



# CLICKABILITY

A SKILL FOR LIFE

Dr. Rick Kirschner

# Most of what you need to know about success in life is personal in nature.

I've learned, through my own experience and that of the people I've worked with, that people need each other to have fulfilling work, successful careers and meaningful lives. Regardless of your cultural background, your age group, or your social status, your need to get along with people is fundamental to your happiness. No matter how much technical skill you have in your particular field of expertise, no matter how smart you are, how capable you are, how gifted you are, if you don't know how to connect, relate and communicate with people, there's little hope for you.

Whether the times are great, or the economy is in the tank, the people who do the best, who prosper and advance, are the people who know how to connect with other people and have it matter. Whether you are a homemaker, a parent, a business owner, a manager, a waiter or a postal worker, your skill with other people determines everything. And when you have the skill to build relationships and networks of relationships, the world is your oyster, and all options are open for you. Being able to click is just a matter of knowing what to do, why to do it, and how to do it.

Click is that state of mind, that sense of self, where everything fits or falls into place. When things click you can enter the worldview of a person, and get in sync. When things click, you're on the same wavelength. You and the other person are insiders to each other's world. You get them. They get you. The click doesn't just happen between individuals. It happens in groups, on teams, in councils and boards. It happens between individuals and groups, through leadership and teamwork. Most of the time, that click just happens to happen. But you don't have to wait for it to happen.

What causes the click in relationships? Resonance.

*“Click is that state of mind, that sense of self, where everything fits or falls into place.”*

We resonate when we reduce differences and send signals of similarity. If you and I come from a similar background, our sense of connection grows. Shared experiences produce the same result. People who have gone through tragedy and triumph together find resonance in the memories of it. They resonate around a bond that those who were not there never quite understand.

We resonate with people with whom we have current experiences in common. Getting married? Having a baby? Going through loss? Getting downsized? Starting a business? Wishing you were rich? When you meet people who are walking in similar shoes, or talking about similar fears and desires, there's that familiar click!

In the complex excitations of life, people have a wonderful ability to filter out other frequencies and signals in order to find and resonate with matching ones. Everything you need to know in order to click, to have your ideas click or to have people click with each other, depends on building a field of increasing resonance.

What happens when the click doesn't happen between people? Without it, there's no trust, no cooperation, no benefit of the doubt. Nobody cooperates with anybody unless there's some pattern of similarity to hold them together.

How do we let people know that resonance is possible with us? Telling them is not enough. That's because seeing is believing, and it has to sound true, too. So we send signals of similarity through our basic behaviors, like body posture, animation, facial expression, voice volume and tempo, and through our words. We also send those signals through the patterns of our needs, our values, and our motivations. When people find common ground with others around such persona and intimate parts of themselves, they can't help but click.

We also resonate with certain personal characteristics that other people can't help but want to be around. You can tell who's got these characteristics and who doesn't by the way they enter a room, by the way they engage other people, and by the way others respond to them.

**Characteristics of Clickability.** People who know how to click are warm instead of cold. You can see the warmth in their eyes, because when they look at you they seem to actually see you. You can hear it in the friendly and helpful tone of what they say. And you can feel it in their words...words that give you the sense that they've got you covered, they are on your side. They have a relaxed posture, open body position.

People who know how to click are energetic, which means they have the energy they need for making connections that allows them to reach out with confidence and determination. That energy doesn't come from age, or health status, or where someone stands in the pecking order. Energy comes from caring, whether its caring about others, caring about a mission, or caring about not wasting time. But it is obvious when a person cares, because they have the energy they need to be careful instead of careless both about when they talk and what they say.

People who know how to click are responsive rather than reactive. They make changes in themselves as a way of making changes in the world. And when mistakes get made, they are quick

to own them, quick to learn from them and quick to correct them. They are able to respond, response-able, because they realize that tomorrow is connected to the choices they make today.

People who know how to click treat others as their equals, regardless of job title, social status, or world view. You can tell, because they are respectful of differences, and can acknowledge that someone else's idea is as good as their own. They treat others as they want to be treated, and don't do to others what they don't want done to themselves. When something they don't want done gets done anyway, they deal with it the way they'd want it to be dealt with if they were the ones who'd done it. A relationship between equals is likely to produce a superior result to a relationship between someone who acts superior and someone who believes they are inferior. At the same time, the person who knows how to click also sees every person as someone, instead of "another one." They identify what makes people unique, encourage it and even amplify it.

