

formative years were serial connectors, and using the technology at the time to make those connections. So, it was bred in me if dare I say. And then you know, as I got older, I founded my company in 2013 and almost nine years later, 90% of our business has been inbound. So, what that tells me is all those connections that I made in my 20s, in my 30s, a good part of my 40s, actually came back to assist.

Jen: You call yourself a serial connector, which obviously came from your parents and I love that. But can you tell us what does it mean? How can we all become serial connectors?

Susan: Well, I think first and foremost you have to witness the joy that happens when you make connections in the universe and then watch the impact. Whether it means somebody gets a job. Whether it means a company gets funded. Whether it means a nonprofit is founded. Whether it means somebody gets a great meal because you suggested your favorite restaurant because they have amazing hummus. And I'm being silly. But the thing is to appreciate why making connections is so vitally important, is to witness what happens from those connections. And that can't be taught. That has to be witnessed. But I have to believe Jen, every single good thing that has ever happened in my life, happened because of a connection someone made for me.

Jen: When you think about it that way, I mean my mind is racing now to think about all the things that have happened to me in my life. And it's interesting because I've been at Deloitte for 20 years, and a lot of times, people are like what's kept you here for so long? My answer every single time is the relationships, the connections that I've made, and what they've meant to me into my career, so that's where I'm going when you say this, because that's so powerful, but people don't think about it that way.

Susan: No. Well, and they often think of it, they think of connecting and networking is one and the same. I fervently believe there's a difference, and for people who may be shy or introverted, connecting should be much more comfortable, feasible, doable, and the reason being is it's much more one on one, one on two, going deep, when networking is very much going around and shaking hands with everybody in the room and taking business cards or doing that in an online meeting room as well, right? As opposed to doing a deep dive, getting to know somebody over the stretch of years, over the stretch of months, so it isn't something that just happens overnight.

Jen: Your book is called, "The Lost Art of Connecting", so tell me more about this lost art. Why have we lost our ability to connect human-to-human and what do we do about it?

Susan: Well, a lot of people when they see the title of the book, assume that I wrote it in response to the pandemic. Yeah, but actually the inspiration and idea for the book started about four or five years ago when I had witnessed, and I think many of us could agree that, we had lost our intentionality when we make connections. We would dash off a direct message on a social platform or we would, just hit send without thinking about what we're saying, or we started to measure our success in connecting by the number of followers or the number of clicks on a particular article we posted. When in actuality, in 20 years from now, those platforms that we have been living on, there's going to be new platforms. So, all the numbers in the world don't really matter, and that isn't what necessarily impacts us the same way a meaningful connection does. So, fast forward to when I got the green light to go forward writing the book, it was February of 2020 and of course in March everything fell apart. And what I learned during all the interviews I did for the book was during those first eight months, we've really started to put more value on our relationships and on our connections, and I do think that that has continued to this present

day, but my goal in the book was really to get back to that compassion and intentionality and thoughtfulness, as opposed to just whipping off a text or a missive on whatever social platform we tend to gravitate towards.

Jen: My colleague and coauthor, we were actually writing our book, “Work Better Together”, which has some incredible alignment with your book about the importance of relationships at work, and the impact on our well-being, and the same thing happened to us. I mean, we in earnest, started writing it in January of 2020, and it was fascinating because the whole front section of our book actually deals with the impact that technology has had on our ability to build meaningful relationships in the workplace. And so, I think we are running parallel there. But can you talk about from your perspective, and what you wrote about in your book, and also where we're going now, right? I mean I don't know that in the workplace for many of us, were ever going back to being, fully in person, the way we might have been during the pandemic. But so many organizations, Deloitte included, are grappling with OK well, how do we not lose human connection in this world that is increasingly digital.

Susan: Right no, I agree with you. I don't think we are going to go back to any sense of the old normal. There will be a new normal, and I do fervently believe that it's going to be a mashup of some sort, but human connection is still the best way to have meaningful conversations. Institutions, organizations, companies, organizations are all going to have to go above and beyond to help their employees and their members, and the participants feel more connected. If we say to our employees, oh, you know, bring your full self to work, that we bring our full selves to work. We can't expect others to be open and vulnerable if we as leaders are not going to be doing that right? Then doing what you can that when you are physically together, it isn't all about the work, right? It is much more focused on what you bring as a person. What are your superpowers? What are your desires and your likes? Because we know that our times together are going to be somewhat limited, so let's fill them with as much joy as we can. That's what I see the new kind of workplace. I'm not saying it's going to be filled with all fun and no work. When people are going to be together, they're going to want to be more celebratory, and then they can go back to their work.

Jen: You do better work.

Susan: Yeah, and in some ways, it might become something to look forward to. I was reading, it was an entrepreneur who was based in Scotland, and four years ago when he founded his company, he couldn't recruit good programmers because nobody wanted to move to the North of Scotland in the middle of winter. So, he set his company up as virtual. People could work from all over the world, and they succeeded and instead of when they got together, that it was three days of working, they would go to a place like Tulum or somewhere like that or Mali so that it would be celebratory as opposed to work, and I thought that that was just a very interesting way, and he said instead of trying to get us back, why not reinvent the future?

