

LISA C. BAKER

**HOW TO
GROW YOUR
BUSINESS
AND
BE A BETTER
HUMAN**



**Building influential partnerships
founded on radical human equality**

How to Grow Your Business and Be a Better Human

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What would happen if your business were featured on Oprah tomorrow?

Imagine millions of viewers listening eagerly as Oprah talks about your product or service.

What if Oprah talked about how amazing it was?

What if she raved about how it changed *her* life?

You'd have so many sales in minutes, your website would probably crash!

That's the power of growing your business through influencers.

When influencers — the people who are followed and listened to by your ideal customers — recommend your products and services, your business grows exponentially. Hundreds and thousands of customers come to you, eager to buy. You don't have to convince them your product is good. They already believe it, because they trust the person who recommended you.

It's the fastest, most powerful, and simplest way to grow your business.

But it comes with a dangerous pitfall.

You see, when you decide to grow your business through influencers, that decision comes with a temptation. It's the temptation to look at every potential business connection through the lens of influence. Whenever you meet someone, you start to focus first on whether they can help you, and how much they can help. That becomes the main thing you see when you're looking at fellow human beings. Instead of wondering whether you could be friends, you wonder how much they can help you. Your first question becomes, "How useful is this person to me?"

And in the short term, this mindset can be incredibly helpful for your business.

But it's incredibly destructive to your humanity.

In the long run, it's destructive to your business, too.

I believe it's possible to grow your business by connecting with influencers *without* becoming focused on people as tools, or on connection as a means to an end.

I believe it's possible to grow your business through authentic partnerships with influencers, in a way that will benefit both of you as human beings.

That's what this book is about.

Why do you want to connect with influencers?

If you're like most people, you imagine that connecting with influencers would be a powerful way to grow your business. If Oprah recommended your product, you'd be famous overnight, and customers would be lining up at your (virtual) door.

But if your focus is only on how influencers can grow your business, then you'll quickly fall into a mindset of begging. You see influencers as having a lot to offer you, and yourself as having nothing to offer them. Who are you to ask for their attention? How can you possibly stand out?

But let me turn this question around.

Why do influencers want to connect with you?

There are more factors at play here than the relative number of Facebook fans you have. If the only thing you're looking at is how influential and famous each of you is — your “influencer value” — then you'll immediately judge yourself as unequal to the person you're trying to connect with.



why do influencers want to connect with you?

You'll feel that you aren't as worthwhile as they are.

And when you feel that, there are only a few ways you can approach them — none of which will enable you to forge a genuine connection.

You can approach by asking them to take pity on you and begging them to help you.

You can approach by offering everything you possibly can in exchange (affiliate commissions! shares with your own meager social following! undying gratitude!) — but the reality is that what you have to offer in exchange isn't much compared to what you feel they can offer you.

Or you can fake it, and pretend you're more important than you really are.

But what if your **value** and your **influence** are actually entirely unrelated things?

What if you *do* have something valuable to offer influencers, and it has nothing to do with how many people are on your email list?

I believe that if you shift your thinking around *why* you want to connect with influencers, your whole approach will change.

For the past few years I've led a monthly mastermind group for mom entrepreneurs. The group has grown organically for years, and I believe much of its success comes from its simplicity. Every meeting, we ask each attendee to bring two things: something to give, and something to get. We ask them to spend a moment before the meeting reflecting on what they've learned about business or life or parenting in the past month that might be useful for the group, and then to reflect on what they need help with. Each person brings an offering of value to the group, and each person asks for help.

The mastermind is local, so the only unifying factors are the that we all live in Atlanta and we're both moms and business owners. Unlike most mastermind groups, we are all at very different stages of our businesses. Some of us have been freelancers for years but have only recently become entrepreneurs; some have thriving brick-and-mortar businesses; and some don't even have a business yet, just a passion and an idea.

It would be easy for some members to feel unequal to others. Some are less knowledgeable, less experienced, and less financially successful.

But by asking everyone to bring something to give, we start each meeting (and each new member) on an equal footing. Every month, we lay the foundation of the belief that *everyone has something to give*. Everyone has something of value to offer, no matter where they are in their journey right now.

And that belief is key to any genuine relationship, because you can't build real connection on a foundation of inequality.

If you approach influencers with a deep sense that they are more important and more valuable than you, they'll know it.

**you can't build real
connection on a foundation
of inequality.**

And you simply can't make friends that way.

You can make business partners, sure. Maybe. If you beg and plead and offer money, maybe you'll get people to partner with you on a promotion or two — but you'll never get real relationships that last for years, relationships that include numerous partnerships and advice sessions and idea sharing and inside jokes and last-minute coffees because you're in town for a layover.

You can't make with friends with people when you want to use them, or when they want to use you.

You can only make friends when you approach people as equals.

Which leads to the question: In what way are you truly equal to a powerful, influential, rich person who's a highly respected leader in your industry?

The answer lies in the different ways we judge people, and the different levels of value through which we view each other.

Four Levels of Value

In our society, there are hundreds of different kinds of value through which we see each other and judge each other. Beauty, fame, wealth, age, personality — the list of ways we judge each other is infinite. But for the purposes of influencers and business, there are four main types of value — four filters through which we view people — that matter most.

Level 1: Capitalist Value

How much money do you make? How successful is your business? How much “net worth” are you generating in a capitalist economy?

When it comes to business networking, this is usually the first thing we wonder about. We believe that wealthy people know how to create wealth (discounting the various underlying types of privilege and advantage that mean different people aren't starting at the same line), and so we think that someone who is rich is automatically also wise, knowledgeable, and skilled. We respect wealth, believing that it's an indication of value. Someone who is financially successful in business must also know what they're doing.

But there are several problems with using wealth as a filter for value.

First, it's simply not true. People who are wealthy are not necessarily good at business. Sometimes they're just lucky — they stumbled into success without knowing how or why. Sometimes they're privileged — they inherited money that enabled them to hire people who know what they're doing, while they simply benefit from other people's skills. And sometimes they're pure dishonest crooks, people who know how to sell but not how to deliver on what they promise.

And even more importantly, financial success is *not* a measure of influence. We imagine that if someone is wealthy, they must also be well connected to and well respected by people who might want to buy our products or services. But there is very little connection between their economic success and how much reach they have to get the word out. So if your goal is to connect with people who are influential with your ideal customer, then the most wealthy people in your industry may not be the right connection.

There are plenty of social media influencers who don't make any money from their influence — they simply offer value and connection. And there are plenty of people who make lots of money but have very few followers — which means if your goal is to grow your own influence, they can't help with that.

So if your goal is to connect with influencers who can help you grow your own audience, then how much money someone makes is entirely irrelevant.

Level 2: Influencer Value

How many followers do you have? How many people listen to you? How big of an influencer are you?

If you're trying to connect with influencers, then of course this filter matters. When you need to grow your business, then you need to find connections who have a following of your ideal customers. But there's a difference between seeing this as a measure of value and using it as a filter.

