

EPISODE 1182

“SM: We have learned just how important our meaningful connections are, how important it is not to take those for granted and to actually stay in touch with people.”

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:46]

FT: Welcome to So Money everybody. I'm your host. Farnoosh Torabi. Hope you're having a great start to the week. Our guest today is a friend, serial entrepreneur, and connector, communications expert, Susan McPherson. She has a new book called, *The Lost Art of Connecting: The Gather, Ask, Do Method for Building Meaningful Business Relationship*. Even before the pandemic gripped the world, we had become a nation engulfed in loneliness. The loneliness epidemic is here. People have hundreds, thousands of friends on all the social media platforms; Facebook, Instagram, so many connections on LinkedIn. But real connection remains rare and elusive and the pandemic in some ways has only worsened things.

Susan's book talks about how we can reverse the growing trends of disconnection to forge meaningful connections in business and in life. Because ultimately, that is what supports a rich life. We're here to learn about our money, but before we get to our money, we have to talk about our relationships, the people we surround ourselves with that add to the quality of our lives. Susan's book walks through gathering, asking and doing. The three steps for building meaningful business relationships, and really, these are not just business relationships we talk about, how these can be relationships in all realms of your life., and how this book doesn't just have business applications, but also a lot of meaning in our personal lives.

Soledad O'Brien, one of my idols, broadcast, journalist and producer talks about Susan's book and she says, "One of the most important lessons we can learn in this technology-heavy world is how to push back against self-absorption, and gadgets, and make space in life for the wonders of human interaction." Susan's book is one step toward that. Here's Susan McPherson.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:02:41]

FT: Susan McPherson, welcome back to So Money. It's so nice to catch up. We were neighbors in Brooklyn, and the pandemic happened. I moved. This is kind of our first time having a real chat since all of it.

[00:02:55]

SM: You know what? It seems like yesterday.

[00:02:58]

FT: Unbelievable. It seems also like yesterday; we were at your rooftop and you were discussing your book project. It was just still in the incubation phase at that point. I think you were still doing the proposal. Fast forward to today, it's really special to have you on, to talk about the book, which is now out. It's called *The Lost Art of Connecting*. Oh, it hits. *The Gather, Ask, Do Method for Building Meaningful Relationship*. I mean, I have to ask, as you're writing this, the pandemic happens, almost gives new meaning to what you are intending to write, or was it more just reinforcement.

[00:03:37]

SM: It's funny. Because the original thesis, impetus for the book was all about the fact that we had become over reliant on technology, had lost or humanity when it came to building connections, and literally use clicks, likes, follows as our means of measuring our credibility in terms of connectivity and networking. That was the proposal. Of course, obviously, once I start writing last February, a month in, the whole world changed. That pieces became a little, kind of, I guess you could say rusty, because the only means of connection we had was the clicks, and the likes and the follows.

But I will say now, one year later, as we are finally having that glimmer with hundreds of thousands of people getting vaccinated, not as many people suffering and dying, we have a do-over opportunity. When in life do you actually have a chance to reset?

[00:04:40]

FT: Do you think we've learned though? I feel like as human beings, we tend to forget. We don't learn from our mistakes as we would like to think, so what would you like us to reflect upon, and think differently about when it comes to connectivity. Was this past year a complete step in the backwards direction or did we actually make some subtle improvements and how we interact? Look, this morning, I talked to my accountant on Zoom, I haven't ever done that. I can't even tell you what she looks like in a lineup, but now I do, because this is like what we do now. I'm doing this podcast, as I see you, I used to never do that. I think that's probably a better thing.

[00:05:23]

SM: Look, there are so many silver linings. I mean, I don't mean to be Miss Pollyanna — of course, it's been a tragically, terrifyingly sad here for so many people, and challenging for myself for sure. But I will say, number one, we have learned just how important our meaningful connections are, how important it is not to take those for granted and to actually stay in touch with people. Maybe people that we had kind of lost touch with or thought, "Oh! Maybe this person isn't really going to 'get me to the next level.'" Well, guess what? None of that even matter.

I think in some way it's been a level setting. I also think we all have been made more vulnerable. When you are open and more vulnerable, so many opportunities open up to you. I do think there have been a lot of lessons learned. I honestly think I don't think we're going to all of a sudden go back and forget everything we've either. I think the enormity of this last year will have lasting impact. How long? I certainly can't predict. I also think this notion of being able to see each other is a good thing, although I also feel for people that are Zoomed out. Certainly for those who run businesses or run companies, you don't have to be on video all day, every day, every minute.

