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Face to Face

The Art of Human Connection

Brian Grazer • From FACE TO FACE: The Art of Human Connection by Brian Grazer. Copyright © 2019 by Brian Grazer. Reprinted by permission of Simon & Schuster, Inc. • 208 pages

Take-Aways

- Eye contact is often the deciding factor when applying for a job, making a sales pitch or asking someone on a date.
- “Curiosity conversations” are meaningful exchanges that involve listening, learning and giving of yourself.
- Trusting, collaborative relationships form the basis of every successful endeavor.
- If you want people to believe in you and your vision, make genuine human connections.
- Through stories, people engage, respond to each other, learn about themselves and experience the world.
- Public speaking is intimidating. Make it less so by focusing on individuals in the audience.
- Being a dynamic conversationalist does not mean you always do the talking. Often, you gain more by listening.
- To foster communication that leads to meaningful connections, be alert and fully focused. Maintain eye contact.

Recommendation

In his bestseller, *A Curious Mind*, Hollywood hit-maker Brian Grazer asserted that curiosity is the secret ingredient that fuels success. He attributes his success to his ability to forge meaningful human connections by looking people in the eyes and practicing the art of face-to-face communication. He develops this theme with stories of his adventures and of working with famous, talented people. Grazer brings you into his “curiosity conversations” with leaders and people of great achievement, including Oprah Winfrey, Bill Gates and George W. Bush. His engaging, autobiographical tale shows you how to connect for success.

Summary

Eye contact is often the deciding factor when applying for a job, making a sales pitch or asking someone on a date.

As a child in grade school, Brian Grazer dreaded having a teacher call on him. Although undiagnosed at the time, he suffered from dyslexia, a reading disability. He would avoid eye contact with his teachers in hopes of staying off their radar. But his grandmother Sonia had great confidence in him. “Brian,” she would exclaim, “never stop asking those questions of yours.”

By high school, Grazer had figured out how to use his conversational abilities to connect with his teachers and classmates. He was better able to absorb information and process material verbally. He sought face-to-face interactions at college, and sharpened his skills in reading body language and facial expressions.

Grazer is an extremely successful television and movie producer. His first book, *A Curious Mind: The Secret to a Bigger Life*, delved into what he calls “curiosity conversations.” Grazer says these meaningful exchanges enable him to forge authentic connections. This ability, more than any other, he says, helped him in his career and personal relationships.

Research supports his experience. People who connect with others and form strong relationships are happier and healthier than those who don’t. Relationships are as important to personal well-being as a good diet and exercise.

Technology interferes with people’s ability to connect meaningfully. Digital communication is transactional and seldom allows people to get to know one another. Digital devices steal people’s attention as they engage via social media rather than in person. Despite a plethora of online friends, people experience greater loneliness and isolation. Gazing into your smartphone affects your ability to look people in the eye. Eye contact is essential for bonding. It forges connection, engages attention and communicates interest.

“In a world where our attention is too often focused downward or elsewhere, simply lifting your eyes to meet another’s gaze can be transformative.”

Looking someone in the eyes shows you are present and that you care. As people lose the ability to relate face to face, looking directly at people makes you stand out. For Grazer, every success story begins with a face-to-face contact and meeting someone’s eyes.

Curiosity conversations are meaningful exchanges that involve listening, learning and giving of yourself.

One of Grazer's first jobs was working as a law clerk for Warner Bros. He delivered documents to people around Hollywood. Grazer insisted on handing the papers he carried to the designated recipient, not a staff member. This put him in the offices of important writers, producers, agents and directors. He used the opportunity to initiate conversations and expand his network. These exchanges laid the groundwork for his curiosity conversations. For four decades, Grazer has asked experts to talk with him for an hour or so. Over the years, he's met with, among many others, Andy Warhol, Barack Obama, George W. Bush, Warren Buffett and Isaac Asimov.