When you use this to measure how valuable a person is, then you will treat people very differently based on how influential they are. You'll think of yourself as less important when you're reaching out to someone with a bigger audience than you have. And this prevents you from *ever* building a true connection.

What you need to do is to recognize that influencer value is a relevant metric when you're seeking to grow your business, while also recognizing that it has no relation to how valuable a person is. Influencers, after all, are human just like the rest of us.

Level 3: Purpose Value

What are you bringing to the world? What value do you offer your customers? What's unique about your business?

If you're an entrepreneur, then your business has a core purpose which adds value to your customers and to the world. This value consists of both the benefits you give your customers (the reasons why people buy from you) and your reason for creating your business (the value you want to create for the world). It's both the thing you want to give customers, and the motivation that inspired you to create your business in the first place.

This purpose value is the most useful lens you have for building connections with influencers.

Your purpose has to do with your mission, and when you focus on this, then you start to shift your thinking from what you're trying to gain to what you have to give. You started your business because you wanted to offer something great to the world, and that is the value you have to offer — not just to your customers, but to influencers, too.

And when you seek out influencers whose purpose and mission aligns with your own, then you can start to build a truly authentic connection based on shared values and shared ideas.

This is what you are looking for: alignment.

You aren't looking for rich people to spread the word (they usually can't).

You aren't looking for random influencers to spread the word (they usually won't).

You're looking for influencers with whom there is an honest-to-goodness, built-in, inherent fit with what you do, who will be interested in what you do for its *own* sake.

You see, most people think influencers only want to share something with their audience if they'll get paid to do so. But the truth is that influencers are eager to offer *value* to their audience. So if you can explain the core value of your offer, and if it aligns with and adds to the things the influencer is already offering their audience, then they're going to be much more interested in sharing it.

And when your core purposes align, that's a great foundation for a long-term partnership that will truly be valuable for both of you.

The question here is: is this a fit? Or could it be? If the answer is yes, then you reach out to them. If the answer is no, then you don't.

Level 4: Human Value

Are you human?

Then you can add value to anyone's life by offering a real, genuine connection.

This may sound out of place when you're hoping to connect with influencers — after all, if they're influential, then they probably have plenty of friends.

But if you have a mission that's aligned with theirs, and if you're putting something unique into the world, then chances are good that you could offer the connection of real friendship — which is more rare than you think. The truth is that **human connection is one of the greatest gifts we can offer anyone**. And when you reach out with your focus on what you can give, rather than what you can get, then your chance of creating a real connection — and building a true friendship — is much greater.

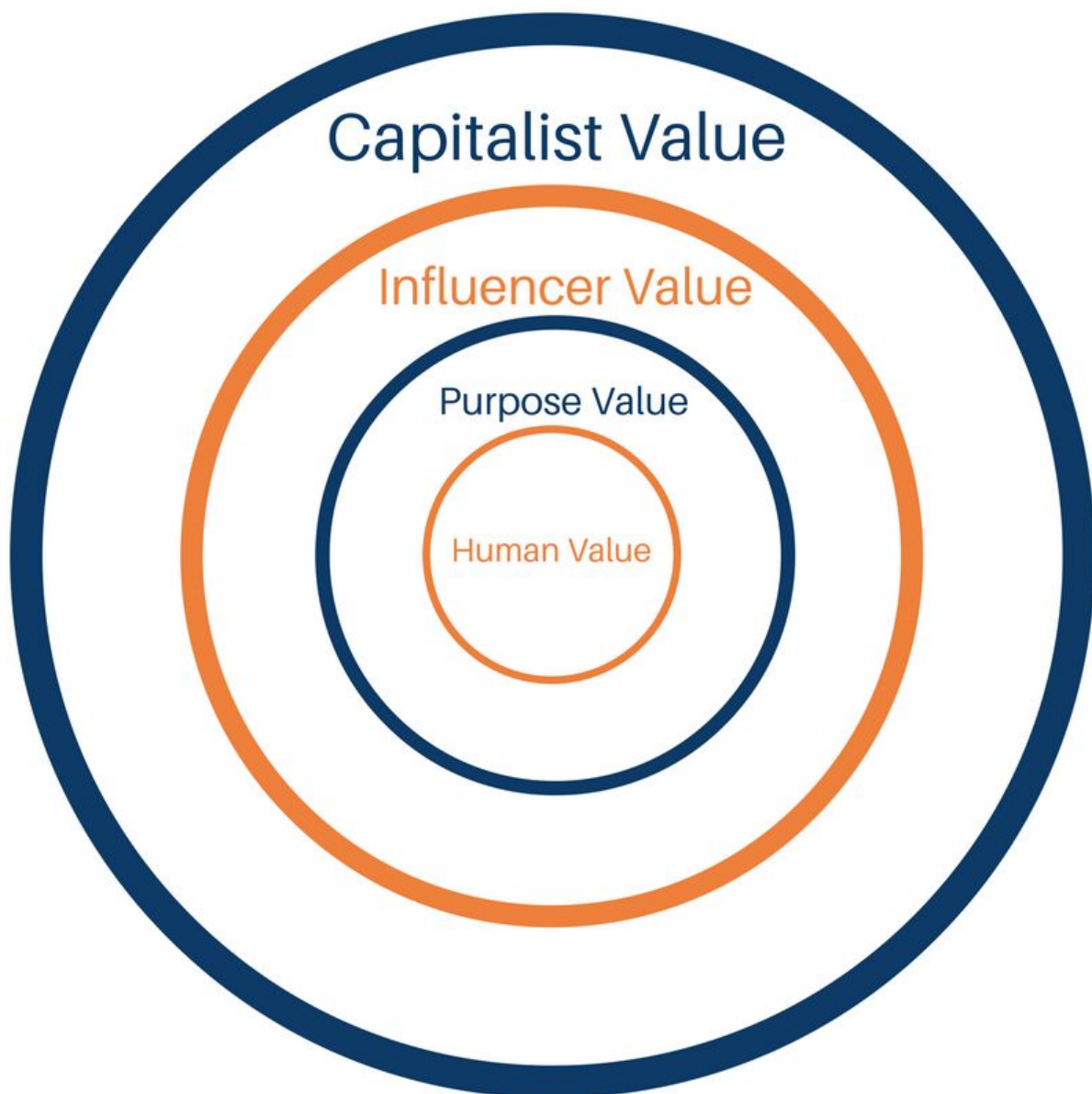
When you approach influencers with a mindset of **radical human equality**, instead of feeling like you're not as good as them, then you create the potential of a true connection and a true friendship.

**human connection is one of
the greatest gifts we can
offer anyone**

The trouble with these different levels of value is that most of the time, we look at them from the outside in. We look through each of these levels as a lens, and we judge people from the outside in — first by their wealth, next by their status, and then by their purpose.

