable, be vulnerable. And that's a tough message to hear. Because, to your point, Chris, it's where's the line, like, if I'm too vulnerable, then I've overstepped, I've overshared and that could cause some issues with the team. But if I'm not vulnerable enough, I could be positioned, as you said, inauthentic. And I think here's a better question. I think you should ask yourself and I'm talking to leaders here and here's the simple question Am I relatable? Am I relatable? Am I relatable? Have you shared a story, a failure, something recently that makes you relatable, that creates something where people can take a step closer to you? And let me give you one really simple example from we profiled this story in our book.

Ryan Jenkins: 41:37

She, this woman, became the CEO of about a thousand-person company right in the, you know, the middle of the pandemic, and so she was in the first all hands, completely virtual meeting and this was kind of her introduction to the group. And, you know, middle of the pandemic, there was still, there was lots of high uncertainty. They weren't quite sure what was happening and oh, now there's this new leader. And as she was communicating the state of the business, the state of the industry, she did a wonderful job communicating with everybody and it kind of goes back to this idea of communicating versus connecting. As she verbally concluded her portion of the meeting and handed it over verbally to her executive team, she just had this sensation that, like, I've done a great job communicating, but I haven't yet connected. She hadn't done anything that made her relatable, and so she made a brilliant move. In the moment it was a little bit risky, but it paid off for her. So, here's what she did. So again, she verbally passed over the meeting, but she continued to share her screen. So, they were meeting on Zoom and so everyone's still looking at her screen and they're thinking but you just passed over the meeting, you need to unshare your screen.

Ryan Jenkins: 42:45

But she intentionally wasn't doing this. And then she went to Google and again all thousand people are watching her screen and everyone's a little getting a little antsy. They're moving to their edge of their seat thinking, oh my gosh, what kind of this is a train wreck. We're going to see her search history. We're going to see what their tab she's got open, they're like oh my, get another CEO on the phone, like this one's going to be out the door here before we know it. And but again, she was doing this intentionally and she went to the blank search boxes. All eyes were on her and here's what she searched she how to CEO. Good, that was it. Oh, wow, a little risky, right, a little risky.

Ryan Jenkins: 43:21

And she purposely used bad grammar because, again, what she was communicating in that moment was I'm right there with you as leaders and you know this, Chris, and so are the leaders that we can't, as leaders, we can't give our direct reports, and those that we leave, we can't give them certainty. We can't right, because we live in an uncertain world but we can certainly give them clarity. And so, she knew, like this is uncertain times and I'm right there with you and we're going to do this together. And she said she got flooded with emails of people saying thank you for being relatable. Someone said thank you for they hadn't seen so many smiles on the Zoom in months, and so it was such a simple action and she moved from communication to connection and she did it in a way of just being relatable.

Chris Comeaux: 44:07

That's an awesome story and I love the way you tell it. Actually, that is actually brilliant. How to CEO good. I love that and that's actually like a brain tattoo as well. So let me ask you kind of a final question and let you do final thoughts, and I'm going to ask it in this way, but I really want you to answer in the form of a story. So, what mindset shift do leaders need to embrace to lead effectively in a multi-generational workplace while ensuring connection remains central to their culture?

Ryan Jenkins: 44:42

And so, instead of answering it, I'd rather you tell it in the form of a story. I'll do my best to I'll share a story here in a minute, but let me take one step back, because what we're trying to do right now, what I'm trying to do, is define connection. Because if we talk to people, we talk about connection, but we know what it is, but I don't think we necessarily have defined it in a meaningful way. Here's how we define team connection it's the collective pull to be all in. Team connection is the collective pull to be all in. It's not a force, it's a feeling, right, it's a feeling. It's like I can't help but lean in and show up for the team. I can't help but be excited to show up at work. I can't help but just lean in. And it compels us to care, even when things are inconvenient. Right, it's because we just feel that we're connected to this group and if anyone listening just think about the things that you're connected to, whether that be a person or a place Like you're just inexplicably drawn, like you don't know why, but you're pulled into something, and that's the type of environments we want to create in teams, especially as we go into a very high-tech future. We want to create a very high-touch places where we're drawn in and we're supporting each other.