Jen: Kind of leading into this, I read that you don't separate your work and personal connections, which I found to be really interesting because there's so much that I talk about and that I believe in that's around the old thinking around like work-life separation and work-life balance, and now it's moving into integration and those types of things. So, talk to me about why you don't separate those connections and how that benefits you and what that looks like.

Susan: Well, let's start by saying it's hard enough being one human, let alone two. Back in the mid-90s when the Internet came into our lives, I used to lug home a ginormous laptop that was the size of my refrigerator, and at night I would go ahead and I plug my computer into the phone Jack and I would send all my email. And then while it was sending, I would go and do my dishes and then I would come back to my computer and it was always covered in suds and start reading all the emails that had been download. That was the day I fervently believed that I was no longer work-Susan and home-Susan. Because there I was with soap suds all over my hands dripping over my computer, and what I found over the years, I had liked to do business with people I enjoy. I like to do business with friends. I like to help friends get jobs and then work with them. So, is that work-Susan or home-Susan? What became apparent in the last 10 years were these concentric networks or communities all overlapped, and I was the same person running McPherson strategies, as I was hosting a fundraiser for a particular nonprofit that I was passionate about. Our lives are so complicated, it's almost more challenging to try to distinctly differentiate. What I want to be clear, I want to clarify is, I'm not saying I work 24x7. I'm just saying I'm the same person whether I'm working or I'm not.

Jen: Thank you for clarifying that for the chief well-being officer. So, so let me ask you, what do you say to the people that push back or believe that you shouldn't have friends at work or work with your friends or do business with your friends, and we tackled this a little bit in our book as well, so I'd love to hear your perspective on it.

Susan: Well, I would first cite Rob Cross' research. He's a professor at Babson College that has proved that when you have friends at work, you are much more likely to stay at the company, you are going to be much more productive, and you're going to be happier at your job, so I would first cite the data. Then I would say if you don't want to have friends at work, that's your prerogative OK? None of this is forced, but you will, if you allow yourself, you will see the benefits, but I also then say to the powers that be that run these institutions, you have to create the space so that people feel comfortable. It isn't just about, "Oh here, you're hired, go make friends with everyone."

Jen: Right, and you don't have to be friends with everyone. We're not friends with everyone in life either, right?

Susan: Right.

Jen: So, you also talk about purpose. It's a key theme throughout your book, so bring this together understanding purpose? How does understanding your personal purpose help you build meaningful connections in your life?

Susan: I mean we know values align us with others, and when, when you're able to look at your North Star, your hopes and dreams, and you're able to share those with others, chances are others will then share those back with you. They don't have to be identical to become friends but being able to not only see someone and see someone for who they are, but listen and then make the mental note that therefore you can be helpful to them is what I think of purpose. To me, that is the way to start the process of a reciprocal relationship that can stand the test of time, but again, when we think of the word purpose, we immediately think of doing good or volunteering.

Jen: To change the world, yeah?

Susan: Yeah. I think when we make introductions and make connections, we are changing the world.

Jen: Yeah, I love that. And I think that really helps demystify purpose for people because I do think oftentimes when people think of purpose, they think that it has to be something big or otherwise it's not worthwhile, and it's almost opposite of that in a lot of ways. All right, so let's dig in. I want to get into your methodology for connection that you share in your book.

Susan: Absolutely. Well, I learned when you write a business book, and you probably did as well, Jen, that you have to have a methodology, right?

Jen: Yes.

Susan: I don't know isn't the opposite of methodology...human? I don't know if it even makes sense, but I could unpack it at another time, I guess. But I realized, this enormous community I had built, again not to be redundant, but in my 20s and my 30s in my 40s actually happened because I was doing something, and I did do a lot of self-reflection to figure out what it is that I was doing. And the book is broken into three sections called Gather, Ask, Do. And I'll give you a 30,000-foot view of each, and obviously, if anybody wants to read it, they can learn a lot more.

In the Gather section, the first person you connect with is yourself, and you do a bit of a deep dive to determine what are your superpowers? Once you figure out what your superpowers are, you think about how you are going to do everything in your power as you connect with others to break that hermetically sealed bubble that typically prevents you from meeting people who don't look like you, don't sound like you, same age as you, same race and cultural background as you. You also think during Gather, who is it that I want to connect with or reconnect with that my superpowers can be helpful to, because the underlying theme of the entire book is flipping what we traditionally have thought of what networking and connecting is to, instead of what can I get. It's how can I help? So, in the Gather section, to reiterate, to be able to understand how you can be helpful to others, you need to think what is it that you bring to the table. Lastly in Gather, you think about what your goals are for the next one year, three year, five years. So that's all within Gather.

In the Ask phase, you think about and you do learn how to ask meaningful questions of others so that you can learn what their hopes and dreams are, what their goals are? If you listen very, very carefully, while they're sharing this with you, you can go to the Do phase.