The problem with that is, by the time you're looking at people through so many different value judgements, you can't even see the inner core of shared humanity and potential friendship. If you think of these levels of value as concentric circles, then you're looking at each of them through the lens of the others. As each circle gets smaller, the center circle becomes too small to see. You become blind to the fact of our fundamental equality, and you can't look at people without instantly judging them as better or less than you — and treating them accordingly.

It looks like this:

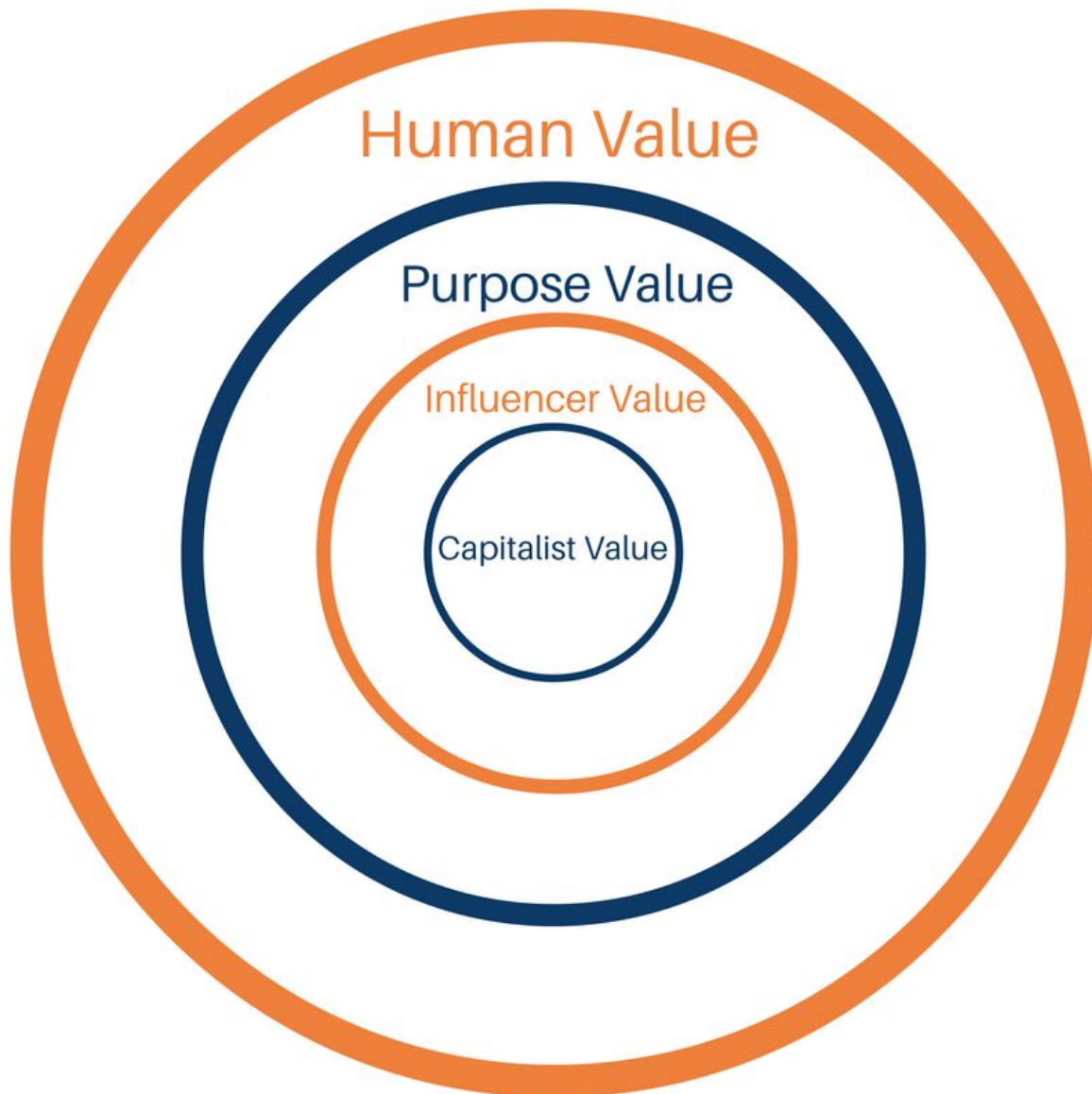


So how do you break through that?

You need to flip the levels.

Flipping the Levels

Instead of looking at people from the outside in and judging their value by wealth, fame, and status, we need reverse the levels, and judge people from the inside out.



When you do this, you approach everyone *first* as a human being. You start from the expectation that you both have interests, needs, passions, desires, and friendships, and that *you have the right to approach anyone as an equal human being*. (And they have the right to approach you, too!)

This doesn't mean you're not respectful of the fact that influencers probably have less time and more power than you do. But it does mean that you shift your thinking around how and why you're approaching someone. You focus on what you have in common and what you have to offer, not on how much more powerful they are than you and what you want to get.

Second, you examine what you know of the person from what you can observe, and from that knowledge, you make an informed guess about whether there's a possibility of a true connection and a true friendship. You look at their purpose, their mission, their passions, and their offerings, and you consider whether it makes sense to connect with them on a business level. You put yourself in their shoes: would you want to share about your offer if you were them? Does what you have to offer add value to what they offer?

And finally, because you're looking to build your business, you filter through the lens of influence. But you don't look at this as a measure of worth (that's already established by the first lens of humanity). And you don't look at it as a measure of being a good fit for a partnership (that's established by the second lens of purpose). You simply look at it as a measure of whether this person can help you build your business.

Several valuable results stem from this.

First, flipping these around means that you truly can talk to anyone. You don't have to beg or plead or be salesy or pushy; you can talk to influencers as equals, because at the core, you *are* equal, and you know that.

Second, it means that your primary filter for whether a partnership could be a fit is purpose, not influence. This is important because there are many people out there whose purposes and dreams align with yours who would be amazing partners for your business — but, like you, they haven't built their influence *yet*. Looking at purpose *first* means you don't discount those people: you recognize their value and you look for ways to partner with them, too.

And third, it means you do also filter through the lens of influence. This is important because growing your business matters (and at certain times in your journey, it matters a *lot*) — and it's okay to look for people who can truly help you grow. When you're in a space of financial stress and you need to grow your business quickly, you should prioritize partnerships with people who are most influential with your customers. But it doesn't mean you see those people as more valuable, or that you're *only* looking to build relationships with those who are useful to you. If you're looking at them *first* through the lens of human equality and shared purpose, then the foundation of your connection will be solid and genuine. Influence becomes a filter, but not the only thing you're looking for.

In fact, when you flip these values around, everything about your approach to influencers will change.

How the Value Levels Change the Game

When you look at people first through the lens of core human equality, and only secondarily through the lenses of purpose and influence, you'll approach them in an entirely different way.

When you view yourself as less than someone, that belief will always shape your behavior. And the ways you behave when you feel like you're less important are not likely to lead to real connection.

Let me share a story that illustrates what I mean.