Ryan Jenkins: 45:58

I was recently interviewed on a podcast by John Lee Dumas. Do you know John Lee Dumas, the Entrepreneur on Fire podcast? He's incredible. He's been doing I think he was one of the first people to do a daily podcast and he's been doing it for years now. So, he's

got, I think, over 4,500 podcast episodes, so he's extraordinary. But we were over 4,500 podcast episodes, so he's extraordinary.

Ryan Jenkins: 46:20

But we were having a conversation similar to this one and he shared a really personal story that I thought was really an exclamation point on what we're talking about. And so, he was in the military and after military, he went to go work in finance in New York and he was working at a great firm and months and months and months had gone by and he just had this sense that he felt burned out. He felt like he was just languishing in his job and, luckily for him, being a millennial, at work he had a really forward-thinking Gen X boss that approached him and said Hey, I can see there's some tension here. Here's what I want you to do. I want you to go invite all of your team members to your place this weekend. He was like what are you crazy? I'm not going to do that. That sounds obnoxious and I barely know these people. But of course, John Lee Dumas his military background and taking orders from folks that are above him in the organization said yes, sir, that's what I'm going to do. So, sure enough, he invited all eight of his team members over to his house that weekend and little did he know. He didn't think anybody would show up, but all of them showed up. All of them said yes, all of them showed up and they said they had a wonderful time.

Ryan Jenkins: 47:35

And then that Monday morning, before he got to work, after that, hanging out with his team members, he said he woke up. And he said, Ryan, for the first time ever. He said I had a completely different feeling going into the work week and he said I'd never experienced it before. But I finally felt excitement. I finally felt the sense of engagement, sense of willing to pull, to be all in. That was my words, not his, and it just reminded me of just how simple connection can be. And again, that pull, that excitement that wanted to bring him into the office, is because he finally had some connection with his colleagues. There was something that was pulling him towards the team and the organization. There was something that was pulling him towards the team and the organization. And so, he said, connection changed everything for me and how I showed up at that organization, the relationships I built. And again, it wasn't a generational thing, it was really just a time and spending, presence of others and showing up for each other and just spending some time getting to know one another. And that's what it's all about. That's what we do. We show up for each other and we all collectively get behind the same stuck thing and we try to get it unstuck. That's what teams do at the end of the day.

Ryan Jenkins: 48:45

And so, the mindset shift I'd like to encourage everybody to be thinking about is this mindset shift of being connectable. So connectable means you're ready and willing to be

connected. So, think of it like being teachable. If you're teachable, you're ready and willing to be taught right. Leaders, we're teachable. We're constantly learning about best approaches and ways that we can best lead. I want you to take that same decision and apply it to connection. So, it's not something you do right, you don't do teachable, you just are teachable. Same thing with connectability. I'm not asking you to be connecting all the time. I'm asking you to make it part of your routine. Your values, your mindset is to be connectable. It's a decision and I encourage everyone to make that decision.

Chris Comeaux: 49:28

That's so good, Ryan. Well, I want your final thoughts, but I also want to poke something in there. What would be one small habit that all of our listeners, that they could start this week to increase meaningful connection with team members across their department organization, but also maybe at home?

Ryan Jenkins: 49:47

Yeah, you know, when you think about being connectable, it's just I think it's asking the right questions. So, I would say, take a how's it going fast questions. So, I would say, take a how's it going fast, so remove that question or whatever go-to question you ask that's not really a question, right? You're not actually looking for the response and go on a fast for that question and replace it with something else. You can steal mine of how's your day going or how's your morning going, or you can steal something else like another good one that a lot of our audiences and clients use is what's the most interesting thing that's happened to you this week?

Ryan Jenkins: 50:23

You know something like that that's. It's not too deep, but it's not also the same thing that we're always picking at or always using. So go on that fast. Try to jump off what you're typically used to, typically used to asking folks in your circles or at work and try to come up with something else. That is a good way. That's going to spark something and have a small exchange and perhaps learn something new and different from those around you that you haven't learned before, and no matter your generation too. That's going to help us connect in more meaningful ways.