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The person who knows how to click has compassion for the difficulties of others. They are sensitive to loss, to struggle, to uncertainty and doubt. And when problems occur, when difficulties emerge, when tragedy happens, instead of trying to fix people or make them feel better, they offer a comforting “I get it. It’s hard for you right now. I’m sorry that it’s hard for you right now. Hang in there.” They understand that compassion is not about interference, problem solving, or pity. It’s about understanding the emotional state of another person, and offering encouragement.

The person who knows how to click is able to listen in a connected way. They understand that people love to hear themselves talk, that people want to be heard and understood when they talk, and that people are drawn to people who listen to them. The key to connected listening is to draw people out rather than let them leave all the good stuff out. Ask just about anyone if they’re a good listener, and they’ll tell you yes. But most people do a meager job of it at best, drawing conclusions and making statements, instead of engaging people by asking questions. Maybe the reason people don’t ask many questions is they are afraid of looking stupid. Maybe they think it makes them seem weak. Or maybe they think they’re supposed to have all the answers. Maybe it’s just a function of the fact that we can think faster than most people talk, so it’s easy to get ahead of what you’re hearing, or for your mind to wander to what you want to say when it’s your turn to talk.

A person who knows how to click has a great deal of curiosity. The less they think they know, the more they are able to find out. And the more value they place on what they can learn by listening, the less distracted they are with their own thoughts. They know that questions set direction and expectation, demonstrate empathy, uncover opposition, invite thought, reveal motivation and intent.

People want to be heard and understood, not just logically, but also emotionally. And while you're making sense of what you're hearing, there may be an emotional message underlying the words, that comes through in a person's tone of voice. For people to feel that you understand, you have to hear that tone. So learning to hear both words and feelings is a valuable skill. When the words don't match the tone, you can ask about the feeling to add meaning to the words. Instead of their emotions doing all the talking, they'll be talking about their emotions.

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**Click with Style.** It's actually possible to hear a person's communication needs by listening to how they style what they say. And if you use the same style, you can speak to their need. However, communication needs change, depending on who we're with, where we are, and what's going on.

For example, sometimes you have a need for action. The longer a communication takes, the less satisfying, and possibly more irritating, it is. Sometimes, you have a need for accuracy.

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If the communication moves along too quickly, is too general, or too vague, it's hard to maintain interest. Sometimes you have a need for approval. If people are too abrupt, pushy or demanding, it's difficult to care. And sometimes you have a need for appreciation. If someone's communication fails to give recognition where it's due (or at least desired,) you may just tune it out, put it down, or get angry. You might even walk away.

You can create a resonant field by matching your communication style, and meet their need. But communication style is a pattern of behavior rather than personality trait. So it is subject to change. It can change over time, because the more familiar people are with each other, the more likely that other behaviors will emerge. It can change depending on the situation, whether it's public or private; whether it's just a few people or many people; whether there are financial pressures; whether it's driven by fear or desire. It can change based on priorities in a moment in time. The point? Don't assume you've figured someone out once and for all. Keep paying attention so that when the style changes, you're ready to change with it.

**Click with Motivation.** Human behavior is purposeful. Motivation determines determination and drives drive. When you understand motivation, you can make a powerful connection to the reasons driving people's behavior. But what exactly is motivation?

Motivation is all about a person's mental direction of movement. When people are motivated, they either move towards something or away from it.

Some people are driven to action by desire. You can hear this motivation when people describe moving toward their goals, fulfilling their values, gaining a reward, taking on a challenge, finding fulfillment, enhancing their reputation, or seeking pleasure of any kind.

Sometimes, people are to action by fear. Even when they move forward, it's because they're trying to get away from something. People motivated by fear may take no action, or hold themselves back in order to avoid something. You can hear when fear is the motivation, because people talk about what they don't want, or want to avoid.

Let's say that you have an idea for a project that involves someone you hardly know. Without engaging their motivation, your work together on the project may not click! This doesn't mean they have to share your motivation for your project. But it does mean you have to find their motivation for your project, a way to connect your project to them so that it becomes their project too.

The way we access our motivations is found in the answers to these questions, "What's in it for me?" and "Why should I care?" Only when we know that answer do we start moving. And only when we have those answers about others can we get moving together.

There's no denying that fear gets our interest, and holds it, at least for a little while. But you must walk a fine and fearful line to use fear as a motivator. Too little, and it won't gain any interest. Too much, and you overload and exhaust the receptors for it, with the paradoxical effect of losing interest. And while fear plays an important role in motivation, it is insufficient as a long-term motivator for change. It's unsustainable. When people motivate themselves with fear, they must

constantly tend to it. That puts them in a stressed out state, until eventually they are exhausted. Fear fails because we get used to it. Once we do, it's hold on us fades.