In my free time, I volunteer a lot with programs that serve people experiencing homelessness. I spend a lot of time serving meals at soup kitchens and offering care at an herbal foot clinic. I spend a lot of time sitting down with people who are homeless, asking about their lives and listening to their stories.

And my experience volunteering has made me deeply aware of how incredibly rare it is for people who are homeless to be treated like human beings.

If you go downtown in any big city in the U.S., you won't have a hard time spotting people who are homeless. Every major city in this country has at least a few people scattered downtown on busy sidewalks, holding up signs and begging. "Homeless — please help," their signs say; or "Will work for food."

If you're walking downtown in my home city of Atlanta, you can't get far without being approached by a beggar. "Hey, can you help me out, I just need a couple dollars for the bus," someone might say; or maybe a more enterprising, "Hey, do you like poetry? For a dollar I'll recite you a poem I wrote!"

Most people ignore these beggars. They actively, intentionally, and rudely avoid them. They cross to the other side of the street to avoid going near one; they are careful never to meet their eyes; and they brush past when they are spoken to.

They treat people as though they weren't human.

When someone on the streets asks me for money, I always give something if I can.

But often, I have no cash, and so I stop and talk.

Sometimes I'll sit next to someone holding a sign in a doorway. I'll ask their name, and how they're doing, and what their goals are.

I can't count the number of times someone has told me that five minutes I spent with them was the best five minutes of their day.

You see, when you sit next to someone and talk to them as an equal human being, then what you're doing — at least for a moment — is building a small but real moment of true human connection. And that connection — that sense that we are all in this world together, and we are all here for each other — is one of the core values of being human.

And when you treat someone as an equal, you can, at least for a moment, transform the way they see themselves.

When it comes to you approaching influencers, of course, the inequality is reversed.

You're the one who feels less important, and your natural inclination is to approach them with an attitude of begging.

when you treat someone as an equal, you can transform how they see themselves

But when you do that, you almost force them to brush you off.

If you see yourself as an unimportant nuisance begging for a favor, how do you expect them to see you as valuable?

The way we see each other shapes both the way we see ourselves and the ways we behave.

The Predator Approach: Viewing People As Tools

When you look at an influencer primarily through the lens of wealth, influence, and power, you'll approach them in a way that tells them you see them first as a tool you can use.

When you first find them, you evaluate them by the question: ***Are you useful to me?***

If you decide they're useful, then you'll reach out to them in a relatively generic way. They're a cog in the wheel of your marketing machine. Even if you attempt to personalize it, you don't take the time to be personal on a human level.

It doesn't feel good to approach people this way.

You have to push through to do it. It's a numbers game. You'll need to roll up your sleeves, hold your nose, and put on your marketing mask. You compile a list of prospects and you pitch them all.

This is an approach founded in need and desperation. It's the effect of a zero sum world, a competitive game where there's only one winner. When there isn't enough to go around, you need to be one of the winners, so you seek out every tool that can help you win — even if those tools are other human beings.

You don't see yourself as valuable, because you believe that value is founded in influence and wealth. You only see yourself as valuable when you're useful, and you only see others as valuable when they're useful. Your sense of your own value will change as you gain or lose in the game.

This approach can be effective — you can get partners and promotions from it. But you won't get relationships. You won't get connection.

And over time, you'll become more of a tool yourself.

I would argue, in fact, that you'll become less human.

The Partner Approach: Viewing People As People

But if instead you look at everyone primarily through the lens of shared humanity, your approach will be very different.

Before you reach out to an influencer, you'll take the time to truly understand what they love, what they want, and what they need, so you can offer something really valuable.

You'll do that, not because they're more important than you, but because they're equally human.

You'll dig in and reflect to consider whether you share values and missions on a level that would mean a long-term partnership would make sense.

You'll ask the questions: ***What do we share in common?*** and ***How might we support each other?***

You'll understand the value you have to offer, and you'll articulate it clearly. You'll put yourself in their shoes to figure out what's truly helpful for them.

You won't need to be fake or pretend, because having a smaller audience or being less powerful doesn't make you less human. You can be honest and open about where you are in your business journey, because where you are doesn't impact your worth.

When you adopt this mindset, you can approach people with curiosity and openness rather than pushiness or desperation. You can ask, "Could this be useful for you?" without feeling like you

have to push or convince. You aren't looking for anyone and everyone; you're looking for people who will enjoy partnering with you as much as you'll enjoy partnering with them.

This approach feels good. It's humanizing rather than dehumanizing. It makes you more human, and it makes the other feel more human, too.

How do you find influencers to connect with?

When most people think about growing their business through partnerships with influencers, they immediately think of someone like Oprah.

There's an automatic assumption that if you want to grow your business, the best possible thing you can do is connect with the most influential person possible. It's the Oprah Fallacy: the idea that everyone should be on Oprah if they can.

The idea is that you want the biggest number of people possible to hear about your business.

But that's not actually the best way to approach finding influencers.

Instead, you should look at potential partners through the lens of the four values — but again, flipping them to view from the inside out.

How to Find Partners with Shared Values

Looking at potential partners first on the foundation of shared human value is mostly a function of how you treat them. You don't approach them as a tool to be used; you approach them — and continue to relate to them — as a person with needs, values, feelings, and importance of their own.

But how do the four values affect how you find potential partners?

Just as flipping the values changes the way you think about partnerships, it changes the way you look for partners as well.

Searching for Partners From the Outside In

If you try to find partners from the outside in, then your first focus will be on how wealthy and powerful a potential partner is. You'll want to partner with people who are financially successful, because they'll make you look good. You'll want to borrow their status as a way of proving your worth. You'll search the lists of Fortune 500 companies, richest up-and-coming entrepreneurs, and A-list bloggers. Those are the people you'll want most to connect with.

Next, you'll look for influential people, and bigger will always be better. You'll search for people with hundreds of thousands of email subscribers and millions of followers on social media. You'll look for the keynote speakers at the biggest events in your industry and the famous writers of bestselling books. Those people can send you the most potential customers, so they're the most useful ones to connect with.

Finally, you'll consider purpose value, but it will only be a passing consideration. Of course you won't want partners who are completely unrelated to your business, but you won't put a lot of thought into what types of businesses are complementary to yours. You won't care at all if your values, methods, and mindset are similar, because shared purpose won't be a priority.

What will happen if you take this approach to finding partners?

You'll have no problem finding a list of potential partners you want to connect with.

But you'll have a very hard time connecting with them.

If you're seeking people out primarily on the basis of their power and influence, you won't have anything to offer them — no matter how great your business is. Your only hope for connecting with this approach is to get lucky. If you network long enough in the right places, you might work your way up to that lucky connection — the brother's cousin or sister's husband who knows a guy who can introduce you.

Searching for partners from the outside in is like trying to get "in" with the cool kids.

But what happens when you flip the values in your search?

Searching for Partners from the Inside Out

If you focus first on the shared humanity and equality of everyone, then you'll recognize the fact of your own humanity, too.