"Figuring out how to connect has probably been the most important skill I've learned in life, and I use it every day: in negotiations, on movie sets, with friends and especially in new situations." "

One curiosity conversation led Grazer to journalist Steven Kotler. Grazer was filming the movie *Blue Crush* in Hawaii and had taken up surfing. He noticed that when everything came together in riding a wave successfully, he entered a flow state, a feeling of "slow-motion euphoria." Kotler, an expert on flow, explained that a brain in the flow state releases chemicals that enhance performance. Entering the flow state while surfing had helped Kotler recover from a debilitating case of Lyme disease.

When Grazer first started out, actor and director Ron Howard – his creative and business partner – noticed that Grazer didn't meet people's eyes during meetings. Howard told him that made people feel disrespected. Grazer took the advice to heart and noticed a huge change. Every interaction felt more meaningful. He learned to approach conversations with an open, "beginner's mind." But he also learned there is such a thing as too much eye contact. Hold a person's gaze for seven to 10 seconds. Staring into someone's eyes longer than that feels creepy.

Trusting, collaborative relationships form the basis of every successful endeavor.

Anyone who has watched or met Oprah Winfrey immediately grasps how her natural charisma and genuine curiosity propelled her to the top. Winfrey made Grazer feel comfortable and validated by focusing solely on him during their conversation. Opening yourself up to another person can make you feel insecure and vulnerable. Showing you genuinely care, like Winfrey, alleviates these concerns. Rapport does not always come easily. People may be shy or socially awkward.

"The most successful creative relationships – like any good relationships – start from a place of authenticity and pure intentions." "

True success comes from authentic, collaborative personal relationships. Every time Grazer has made a business decision that rested on a foundation of genuine connection, it has worked out well. For example, Grazer met Eddie Murphy at the height of Murphy's success in the 1980s. At their first encounter, Grazer leaned in, made eye contact and asked personal questions to draw out the actor. Murphy responded

enthusiastically, and the two forged a friendship. Over the years, they collaborated on five movies and a television series, each a financial and critical success.

If you want people to believe in you and your vision, make genuine human connections.

Making movies demands a strong creative vision. But convincing others to back an expensive film project goes beyond simply sharing a vision. People must trust you and your commitment. Relationships built on trust are crucial for bringing any big idea to fruition.

Grazer believes the Hollywood connections he forged over time enabled his hit movie *American Gangster*. Nick Pileggi, a prominent journalist, brought Grazer the idea 10 years after the two met during a curiosity conversation and developed a friendship. Pileggi introduced Grazer to Frank Lucas, head of the heroin street trade in the 70s, a renowned gangster, convicted felon and a federal informant. Lucas's life was fascinating, and Grazer knew it would make a great movie. It was a survival story of an uneducated black man who clawed his way out of poverty through grit, ruthlessness and determination. Making the movie also required tenacity and perseverance.

“For me, the most predictable path to creating a hit show is to build and nurture true and trusting relationships.”

Pileggi and Grazer convinced award-winning screen writer Steve Zaillian to come on board. That took more than three years. They wooed director Ridley Scott, who turned them down. Eventually, they hired Antoine Fuqua to direct and Denzel Washington to play Lucas. Benicio del Toro took the other leading role, portraying DA Richie Roberts. Three weeks before filming began, the studio pulled the plug, despite spending \$35 million in preproduction. Grazer renewed his efforts. He convinced Ridley Scott to direct, after all, and brought in Russell Crowe. Grazer and his family moved to New York for a year to film *American Gangster*, which became an award-winning box office success.

Through stories, people engage, respond to each other, learn about themselves and experience the world.

People find meaning in stories. When a story resonates emotionally, it becomes part of a person's makeup and memory. Not every story finds its way into the heart of every receiver. As a Hollywood storyteller, Grazer had to learn the “art of the pitch.” Anyone pitching an idea in any industry must connect emotionally with potential buyers. When Grazer first pitched the idea for the movie *Splash*, executives laughed him out of their offices. After seven years of failure pitching a “mermaid movie,” Grazer changed his approach. He realized the underlying theme of the movie, the search for love against all odds, was more relatable than the story line. Disney produced the movie, and Grazer won an Oscar nomination for the screenplay.