Desire is more powerful as a long-term motivator. Desire beckons to us, it calls us forward and moves us toward. Desire pulls us out of ourselves and into meaningful action. If you know exactly why you do want to do something, doing it is no big deal. If you know why something matters to you, doing something about it is the natural response.

When you add in a little fear to a lot of desire, you have strong reasons to go forward both in front of you and behind. The most highly motivated people you've ever known are likely to have known what they did want (desire) and what they didn't want (fear). This combination works best to keep us going on good days and bad. When you mix a little fear with a lot of desire, you can have strong reasons to move ahead—a pull from in front—and strong reasons to get moving—a push from behind, a kick in the rear.

People's specific motivations are as many and varied as people themselves. And while there are many models to account for these motivations, I couldn't find one that was specific enough as to be useful for consistently building connection with others, connecting others with ideas, connecting ideas with groups, and connecting people with each other.

So I developed a model of my own, one that takes both desire and fear into account. My model identifies six recognizable motivations with which you can click. Each has a desire aspect and a fear aspect—a “towards” side and an “away” side.

They are:

- Values (right/wrong)
- Reward (gain/lose)
- Challenge (success/failure)
- Esteem (worth/worthlessness)
- Purpose (meaningful/meaningless)
- Feelings (pleasure/pain).

Just as our lives are complex, our motivations are many. And they can vary, depending on your specific situation. What motivates you depends on where you are, who you are with, and what is before you or behind you. Nevertheless, there tends to be a primary motivation behind much of what we do, what we say, and how we are with each other. Understand a person’s primary motivation, the one that is of more importance than the others in a given situation, and you have a meaningful way to click.

**Click with Values.** Understanding a person's values is no great mystery. Our values are on display in the choices we make, the things we say, and the items that surround us in our personal space. Knowing our own values is the most effective guide to setting goals, making decisions, developing plans and taking action in our lives. Values give us a gauge by which to measure everything that tries to occupy our time, our energy, our mind. And knowing what others value gives us a point of contact, a platform on which to build, an amazing opportunity for a click!

Couples who build their relationships on the common ground of values can survive all kinds of life cycle events, even thrive, in spite of the differences that inevitably arise. Organizations can rally their people around a clearly defined set of values, once the people understand and accept those values as the best way to fulfill their own values. And individuals who know their values are able to place them at the center of what they do and bring their lives into alignment. Such authenticity and consistency puts them in a stronger position to gain influence and prestige in the eyes, minds and hearts of the people around them.

But the reverse is also true. Couples that lack shared values are likely doomed, regardless of how much else they have in common, to fight over and eventually move away from each other because of the lack of this basic bond. Teams and partners that can't agree on what matters

most, tear themselves apart. Organizations with no clear set of values lack a coherent center around which leaders can lead and people can organize themselves. The result is turf wars, backbiting, and discipline problems. And people who have nothing to offer but the platitude of values, like “I believe in family values,” or “It is wrong to do wrong,” undermine their credibility and lose the support of others.

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**Get People to Click with Your Ideas.** Whenever you are presented with information, whether an opinion, raw data, or a new idea, your mind runs it through a resonance test. If the input passes the test, it is accepted. From there, it can be used to inform, to transform, and to move people to action.

What happens if the input doesn't pass the resonance test? Maybe your mind will reject the input, and nothing will change. Or the information may get assigned to a holding area of non commitment. That's better than outright rejection, but it is still a long way from a click!

The decision to accept or reject incoming information is made at the speed of thought. If a person has already invested their thought energy in developing an opinion on the subject of your idea, their zone of acceptance is going to be narrowed by all the thought they've put into it and around it. If the person hasn't made a big investment of time, or thought, or energy into making up his or her mind, you're more likely to find a receptive and open-minded person with a wide zone of acceptance. Likewise, if a person is in the process of learning about something and has not yet arrived at a conclusion, you'll find a bigger zone of acceptance and require a less focused persuasive effort.

The more inclined a person is to resonate with you, the more persuasive you will be and with less effort. The less inclined a person is to resonate with you, the less persuasive you will be and the more effort will be required. And which way they are inclined may have less to do with your information, and more to do with their feelings.