Which means that you'll start looking for partners in the most obvious place: the people you already know.

If you've been in your industry for a while, chances are good you know a few people. You might know someone whose business is very similar to yours, but different enough that you could create a valuable offer together. You might know someone who has a pretty big following who would be happy to promote you simply because they know and love you. And you might know someone who can introduce you to an ideal potential partner.

Even if you don't know anyone, you almost certainly follow people. If you care about your business and your industry, then there are people you have learned from, people you have

followed, and people you have discovered as you're studying or researching. If you follow them, then other people probably follow them too.

When you start thinking about influencers you could partner with, start with the people you already know.

Next, you'll think about your purpose value. How do you use this to find potential partners? Think about the core value your product or service gives to customers. What is the main benefit you provide? And then, think about what else goes along with the benefit you offer.

Ask yourself:

- What do my customers need before they use my product?
- What do they need after they use my product?
- What other products or services would help them use my product?
- What other types of products do my customers enjoy?
- What products or services would enhance the experience or atmosphere of my product?

Questions like these will lead you to complementary businesses you can partner with — influencers who offer products or services that complement your own.

You can also ask:

- Where do my customers go to learn about products like mine?
- What do my customers read and listen to?
- What information helps my customers use my product?

These questions will lead you to content platforms like publications, blogs, and podcasts that could be potential partners for you.

Finally, you'll look at each potential partner's influencer value. This won't be a method you use for finding people — it will never be the reason for a partnership. Rather, it's a filter you'll use as a final step so you can guess which potential partners will most be able to help your business.

This method will not only give you a solid list of potential partners; it will also give you a ready-made way to approach them.

If you've followed them for years? You'll be able to tell them that. If your product clearly complements theirs? You'll be able to clearly explain that. Your message, and your purpose in partnering, will be clear and simple.

Let's go into more detail on how you'll reach out to them.

How should you connect with influencers?

If the right way to approach influencers is founded on the belief that we're all equal human beings, what does that look like practically? How is it different from the way most people approach influencers?

I believe there are four keys to putting this into practice in the real world.

Four Keys to Authentic Connection

These four keys apply to any relationship, not just connecting with influencers. Keep them in mind any time you're talking with a stranger — whether it's a random person at the bus stop, a person experiencing homelessness on the sidewalk, or an influencer you want to partner with — and you'll find that all of your relationships can be more genuine, more simple, and more human.

Key 1: Be Honest

A few years ago, I met a guy at an event and chatted with him about the displays at the event. At the end of the conversation, we friended each other on Facebook and discovered that we had a lot of friends in common. After that, he began calling me occasionally to get together. Eventually his calls became more frequent, and instead of inviting me to group events with mutual friends, he was inviting me to go out to dinner alone with him.

I knew I didn't want to date him. I had known that from the first day I met him. I thought he was fun and interesting, but I wasn't attracted to him.

But I didn't know how to tell him that, because he hadn't actually asked me to date him.

This situation went on for *months*. He kept inviting me to get together regularly, but when we went out, our interactions were always entirely platonic. I felt uncomfortable bringing it up (how do you tell someone you don't want to date them when they haven't asked you to date?!?), and eventually, I started avoiding him. To my relief, he finally told me he was interested in me, enabling me to reply with a kind but definitive no. And we're still friends.

Now, some experts will tell you that if you want to build a relationship with an influencer, you should take a similar approach.

They'll tell you that you should spend weeks or even months connecting with an influencer in a casual way so they'll recognize your name. You should follow them on social media, comment

on their blog posts, reply to their emails, and perhaps email them just to tell them you admire them.

But while there's nothing wrong with any of that (and you *should* do it if it's genuine)...it's easy to do in a dishonest way.

If you're following someone on social media because you truly love their posts, and you're commenting on their blog because you have something interesting and valuable that you want to respond — those are great ways to get to know an influencer when you're thinking they might be a good potential partner.

But if you're doing all those things *because you're already planning to pitch them for a partnership*? Then you're being dishonest.

You're exactly like my friend who hung out with me for months before he finally admitted he wanted to date me.

Everybody knew what his real motive was. All my friends knew it, and I knew it too. It was the awkward, unspoken elephant in the room.

But because he didn't come out and say it, I couldn't either.

That's just uncomfortable for everybody.

So if you're casually interacting with an influencer because you honestly like what they have to say, that's great — and it can be a wonderful way to get to know them from a distance and evaluate whether you might want to connect with them more directly.



**inauthenticity
is uncomfortable for
everybody**

But if you're doing it strategically, knowing all along that you're planning to pitch them for a partnership...I think there's a better way.

It's possible to reach out directly to influencers and offer a partnership without being fake or forced.

All you need to do is learn to articulate your core value.

Key 2: Lead with Real Value

Your business is your creation, and your products and services are dear to your heart.

But that doesn't mean they're valuable or useful to everyone else.

In November 2016, I spent three days volunteering at Standing Rock — the camp founded by a group of Lakota women to stop the building of an oil pipeline that would impact their water supply. The tribe put out a call for volunteers to come help at the camp, and so a group of friends and I went to help however we could.

It turned out that the thing they needed most was donation sorting.

People all over the world had been inspired by the Standing Rock, and people all over the world had sent donations. Some were useful: winter clothes, heavy-duty tents, and ropes. But the vast majority were simply junk.

I arrived at the donation tent one morning to see a literal mountain of stuff. The pile was around 10 feet across, and as tall as my head. People were sorting, but with no rhyme or reason, and no one was in charge. When I asked a woman how I could help, she said, "Pick a spot and start sorting!"

So I tried. But much of it was worthless for people who were preparing to spend a winter outdoors in the cold of North Dakota. Who thought that women's lingerie, children's t-shirts, and a bucket of keys would be helpful?

The truth is, people were eager to give. So they found something to give that they had no use for.

And when you have something to give in your business, or someone you want to connect with, it's easy to think your offer is useful simply because it's what you have — but that isn't always the case.

The top influencers in your industry know your competition very well. They know exactly what other people are doing that's similar to you. And the truth is, if you're like the vast majority of entrepreneurs, then what you're offering is, in many ways, not new. There are plenty of other people who are solving the same or similar problems to you; there are plenty of other businesses that your customers could choose instead.

And to offer value, you need to be able to articulate how you're different.

You see, what the best influencers want most is to give value to their audience. If you have something truly unique and valuable, they'll want to share about it simply because it will help their audience.

And if that's not the case, then you need to better identify and articulate the uniqueness of your business, or you need to offer value in a different way.

Luckily, there are a *lot* of ways you can offer value to an influencer.

Here are just a few ideas:

- Implement advice they've given in a blog post or a course, and offer to write them a case study about how their advice helped you.
- Create something personal they can use (like an infographic or a video) that's related to what you offer in your business.
- Ask if you can interview them on your blog or podcast.
- Ask if you can offer a free workshop on your topic of expertise for their membership community.
- Write about them in your book or blog.
- Offer a guest post on a really great topic.
- Give them a tip about an amazing service or product that their audience will love. (Yes, this can be your product...*if* it's truly amazing!)
- Pay them (affiliate commission or sponsorship fees).