[00:06:48]

FT: You could have written about a host of things. You're so smart, you're so experience, you run a business. For those of you who want to learn more about Susan's background, you were on this show, June of 2019. I looked it up, Episode 898 and you talked all about your comeuppance, and your childhood, and your important work that you're doing today, consulting companies, big and large and how to really create real change in the world and improve their businesses to different types of initiatives. You could have written about anything, and yet you wanted to focus on this connection piece. Why?

[00:07:28]

SM: Honestly, when I turned about 54, I'm now 56, I finally realized what my secret sauce was. I say that because don't ever give up on figuring out what your chief differentiating factor is. Because it may take a while to find it, but it's there. I realized that 98% of the business of my then six-year-old company had been inbound. There's a reason for that. It is the fact that all these years, I had been building meaningful, deep reciprocal relationships. I would go so far as not call it networking. I call it the types of people that have shown up since 1985, '86 when I first started working professionally. I realized, you know what, maybe there's that could be helpful to others if I put it down on paper.

[00:08:21]

FT: It offers a three-step method, your book, which again is called *The Lost Art of Connecting: The Gather, Ask, Do Method*. Let's start with Gather. You say that instead of waiting for the perfect event to happen, think outside the box and create your own opportunity, but keep it simple. Can you elaborate? Then in a post-pandemic world, I think we're all going to be like — it's like, I can't wait to have people over, but I'm also like, "What's the protocol? Do we wear masks?"

[00:08:52]

SM: I am not an epidemiologist, I am not a medical worker so I don't want to be advising on — I would just say, whatever the CDC says, follow. But I will say, now is the time to start. I don't think we need to wait until — meaning, we can be doing these things virtually, to start to prepare ourselves. The reason I say simple is, there are many introverts who will read my book, that the thought of gathering, and hosting is the most terrifying thought in the world. Why I suggest start small is, this is not a number's game, this is going deep, this is surrounding yourself with maybe three people. If you are so inclined to have each of those three people, invite one other person. Viola! You have six to eight people at that point.

Then actually grew out of my own FOMO in life, and yes, I think FOMO is identified once Instagram came into being. I've had FOMO since I was in high school. I turned it upside down, and instead of creating what I call JOMO, not the joy of missing out which is your immediate inclination. But rather the joy of meeting others. Again, yes, I'm an extrovert, but even introverts enjoy meeting people. It's a question of doing it in smaller doses, doing it in more meaningful ways that elicit the kind of conversations that would be a lot more interesting than the weather.

[00:10:20]

FT: There's a book if you want to do an even deeper dive on how to gather, there's a book called *The Art of Gathering* by Priya Parker. This step in your methodology reminds me of what she really deep dives into, which is how to do that in many different ways, know your audience and go from there.

[00:10:39]

SM: She's interviewed in my book.

[00:10:41]

FT: Wow! Okay.

[00:10:42]

SM: Yeah. There you go.

[00:10:43]

FT: There you go. All right. Step two in your methodology is Ask. It's not about asking for help to build the relationship, but to offer it. Tell us how this actually works in real life.

[00:10:57]

SM: Of course. Of course, the immediate inclination is, ask, is to ask for the introduction for the job or the introduction to the board opportunity. But actually, the ask is learning to ask the right questions so that you can then be of help, so that you can then be of support. Not to the point of putting yourself second, but rather being helpful, so that over your life, you are then reaping the benefits from being a helpful individual.

[00:11:28]

FT: I've always thought that it's a great way to end an email, or even just — if it's not the purpose of the email, but to always end with a line about how you can be in service of this person, like how can I help you is always a great way to keep the dialogue going in a very positive way.

[00:11:49]

SM: You couldn't have said it more succinctly or better. I have noticed over not just this year of the pandemic, but over my lifetime. When you simply say to somebody, "What is challenging you right now? Is there anything you could use help with?" Wow! That does open up a meaningful conversation.

[00:12:07]

FT: Oh my gosh! It reminds me of years ago. Obviously, pre-pandemic. I was coming out of my maternity leave haze, and I was like trying to back into the groove of my work. I thought, "I'm

just host going to host these breakfasts, this monthly breakfast. I'm going to invite a few friends, they bring a friend. I'd pay for the scrambled eggs, it was my pleasure and people would love to come. People love, in New York City especially, a lot of people don't start work until 10:00.

Between like 8:00 and 10:00 is a great time to invite them to a warm breakfast on their way to work, and they would come. We would do this thing, where we'd go around and say, what is the one thing that we need help with? Magic would ensue, relationships would form. It was like the most effortless thing, and that's the thing I want to tell people, it's like it doesn't have to be hard.