Some of the worst decisions you've ever made were based on feelings. And some of the best, too. Your ability to think is essential to navigate the complexities of modern life, but your emotional state affects your reasoning abilities in dramatic ways. Feelings happen. But thought requires energy. According to psychologist Ellen Langer, people are cognitive misers who conserve our thought energy whenever we can. In those moments, we take emotional short-cuts that tell us.

These emotional shortcuts help us sort through an onslaught of information, to direct our attention and prioritize input without having to think too much, to know what to ignore, what deserves our attention, what to decide and, yes, what to do. We take these shortcuts when our ability to think is impaired, when we're tired, overwhelmed, and busy. And who isn't, these days? Shortcuts help decrease the demand for thinking and conserve valuable energy. When people don't want to think, they can decide with our feelings instead of our thoughts. Knowing these shortcuts helps you to speak to the emotional side of people, while providing their rational side with information at the same time.

*“The less inclined a person is to resonate with you, the less persuasive you will be and the more effort will be required.”*

Much of what you need to exercise such influence is already hardwired into the human nervous system. You just need to resonate with it. So if you want someone to click with your ideas, you can help people take the shortcuts. They are:

**Affinity:** We click with people who like us, who are like us or who we want to be like.

**Comparison:** We can save a lot of time by considering one thing in the light of another. You can offer a comparison, imply a comparison, or invite one.

**Conformity:** It keeps schools of fish together, flocks of birds flying in formation, and packs of animals roving in bands and herds and gaggles. Living creatures move collaboratively to fulfill common goals, and move collectively against common foes. Asking people to stick their neck out won't get you a click. But if your idea puts people in good company, they'll be glad to hear it!

**Reciprocity:** It's all about a little give and take. Doing for others creates a sense of obligation, and that's what triggers the instinct for reciprocity. People want to discharge that obligation as quickly as possible.

**Authority:** Our nervous systems have evolutionary programming to keep us safe, by deferring to the strongest, smartest, most capable and powerful among us. This is reinforced through conditioning, first from parents and then from other authority figures who can reward and punish. Speak with authority, or find an authority to speak for you, and you engage this shortcut.

**Consistency:** We want things to work the same way tomorrow that they worked yesterday. We have a strong preference for consistency in our lives, and in the lives of the people with whom

we connect. We associate it with character and personal strength. When our expectations are not met, the world, at least for a moment, does not make sense. Our minds become confused, and our activity is interrupted. Conversely, inconsistent behavior rapidly diminishes trust.

**Scarcity:** When there isn't enough for everyone, when something is hard to get, scarcity creates value. If you have what other people want, and it's otherwise hard to get, you gain some control of your environment. This is true about tangible things, like gadgets and cookies, and about intangible things too, like information and your time.

To make the best use of the seven signals, remember these two guidelines

1. A little goes a long way.
2. Two or three signals makes an idea more emotionally compelling than one alone.

*“The less inclined a person is to resonate with you, the less persuasive you will be and the more effort will be required.”*

**Getting a Group to Click.** I've come to the conclusion that all around us are good people wanting to be invited, activated and engaged in a greater good. But when people come together, they need a very good reason to stay together, or they allow things to fall apart. Entropy is the scientific word for that - the movement towards chaos. Quit taking care of your room, and it becomes chaos. Ignore what gets placed on your desk, and it will become a complete mess. Fail to attend to your teeth, your weight, your... well, you name it, left to its own, with no reason to drive it forward, everything eventually falls apart.

If you want positive results, if you want positive change, if you want to bring out the best in people instead of their worst, the best starting point is to hold a positive focus. Even when under siege, a positive vision tempers the excesses created by fear. The prime directive of leadership is to hold the focus. People need to understand what they're doing, why they are doing it, and why doing it matters. And why it matters is that doing what we do holds the inherent promise of making a difference, of changing things for the better.

Whenever you want to bring people together, you've got to create a respectful atmosphere. Treating people with respect means you recognize that they have lives and needs and interests independently of your own, that their lives have significance with or without you, that their

hopes and dreams for themselves are no less important to them than yours are to you. You may respect someone's opinion as their right, even if you are certain they have the wrong opinion.

A key moment of truth, and a powerful opportunity to create a respectful environment, occurs when people speak up about their ideas. Most people have learned to discount their own ideas rather than face the indignity of having them discounted by others. Yet ideas are the lifeblood of engagement and participation. When people don't speak up, it's usually because they don't want to get shot down.

When an idea is offered, receive it in a respectful way, even if you fundamentally disagree with it. Rather than just say what you don't like about it, tell them what you do like about it, and what you find interesting about it as well.