Don't reach out without offering value. Focus first on what you have to give.

**always focus first
on what you have to give**

Key 3: Don't Assume

A few years ago, one of the groups I volunteer with held a "night on the streets" for volunteers. For 24 hours, we went out in small groups to spend time outside in Atlanta as if we were experiencing homelessness. The purpose was simply to learn: to get a glimpse of what it's like when you have nowhere to go.

I began my night on the streets in the evening, and as evening drew to darkness, we headed to a dark parking lot where a man had told us we could get a meal. A group comes with a van, he had told us, and they serve dinner.

When the van arrived with soup (which smelled better than anything I'd ever smelled in my life), I hesitated to get in line. After all, I'd had a good meal in the comfort of my own home just a few hours before. For many of the people in line, this was probably their first meal of the day.

But I gathered my courage and went to stand in the back of the line. I was hungry, and the meal I'd eaten at home seemed very long ago.

When I got to the front of the line, the man serving soup looked at me and said, “Have I seen you before?”

I was embarrassed and taken aback. Did he recognize me because we’d volunteered together? Did he know I was only “faking” being homeless? We had never intended to lie about why we were on the streets, but I hadn’t been prepared for being called out in a soup line. How was I going to explain myself to him?

“I’m pretty sure I saw you hanging out at CVS last week,” he said. “Was that you?”

And then I realized — he didn’t recognize me from volunteering. He thought he recognized me from the streets.

In that moment, I realized in a more powerful way than I ever had how true it is that we are all equal. I had thought my real status as a housed person would be obvious at a glance; I had never really understood how little difference there is between me and people who are homeless.

But I also realized how incredibly easy it is to assume.

It was entirely reasonable for the man serving soup to assume I was there because I had nowhere else to go. The reality of what I was doing outside in the cold wasn’t something he could see at a glance. He couldn’t know anything about my story, my reasons for being there, or what I truly wanted.

And this is true when you’re approaching anyone.

No matter how much you research, you can’t ever know for sure what someone wants, what they need, or what they’re passionate about.

And when you’re looking to build partnerships, you need to come with an open mind.

Most of the time, when I reach out to someone for a partnership, I have a clear idea of what I think would work, but I also am very clear that I’m open to what *they* think will work.

Here are some examples of what I mean:

- Don’t assume an influencer will be interested in a particular type of partnership just because they’ve done them in the past with other people. Needs, interests, and business structures change. A blog that used to accept guest posts might not accept them anymore.
 - Instead of saying, “I’d like to offer you a guest post on this topic,” start with, “Do you still accept guest posts?” or “Are you the right person to send a guest post idea to?”

- A person who promotes affiliate products might only promote products they have personally used.
 - Instead of saying, “This is a great affiliate opportunity!” say, “Are you open to new affiliate partners?”
- Don’t assume a partnership structure that worked for one partner will work for another.
 - Instead of saying, “Would you like to do a giveaway of this product on your blog?” try, “Do you think this product would be interesting for your readers?”

When you avoid assumptions and keep your introduction open-ended, you can work with a potential partner to mutually decide whether a partnership is a good fit, instead of asking for something too specific early in the conversation.

Key 4: Be Consistent

The final key is simple: be consistent.

In many ways, it’s long-term consistency that makes the difference between authentic relationships and utility relationships. Reaching out for one promotion is easy; it’s consistently staying in touch that makes the difference.

This can be hard. It’s easy to lose touch with people, especially when they’re long distance. It takes work to make sure you don’t forget about relationships and let them slip through the cracks.

But building long-term relationships instead of one-off partnerships truly is the biggest difference between being authentic or not.

How can you be consistent in building relationships with people in your industry?

First, and most importantly, build relationships you truly care about.

This goes back to finding partners who are a good fit: don’t partner with people that you don’t truly want to be friends with.

If you really admire someone, and if your work is truly aligned with theirs, then your focus isn’t on a single promotion partnership; it’s on connecting with someone with whom you could do many partnerships that are mutually beneficial.

But the key is to only reach out to people whom you actually like as people.

If you do that, then staying in touch won’t be so hard.

As you start to connect with influencers and build partnerships, make a list of people you want to stay in touch with. It doesn't need to be complicated; it can be as simple as a to-do list on your phone that recurs every six months, or an event on your calendar. And it doesn't need to be frequent — long-distance friendships don't need to require frequent attention. Just put a simple system in place that will remind you to stay in touch every six months or so.

Then, every six months, send a quick email to say hi and ask what's going on in their business and if there's anything you could do to support them. Ask about whatever you discussed the last time you were in touch with them.

It's sad that our standards for staying in touch are so low, but most people only reach out to business partners when they want something.

Reach out once or twice a year for no reason at all, and it's amazing how valued people will feel.

Authentic Outreach in Practice

What does it look like when you put these four keys into practice as you reach out to potential partners?

Here's what it does *not* look like.

Common Mistakes in Influencer Outreach

There are several mistakes people often make when reaching out to influencers, and all of them are rooted in the sense of inequality that most people feel in relation to influencers.

First, **they over-explain**. This comes from not understanding or being able to articulate the value you have to offer. When you can't quite put into words what's unique about what you're offering, you overcompensate by giving too much information. You use up several paragraphs of your email trying to explain exactly how and why your offer is valuable to their audience.

Second, **they offer no value**. Ideally, you can offer value through the thing that's intrinsically interesting about your business. But if you aren't able to do that, then make it clear what value you *are* offering. You're the one reaching out, which means the burden is on you to clearly demonstrate what's interesting about what you have to say and what value you want to offer.

Until you can state *briefly* and *clearly* what the value is that you're offering, don't try to connect with an influencer.

And third, **they're unclear what they're asking**. They ask the influencer to share a link on social, or perhaps to give feedback on an article, or maybe to allow them to guest post on their

blog, or possibly all of the above at some point? When you ask for lots of different things, it's confusing, and the confused mind says no. If you make an ask at all (which you don't have to), ask for one thing only, and be very clear what it is.

The Reason for These Mistakes

All of these mistakes are defensive behaviors: they're caused by the feeling that you aren't as good as the person you're reaching out to. These are what we do when we feel like we need to prove ourselves. They're a common response for anyone who is unsure of their worth. They stem from uncertainty about one of the two inner circles of value: your core human value or your purpose value.

The two inner circles of value — human value and purpose value — need to be certain and solid before you can connect with influencers effectively. When either is shaky, you make mistakes. Your human value never changes — it's always a fact — but your belief in it can change. And your purpose value — the unique value you're offering the world — can, in fact, have very little value in itself.

This chart illustrates how those factors work to shape your behavior when you approach influencers.