“As human beings, we are social creatures, and one of the most powerful tools of connection we have is a well-told story.”

You must connect with the people who are listening to your pitch. Focus on establishing a relationship from the beginning. Be mindful of people's time. Make eye contact with every person in the room. As you speak, read their body language and facial expressions. Know when to wrap up, and don't try to force a decision.

Public speaking is intimidating. Make it less so by focusing on individuals in the audience.

When you worry about what other people think, you feed your insecurities. You become more vulnerable, not less. It's not always easy to shed self-consciousness, especially when speaking in public. In 2002, Grazer attended an Oscar nominees' luncheon. As he sat in a room of Hollywood movers and shakers, he felt how stilted and awkward the atmosphere seemed. Then, actor Will Smith rose to his feet and exclaimed, "Hey! Isn't this a blast! Aren't we all excited to be here?! It's great to see everybody!" This broke the tension, and everyone had a great time.

"No matter where I was or who I was with, every connection was made possible by face to face interaction and a look in the eye." "

Access the genuine, relaxed parts of your personality in pressured situations. Public speaking can be intimidating. Focus on individuals in the audience rather than the group. When Grazer spoke at the Microsoft CEO summit, the audience included leaders like Jeff Bezos, Warren Buffett and Bill Gates. Grazer knew that Gates was hard to engage. Gates spoke right before Grazer, mentioning Jonas Salk in reference to his world immunization initiative. Grazer began his speech by recalling the time he met Salk and threw up on him. Grazer captured Gates's attention with that humbling tale.

Being a dynamic conversationalist does not mean you always do the talking. Often, you gain more by listening.

Often, people think about what they want to say while another person is speaking. Instead, give your conversational partner your undivided attention. People feel valued and respected when you listen closely. You'll profit by gathering knowledge, spotting opportunities and forming deeper relationships. Grazer recalls two encounters when listening worked to his benefit. He found himself at lunch with renowned record producer Jimmy Iovine, rock star Bono, actor Mark Wahlberg and studio executive David Geffen. Grazer listened intently as Bono talked about his work fighting poverty and AIDS around the world. The inspiring lunch motivated Grazer to start Imagine Impact, a nonprofit mentoring initiative.

"Listening can be just as powerful as talking, if not more, when it comes to establishing a bond with another person." "

Grazer and his daughter met Prince backstage after a concert. Grazer mentioned that he had optioned the rights to *The Da Vinci Code*. Prince had an intense interest in religion and religious history. He talked extensively, leaving Grazer's daughter with an indelible memory of the night Prince and her dad spoke at length.

To foster communication that leads to meaningful connections, be alert and fully focused. Maintain eye contact.

Looking into people's eyes while you talk clues you into their emotional state. This allows you to react appropriately if things go in an unexpected direction. For example, Grazer arranged a curiosity conversation with a father and son who were regional heads of the Freemasons. Grazer wanted to learn about the secret brotherhood. The father asked Grazer if he would consider joining. Because Grazer was paying close attention, he recognized the seriousness of the offer. He declined, but did so in a way that honored the newly formed connection.

"We are made for connection. It is the source of growth, discovery, joy and meaning in our short, sweet time here on Earth." "

Eye contact and body language vary between cultures. Adjust your behavior while traveling to form meaningful connections with the people you meet. Grazer and his wife Veronica once vacationed in Burma. They grew close to their guide, Kiki. When it was time to say goodbye, Grazer moved forward to give Kiki a hug, but she drew away and conveyed that they should look at each other instead. "We see everything we need to know," she explained, "by looking in each other's eyes."

About the Author

Brian Grazer is an award-winning film and television producer and co-founder of Imagine Entertainment. His credits include *Splash*, *American Gangster* and *8 Mile*. He wrote the bestseller *A Curious Mind: The Secret to a Bigger Life*.



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