If there is one thing that aggravates and infuriates people about change, it is being informed after the fact of it. People have a need to know where they are and what's going on. Anytime there sense of place and identity is brought into question by the mixed messages of sudden moves and changes of direction, the risk is great for cynicism to grow and participation to shrink.

People don't want to hear about the new deal after the fact. They want to hear about it while it is still being thought about. That gives them a chance to talk about it, think about it, and have some say in it. Even if they don't like the way it turns out, they had their say. When an important

decision is coming down the road or standing on the brink, ask people to think and invite their input! Who knows? Maybe, you'll find a way to make a better decision. Or maybe, they'll find the way to support the decision that is eventually made. In either case, it's a congruent message of respect.

You can also spread the word about positive results, so people can celebrate each others' good fortune; about resources available, or needed, so that people can use them, or provide them; about when things go right, so people can celebrate good fortune, and when things go wrong, about the lessons learned, so everyone can benefit.

We live in a time of unprecedented change. For people to connect with each other, they need knowledge, resources, and trust. You must create an organizational container for these kinds of results. You get there by knocking down the walls that keep people from doing what they know needs to be done, and building bridges that connect people with each other, and with the resources they need to succeed.

Have you ever noticed that whenever there is a crisis, the best in people tends to show up to deal with it? Time and time again, we see the best of people show up in the worst situations. But do we need a crisis to be at our best? No, not really. According to Buckminster Fuller, there is something built right into every decent human being. It's there all the time, but most easily

seen in a crisis. It's the principle of spontaneous cooperation. It turns out that people want to help each other out. They just need a reason and a way. And if you build a group, a team, a business, an organization around a reason and give them a way, then remove the barriers to what they need and build the bridges to get them where they need to go, people will surprise you with their caring, their ingenuity, their sheer determination to be good, do good and have good things happen.

**The Click of a True Friendship.** Isolation is a killer, deadly to the human spirit. Nothing exists in this universe in isolation, everything exists in relationship to something else. So it is the most natural and healthy thing in the world to want company, companionship, connection, intimacy. We need people in our world to experience the wonder of it. You are born alone, and you die alone, but in between, it is the connections we share that determine our fulfillment and happiness.

The good news is that you are not alone. All around you, there are connections waiting to be made, friends wanting to be found, relationships wanting to be discovered. And when all is said and done, to have a friend, you must be a friend.

To keep your connections strong, do these five things.

**Encourage:** People can rise to greatness with no help or support, but people rise higher and faster with it.

**Help:** Life can be challenging. We get by with a little help from our friends. Many hands make light work, and we're all smarter than any of us.

**Gifts:** Compliments for starters. It's a sure signal of appreciation and affection. Space, for another. Give people space to attend to themselves when they ask for it, when they're feeling embarrassed or ashamed. And remember. Sometimes, the greatest gifts we give come from receiving each other's gifts.

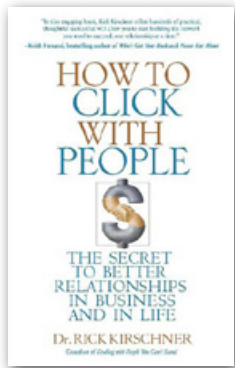
**Quality not Quantity:** How much time does it take to be a good friend? Moments. What turns regular time into quality time? It's all about attention. Undivided attention, that is.

**Touch:** One of the most powerful ways to end that feeling of isolation we each bring into the world is through touch. Something as simple as a touch on the hand, a pat on the back, a hug, a neck or shoulder massage. These little touches send warmth through the points of contact that then spread to the human heart.

So what's the value of a friendship? Even knowing that friends die, that friends may one day betray you, that friends may somehow become something unwelcome and unwanted in your life, the value of a friendship is found in the knowledge that you are not alone.

Will Rogers once famously said, "A stranger is just a friend I haven't met yet." Maybe one day you and I will meet. Maybe we'll hit it off right away, and things will just click! Stranger things have happened. 🤖

# Info



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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** | As a motivational speaker and communication skills trainer, Dr. Kirschner delivers artful programs in venues ranging from conference halls to boardrooms to grand theaters, with groups as large as 6000 attendees or as small as 4 executives in an off the beaten track locale. Clients include the world's best known organizations, from Heineken to NASA to Progressive Insurance to the National Association for Neonatal Nurses to Starbucks to Texas Instruments. He's been interviewed on hundreds of radio and television programs, including on CNBC, FOX and CBC. His ideas are found in newspapers and magazines including *USA Today*, *London Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Executive Excellence*.

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