<p>If you TRUST in your core human value and you DO have purpose value to offer...</p> <p>You can approach influencers honestly, directly, and without fear. You can articulate your value in a way that intrigues people, and you aren't afraid to share your offer.</p>	<p>If you DOUBT your core human value and you DO have purpose value to offer...</p> <p>You struggle to articulate the value of what you do. You over-explain and struggle to spark interest. You believe in your product, but you're afraid to share it.</p>
<p>If you TRUST your core human value and you do NOT have purpose value to offer...</p> <p>You're a scam artist. You use pushy marketing tactics, believing that sales techniques are more important than a good product.</p>	<p>If you DOUBT your core human value and you do NOT have purpose value to offer...</p> <p>You beg for help. You try to fake it till you make it. You try to force yourself to use more pushy tactics, but the truth is you're afraid to share your offer.</p>

When you shift to a foundation of radical equality, you don't need to do any of these. Instead, you can reach out in a simple, direct way.

What to Say Instead

Every time you send an initial outreach email to an influencer, it should be as personal as possible. But nearly every initial outreach can follow the same basic template.

First, ***make a connection***. Tell them why you like them and what you admire about their business. Or tell them something specific you enjoyed from their last podcast. Or crack an inside joke that only their fans would understand. Or tell them you love their beard.

The point isn't to be fake, so of course this should be something real. Tell them something you honestly admire. But the point is also to let them know that you are familiar with them and their work. A lot of people send generic outreach emails to hundreds of influencers at a time, and they're not in any way familiar with the people they're reaching out to. In a short initial email, you can't demonstrate that you truly care about them as a person and you want to build a long-term connection with them, but you *can* demonstrate that this email is just for them and not for them and 100 of their friends. Make it clear that you're interested in connecting with them, not with just anyone.

Second, ***offer value***. Again, there are many ways to do this. The key is to clearly articulate the value without going into too much detail. If you want to offer a workshop for their members, don't give the outline of the workshop here; just give a one-sentence description that's clearly unique and likely to intrigue them. If you want to write a guest blog post, don't include the full outline; include a few different ideas and describe each in a couple of sentences. If you want to do a giveaway of your product on their blog, describe in one sentence why your product would be valuable for their audience.

The key here is to *not* give too much information. Remember, they're busy. Don't tell them everything they would need to know for a partnership. Just give them enough information so they can start to evaluate whether it sounds like a potential fit.

Third, ***ask a yes or no question***. In most cases, this question should be the same: ***May I send you more information?*** This question is great, because it enables you to keep this initial email very short. You don't need to explain all the details in your first outreach. Just a sentence or two can intrigue someone enough (or not) for them to decide whether they want to know more.

Also, asking for more information is a very low commitment. You're not asking them to get on a phone call, or agree to a partnership, or even send a tweet. You're just asking them to write one word back ("yes"). They don't even have to write a full sentence — a simple "yes" is enough.

In addition, this question makes what you're asking for very clear. Don't ask for three different potential things — just one simple question. This prevents confusion.

And finally, it puts all the work of next steps on you. You're the one who initiated the conversation, so you're the one who should put the effort into making the next steps happen. Make things easy for the person you're reaching out to, and you'll be well on your way to a genuine relationship.

When Outreach Still Feels Bad

I believe that if you are doing outreach *right*, it should always feel *good*. You may have heard that marketing involves pushing yourself out of your comfort zone and doing things that are hard. I disagree. I think that marketing, and *especially* marketing that involves building relationships with people you admire and care about, should be fun, exciting, and comfortable. It should feel good.

But I often find that even when people have learned these techniques and have a solid plan for outreach, they still feel scared.

reaching out to potential partners should always feel good

Usually this is for one of two reasons.

Reason 1: The Relationship Isn't Strong Enough

First, it might be because you're reaching out to someone you know at least on an acquaintance level, but the relationship simply isn't strong enough for the thing you're asking for. It feels bad because, quite honestly, it *is* bad: you're making a bigger ask than the relationship is ready to sustain. It feels like you're taking advantage of the person, because you are.

Sometimes this is because you're reaching out to someone you've lost touch with. You knew them pretty well at one time, but you haven't talked in several years. Now you're reaching out to ask if they're interested in buying your program, or if they want to do you a big favor and share your product with their audience. Of course that feels bad. It's not a nice thing to do. You haven't talked with them in years, and now you're only getting in touch because you want something.

Sometimes it isn't that you've lost touch with the person, but simply that you don't know them well enough. Maybe you haven't known them long enough, or you haven't spent much time with them. Either way, the thing you're asking for feels bigger than the relationship (yet) merits.

The solution in these situations is this: don't do it. Never take advantage of relationships in this way. If you're reaching out to someone you know on some level, always stop and do a gut check first. Does this feel good? Do you feel the relationship is strong enough for the thing you're about to ask? Would you be comfortable asking for this if you were sitting face to face with them? Would it feel good if that person asked for something similar of you? If the answer to any of those questions is no, then don't ask. Instead, revive the friendship if it's an old one you want to keep, or build the friendship if it's new — but never do that with an eye toward hopefully getting a partnership down the road. Do it because you care about the relationship. Let the rest come naturally.

If a relationship isn't ready for a particular ask at a particular time, it's actually better to reach out to someone you *don't* know, because at least then you're not taking advantage of someone. When you reach out to a stranger, you're inviting a new relationship — and it's perfectly okay to offer a potential partnership along with it.

But there's another reason why it feels bad to reach out even if you're doing it right, and this reason applies even more when you reach out to strangers. It has to do not with the quality of your relationship, but with your offer itself.

Reason 2: Your Offer Isn't Ready

If you're afraid to reach out to strangers, the reason (contrary to popular belief) usually isn't because you're introverted, or because you have an inner block and feel unworthy.

Usually, it's because your offer isn't ready to share with the world.

This is discouraging to realize. It's terrible to discover that the thing you've been working on for months or years is simply not there yet. But in the moment when you go to send an email to a stranger, stop and ask how you feel. If your offer isn't ready, that's the moment when you'll know.

This has to do with your third level of value — your purpose value. If you are clear and able to articulate the value that you're offering the world, the thing you're creating and the change you want to make, then you'll know it. When you describe it to people, they'll get excited. You'll say your one-sentence description of what you do, and they'll immediately ask where they can buy it. They'll invite you to come speak at their event. They'll pull a friend or two into the conversation and urge you to explain more. They'll get excited, because the thing you are offering is intrinsically exciting.

If the offer you're presenting to influencers isn't generating that level of instant excitement — if you aren't able to explain clearly in just a sentence or two exactly why it's incredible, in a way that makes people agree immediately that it's incredible — then you're not ready to reach out to influencers. Because this value you're offering the world, your core purpose value — this is the value you're offering in your outreach, too. Until you know and can say exactly what you're offering, reaching out will feel scary.

But once you are able to clearly articulate your core purpose value and the value it gives, that will become the key that opens doors to authentic connections.

The impact of authentic connections

It makes a big difference when you start to connect with people authentically, approaching them as fellow humans instead of as useful tools.