[00:12:56]

SM: Right. You don't always have to be immediately helpful. But what you can do is, if you can't help that person, you may know someone else who can, or you may be able to help them down the road. But I believe, and when we talk about the DO, it is this notion of stepping up. If you can't be helpful, that's okay, but just say so. Don't ghost people.

[00:13:22]

FT: Right. No pressure. No pressure. But the seed has been planted, and you don't know when you're — like that's the thing, I've always said that — this is going to take this on the other side of this equation or the person who needs help to say that to someone else and say, "This is what I'm looking to achieve or what I'm —." Whenever I've been on sort of the receiving end of that request, and maybe I don't know immediately how to help this person, it stays with me. You better believe that in six months or three weeks or whatever the time is, the opportunity for that person will present themselves, because I'm now conscious of what that person needs and I'm more than happy to include that in my in my purview.

[00:14:03]

SM: A friend of mine once said I'm like a human CRM. What I have found is, everyone you meet is like a braincell. This means like over time, when somebody says to you, Farnoosh, "Gee! You know what? I really need to talk to somebody who's an expert in climate change." Chances are, you might have met them, right? Then that braincell can be activated. I mean, I'm being a little silly, but I think you just made that —

[00:14:26]

FT: Well, hey. I host a podcast, I'm sure there's somebody in these six years that if they are not the person, they know someone. I always say, hosting a podcast is my way of continuing to have friendships with people.

[00:14:41]

SM: Wow! You have set the bar so high, and you were doing this long before the two million I think I just saw podcast out there.

[00:14:51]

FT: Oh my gosh! Still fewer than there are blogs, and YouTube pages, so it's still a pretty fertile medium. But yeah, we talked about social media a little bit and I just wanted to get your take on the whole phenomenon and now we've got, it's like this multiheaded monster. I can't keep up, Susan. Clubhouse. Now, on Twitter, there's all these different methods to connecting. I'm just overwhelmed and I wonder what's the best kind of relationship to have with social media so that you can continue to connect authentically with people.

[00:15:27]

SM: I would honestly say, what is the most comfortable to you. That may be the simplest answer. I think it's also important to go where the audiences that matter to you, or the communities you wish to build. Which may or may not be what is the most comfortable to you, so you may have to push to get out of your comfort zone. But Farnoosh, I'm like you. I mean, it is overwhelming and it's a lot to keep up on, but I want to make sure your listeners know. You don't have to be everywhere, and quite frankly, if you try to be everywhere, you won't succeed at any of it.

[00:15:59]

SM: But it feels like that's the message that we're getting, is like if you're not everywhere, you're not omni relevant, and why should that be the goal. I've always said like, I don't want to be average to many people. I want to be significant to a few. That means, Instagram is where I'm having the most fun, and the most rich conversations, believe it or not. On Instagram, like that's where I'm going to hang out, and I'm sorry, but Twitter, LinkedIn, I can't. It's not happening for me there.

[00:16:27]

SM: Well, look at how successful you are.

[00:16:29]

FT: And it works out. If I could clone myself, maybe because it is also a matter of time.

[00:16:36]

SM: Yeah, of course. \

[00:16:37]

FT: Your last step in your three-step method is Do. I want you to talk to us about the doing part, because you've gathered, you've asked. This is really about the maintenance, and nurturing, and staying in touch, staying connected. I always get stuck on how to end an email. So much of how we communicate is through email, so maybe the second part of this question is how do you write a perfect email, but how do you — what are some of the major tenants of the do step?

[00:17:03]

SM: The do. Well, first of all, this is not something you just do once in your life. You don't gather, ask, do. This is something that I would encourage people to do throughout their life, throughout any time they are having a major life change, maybe when they're moving locations, maybe moving jobs, maybe starting to serve on a board. But the cracks of the do is, if you properly ask

and you properly listen, which is something we are woefully bad at. But if you intentionally, and actually take notes, which is something I have found to be extraordinarily helpful, then you can actually follow up effectively and become reliable, dependable, somebody who is trusted and I hate to say it, but known as the person who get shit done.

You mentioned email, and of course, that is our actual, certainly professionally the easiest way. But I sometimes think it's really important, when you are in a conversation with someone, ask them what is their favorite means of receiving information. You may be surprised. It may be a phone call. Somebody may say, "You know what? In lieu of an email, why don't you call me in two weeks." That might be an easier thing, not only you get the respite of having two weeks to wait, but to me, that's an integral thing to do.