Chris Comeaux: 50:56

That's awesome, Ryan. I keep hearing the song in the back of my mind all in. Do you come out to that whenever you go? Speak out of curiosity.

Ryan Jenkins: 51:04

That's a great point. No, I usually use One Republic's Connection. Can I get a connection?

Chris Comeaux: 51:12

Oh, very cool, that's awesome. Well, Ryan, thank you. I really what I said in the beginning feels even more deeply and profound now that you are in the right place at the right time with the right wisdom. And I do think your superpower is indeed that ability to use the stories, because it gets us beyond that left brain to do that right brain heart connection to go. Oh, oh crap. I've been so in the tasky stuff. How have I lost sight of that? And I think we live at a time, especially because of how quickly AI is moving, to listen to interesting podcasts.

Chris Comeaux: 51:48

Last night, Jeff and I, our executive producer, were talking this morning and he asked me a question like did you listen to the same podcast that we both did? And that just how quickly you know AGI, ASI and where is this thing all going? And some of the key thinkers are like I'm not quite sure. And yet you kind of watch this facade of how quickly you could have the perception that you've really grasped knowledge and at the click of a button you could ask almost any question in any field. That's got a seduction in a very shadow side and a gravitational pull from the most human element of connecting with other human beings, and so it's a long way around the barn for me to say man, I'm so glad you're doing this work. Thank you, it was a blessing to me just listening to you today. I'm very thankful to Eric I'm going to shoot him a thank you for connecting us, and so I'll just give you the final word before I close us.

Ryan Jenkins: 52:45

Well, I appreciate that, Chris, and thank you for all the work that you do as well, and those that lead. Sometimes it's thankless, but it's so important, right, and it's tough to do, and one of the reasons I love this topic is because that's a lot of the messaging I need to hear. Again, I'm an introvert that tends to like to wrestle ideas to the ground and then share them with groups, and so it's a message that I'm constantly having to use to pull myself away from the things that seem to have my attention and the tasks. I'm a very much go-getter knock all the things off my to-do list and so I have to remind myself the value of connecting with others, and for leaders especially, too.

Ryan Jenkins: 53:23

It's not always about us wanting to connect, but it's about those around us that need our connection, and so oftentimes, as leaders, we go first, and so happiness and success it's only real when shared. It doesn't exist unless we actually share it with someone else. We are social creatures, and so we. You know it's a blessing that we're a part of teams, and what an honor it is that we get to lead, and none of this exists. None of the happiness, the success, all the highs of life doesn't exist without others to share it with, and so I'll leave that with folks. Be connectable exist without others to share it with, and so I'll leave that

with folks Be connectable. We must be intentional about connection, and so I'm encouraging all of us to be connectable, and thank you, Chris, for having me.

Chris Comeaux: 54:04

Yeah, thank you for being here, Ryan, and of course, we're going to include a link to your book Connectable. Any other links, Ryan, that you want us to use, please get those to me. We're going to include them in the show notes. Thank you for the work that you're doing. I do think that this is incredibly important work at the time that we live.

Ryan Jenkins: 54:19

Thank you.

Chris Comeaux: 54:20

All right to our listeners. At the end of each episode, we always share a quote, a visual that possibly might create a Brain Bookmark, a thought prodger about our podcast subject the further you're learning in growth and thereby your leadership. We're looking for like a brain tattoo. We want it to stick. Be sure to subscribe to the channel the Anatomy of Leadership. We don't want you to miss an episode, please. We want you to check out Ryan's book. We want to check out Anatomy of Leadership. We'll have links to those as well. So, thanks for listening to the Anatomy of Leadership, and here's our Brain Bookmark to close today's show.

Jeff Haffner / Brain Bookmark: 54:51

"We have to be vigilant about fighting for connection. The teams that have true connections will stand the test of time." By Ryan Jenkins.