It makes a difference when you shift the way you view people — both those who are more powerful and those who are less powerful than you.

Like light, which is both a wave and a particle until it's observed, the way we see each other shapes the reality of what we are.

We see this in small children: they form their sense of self-worth primarily from the way that adults *respond* to them. When other people treat us with respect and dignity, that changes how we feel about our own worth. A responsive caregiver pays attention to what the child is saying, even before the child can talk; she notices when the baby is happy or sad or scared and responds to what the baby is asking for, especially before the baby has words.

Responsiveness says, "I see you." Having our emotions seen, validated, and respected is what grants us security and inner certainty of worth.

And that's a gift you can give to anyone — both the powerful and the powerless — simply by the way you see them and approach them.

The Impact on You and the Other

How does this impact you?

First, it grows your business. Connecting with influential partners is, quite simply, the most effective way to grow your business. It requires no budget and no existing audience. All you need before you start is a clear understanding of your ideal customer, a clear articulation of the core value of your offer, and a solid sales path.

Also, it makes you friends. I don't just mean influencers — I mean everybody. Whether you want to make friends with a street performer or a president, seeing them as a human being is the foundation to connecting with anyone. When you recognize that we're all equal, and in many important ways we're all the same, it takes away a lot of the fear of speaking to someone.

More importantly, it helps you be more human. Connecting with other people — even if it's just smiling at random strangers — will actually improve your happiness and help you live longer. How much more value will it add to your work and your life if you actively seek out, build, and maintain authentic relationships with people you value?

Of course, the good impact extends to the person you connect with, too. When you connect with an influencer in a genuine way, they feel respected, understood, and appreciated. Hopefully, they get to gain a business connection and a friend, and if not, they get to say no without feeling pushed.

The Impact on the World

I believe that more connections — with other people, and even with animals and plants — are always valuable. When living creatures value each other and pay attention to each other, that adds value to the world.

That's true in a general sense, and in that general way, you're adding to the web of connection in the world when you reach out to new people.

But there's something much more specific you're doing when you reach out to influencers, which has to do with power.

This whole approach is founded on the truth that all human beings are fundamentally equal, and that we all have the right to connect with each other on the basis of that equality.

But reality is that not all humans see it that way.

Reality is that even though we're all equal, we don't all share the same power.

And when you reach out to influencers, you are, in a fundamental way, also seeking to shift the balance of power.

There's a reason why trying to connect with influencers can sometimes feel like trying to break into the clique of the cool kids.

It's because many influencers see themselves that way.

And the truth is that influencers *do* have more power than you. They have more influence, which is one kind of power, and often they have more of many types of power — privilege, money, status, and expertise.

Power and influence form a positive feedback loop, with each reinforcing the other.

And when you focus on inequalities of power rather than on the equality of human worth, it creates another kind of feedback loop.

If you focus on yourself as weaker, then you'll approach with an attitude of need. You're hoping the powerful person can help you. The result of that is, whether they help you or not, they keep power over you. Whether they grant you help or not, the power is theirs. They're not sharing it; they're just using it for your benefit. And that keeps you in the cycle of always needing help — and always seeing the other as a tool that can help you, not as a fellow human being. It creates a cycle of dehumanization, where one person is a tool to be used, and the other is a tool to receive, but neither is human and neither is equal.



It's important to recognize that in this cycle of dehumanization, the powerful person is the one with the most capacity to break the cycle. That's why, if you want to learn to approach

influencers as equals, it's a great exercise to try first sitting down with a person experiencing homelessness in your neighborhood and treating them as an equal. In that relationship, you are the one with the greatest power to break the cycle.

But the person with less power can break the cycle too. And that can be an incredibly beautiful thing.

Let me tell you a story about a time when I experienced that.

A few years ago, I met a man at an event I helped organize. We had brought in a shower truck so homeless people could take showers. Everyone there was thrilled to be getting clean and to find fresh clothes, but one man stood out in his unbridled joy. We had music playing as people were waiting, and as he waited for his shower, he danced. For hours he danced with his eyes closed and arms stretched to the sky, with an abandon and passion that anyone would envy.

Later, as he helped us clean up after the event, he told me that he's homeless by choice. He left his home to live on the streets because he felt called to take care of the people who had no homes. As we walked and chatted, he scooped up a bag of groceries that someone had mysteriously abandoned on the sidewalk behind the dumpster. "God always looks out for me," he said casually, as he looked through the bags of food. Clearly for him it was an everyday occurrence for food to magically manifest on the sidewalk, like manna falling from heaven. He offered to distribute the supplies we had left over from the event with equal composure, assuring me that he would find people who needed them.

Talking with him, I had no sense that I was helping him. He clearly didn't need anything I had to offer — everything he needed, it seemed, grew on the ground whenever he needed it. And his utter certainty that his needs would be provided for made my interactions with him feel very different from most people I meet on the streets. With most people, I feel a constant pressure to help. I want to use my power for good. But with him, I could give nothing. He had everything he needed. I could give only attention and kindness, things which he gave me back in equal measure.

In other words, despite our different situations, we interacted utterly as equals.

All of which is to say: when power is unequal, the responsibility of shifting the interaction to one of fundamental equality ought to lie with the person who has more power.

But power is rarely conceded willingly.

And the truth is that the person with less power can shift the balance too.

When you approach someone with love, openness, and trust that your needs are taken care of — without needing anything from that person — then you can shift the dynamic of power, even when the person you're approaching has more power and privilege than you.

And it may be up to you to make that shift, because there are plenty of people in every industry and walk of life who don't really believe in the fundamental, radical equality of human beings.

There are certainly influencers out there who believe they are truly more important than you because they are more powerful, more influential, or more successful.

Which leads to another possibility: when you approach them as an equal, they might push you away.

But I don't think this should scare you. It's not something to worry about. Because if an influencer ignores you, or responds in a condescending way to your outreach, you can use that as a filter. Assume that a connection with them would never be a good fit.

(Although if *many* influencers are responding that way, you should consider whether you're being disrespectful in your outreach!)

But the truth is, when you approach powerful people and seek to connect with them in a human way, you are seeking to transform something in the world.

You're seeking to shift the balance of power, and sometimes the powerful will push back.

And that's okay, because the most powerful people — the ones who truly care about their audience and their relationships, and who have less need to prove themselves — they'll respond with interest and appreciation. Because by the means of your approach, you're making a statement. Your approach says: We are all human together. We are all worthy of connection. I admire your work and share your values, and I would love to offer something to you.

That shifts power away from the idea of networking and inner circles, away from the need for schmoozing or insider clubs or cliques.

It shifts our understanding of power, from a thing that's held in exclusive circles to a thing that can be shared.

And in the long run, this shift will do more than make you a better human: it will make this a better world.

Want to learn more about partner marketing
founded on radical human equality?

Learn more about my one-on-one Partner Marketing Mentorship:
www.authenticpartnership.rocks/learn-partner-marketing