And the Do phase is my favorite. And that is where you take all that data that you listened to and you go into action. And this is back to what we were just talking about earlier. This doesn't mean you have to write a check for \$100 million or \$500, or you have to give up your first child. This means like you make an introduction for someone, you make a connection. You connect somebody on LinkedIn. You connect them on whatever platform of social media choice you tend to prefer. You offer up a nonprofit that you think might peak someone's interest based on what you heard from that person. So that is what Gather asked you is, and dare I say, that given the world we've been living in, it's never a better time to think about now how you can start building your connections based on not only what your future goals are, but also how you can be helpful to others.

Jen: Yeah, especially how we can be helpful to others. We touched on this earlier about networking, right? Hopefully, as we start to go back to some more in-person events and networking events. Networking - it is a necessity for many of us at work, but if you're like me, like I said, you cringe at the

thought of it. So, are there any tips for making networking less awkward? How do we view a networking event more like a connecting event, I guess?

Susan: I love that. And you know, I will add, whether it's virtual or in person. One thing I like to share and it's something I call my triumvirate, AKA the power of three. Think about an event that you have upcoming and do a little research. Oftentimes you can find out who's going to be in the room again, whether it's an online room or a real honest-to-goodness room. And think intentionally about the three people you want to meet. Think about the three things you want to share and tell yourself you're going to walk away learning three things. Guess what? That's doable, that's feasible, that's achievable, and then you can go hide in the bathroom or...

Jen: Go home.

Susan: Go home or go order room service, right? To me that's a fair way to tackle what could seem like the worst thing in the world. But again, just to reiterate by sharing three things, you're being vulnerable. By learning three things, the others are being vulnerable, right? By intentionally seeking out three people, you're thinking about what are three people that potentially could help me meet my goals, and how can I help them, and again, it's not walking around and shaking hands with everyone. Thankfully, with the technology we have today, you often can find out who's going to be there. You know? I joke my first real professional role at a company was at USA TODAY in the 80s, and I was a researcher, and I used to have to interview people over the phone and then gather all their data. To prepare for those interviews, I had the Encyclopedia Britannica and Yellow Pages, which of course today, think how much you can find out about people before you actually meet them.

Jen: Right, yeah, that's absolutely true. Sometimes it's scary how much you can find out about people before you meet them.

Susan: 100% agree.

Jen: So, let's shift back to the workplace a little bit and, colleagues but also, team leaders and you talked a little bit about this in terms of connecting and getting to know each other, but how can we do that on a regular basis?

Susan: Sure. Well, I always say everything but the weather talk. OK? Years ago, I lived in Denmark when I was in college and my Danish father, who I lived with. This was 1985, [he] said to me, "you Americans, all you want to do is talk about the weather because you don't like silence". It's funny, as ever since then, every conference call, and of course now every video call gets what everybody talks about for the first five minutes, and you know why? Because it's safe. It's not scary. We're not opening up anything about ourselves that will share anything. So, what I like to do is have a revolving door of who's going to be the host. So, if it's a regular weekly meeting, that person is responsible. That one gets new voices into the mix. Two: Have different prompts for start of a gathering as silly as what was your favorite food as a child. Two: When this pandemic is over, where in the world could you go if budgets weren't an option? These types of questions get people talking about things that they don't typically talk about in the office or the virtual office, and it does open up people. These aren't dangerous questions. In other words, you're not putting people in an awkward situation when you ask them these types of things. I think that that encourages curiosity, and it helps to find the commonality in the un-commonality that so many of us share because I do believe we have more in common than we don't, but we often just don't get to a

place where we talk about those things. You'd be surprised how many kids, if they grew up in a certain time period, they have the same favorite food, right? Then they discover that about themselves, or you learn about a culture that perhaps you didn't ever even stop to think about. So, I think that these types of prompts can be very helpful, and I think also preparing ahead of time and giving people the grace to, whoever's hosting to let that person come up with his/her or their ideas about what is it the theme that they want to use?

Jen: I love that yeah, and I love staying away from the weather talk because I do live in Miami, Florida. So, I usually get chastised for the fact that when everybody else is freezing, they're like Jen don't even tell us what the weather is like in Miami. We don't want to know. So, that's great advice to stay away from the weather talk.

Susan: Well, bless you. But I would be so much more interested to find out what your favorite restaurants are in Miami or what it feels like to have the sand between your toes. Like that to me would be more interesting.

Jen: Yeah, absolutely. Well Susan, thank you so much for this conversation for being on the show. There's so much that I still need to go and think about and process that you said here, and I know the listeners are going to get a ton out of this, and I just have had a smile on my face this entire conversation, so thank you again for being on the show.

Susan: Thank you Jen. You are a superstar, and I am honored to have joined you today.

Jen: I'm so grateful Susan could be with us today to talk about the lost art of connection. Thank you to our producers, Rivet 360, and our listeners. You can find the WorkWell podcast series on Deloitte.com or you can visit various podcatchers using the keyword WorkWell, all one word, to hear more. If you like the show, don't forget to subscribe so you get all of our future episodes. If you have a topic you'd like to hear on the WorkWell podcast series or maybe a story you would like to share, please reach out to me on LinkedIn. My profile is under the name Jen Fisher or on Twitter @Jenfish23. We're always open to your recommendations and feedback, and of course if you like what you hear, please share, post, and like this podcast. Thank you and be well.