The other thing I like to do is, while it is fresh in my memory is sometimes I will immediately take notes, and just as soon as I get home after meeting them, or even during this pandemic when I've met people through Facetime chats, and Zooms and Microsoft Teams or whatever, I would write right after, while it's on my mind and just say, "You know what? It was a real pleasure meeting with you. I'd love to schedule a virtual coffee in the next month, because X, Y, Z." So being very prescriptive. Some people will be like, "Oh! This person is scary. I don't even know her." But most people will actually be really appreciative.

I do think with email, get to the point, be direct. No one has time for just flowery, I mean you can say, "It was nice to meet you, but if there's something specific, that the person mentioned, it is so confirming if you can say, "Wow! You mentioned that restaurant that humus that I absolutely adore. I'm going to try it and thank you."

[00:19:37]

FT: Yeah, specificity. People don't go that extra mile of doing the follow up. This last step I think in your methodology is the one that we take most for granted, I think. It's so refreshing to know, it's true that it is appreciated, and we maybe in the moment feel really unsure, or insecure about it, reaching out to somebody. But most people will welcome that.

[00:20:08]

SM: Exactly.

[00:20:09]

FT: That's a good reminder. All right. Let's talk about loneliness epidemic. Not to open up a can of worms here, but this book in the context of this other big problem, I suppose that we have in our world, where many people are identifying with feelings of anxiety. and depression. and isolation in this pandemic is only I think made that worse. What do you want your message to be for those people?

[00:20:37]

SM: Well, first of all, I have been alone for the last year, and I have been living my greatest fear, because I was lonely before this pandemic started. I've been single since 2014, and I used to travel all the time, to actually deal with the one thing I was terrified of. Not to say go write a book to deal with your loneliness, I don't know if I would recommend that.

[00:21:01]

FT: Journaling helps.

[00:21:03]

SM: Well, yes. Keeping busy certainly, but I have to say, yes, I could have gone into a hole and not reached out to anyone, but I did the opposite. I actually reached out to people more. I contacted friends that I haven't been in touch with over the years, that maybe we were still connected on the old Facebook, LinkedIn, but I actually made a concerted effort to say, "This is a difficult time. How are you doing? It's difficult for me, but why don't we get on the phone and chat." I have found that to be extraordinarily cathartic, and there were few people who didn't respond, and yes, that sucks. But in the greater scheme of things, just by reaching out, that act was helpful to me.

[00:21:51]

FT: I see your book is not just something that should sit on the business shelves of Barnes & Noble's, but really it offers so much to the reader in the form of self-help and self-improvement. I don't know what was the lens through which you were writing this book. Was it strictly for like the context of work and business? But I mean, truly, there are so many takeaways that we can bring back into our personal lives.

[00:22:17]

SM: Well, you've known me, Farnoosh for many years. There is not a work Susan and a personal Susan. There is a one Susan, and I don't know if that's a good thing or what, but it is what it is. I have found that being my true self, both professionally and personally actually has led me to have deeper relationships. Actually, better business relationships. In deference to you, there's a chapter in this book all about how do we talk about money.

[00:22:43]

FT: Really?

[00:22:44]

SM: Yes. Yes.

[00:22:45]

FT: Okay. Let's talk about that. What was your hope for that chapter?

[00:22:52]

SM: Well, as you I think are so — you should have been writing that chapter and I certainly don't even begin to want to step into your shoes. But this notion is, when we talk about money, we open up so many barriers, and we learn so much more about each other. So that then, we

can actually have the real conversations. It goes so far as to discuss that, and I talk a bit about how I became an angel investor through learning about the deep inequities we see in the moneys that go to women of color, and to women in general. By investing, obviously, I have the privilege to do so. But that has led me to actually get to know people on a deeper level as well.

Anyhow, I love your comment about the fact that this isn't just a business book and McGraw-Hill has it as a business book, so it is a business book.

[00:23:46]

FT: Yes.

[00:23:46]

SM: But for me to be prescriptive, that is like putting on a shoe that doesn't fit.

[00:23:55]

FT: Well, you used the word, vulnerability earlier, and in the context of talking about money, talk about getting naked.

[00:24:01]

SM: Oh my God! Yes.

[00:24:02]

FT: It's really hard for people to do that, but when they can and they do, it does unleash just a load of stuff, that I think was mostly good.

[00:24:12]

SM: Mostly good. Again, all of this is always — it is scary walking up to someone at an event that you've never met. It is scary on a Zoom line to chat with someone you've never met, but life can be scary, right? I look back and if I think, if I had an open various store or walked up and introduced myself to certain people, so much wouldn't have happened.

[00:24:39]

FT: True. Do you also find that in this era of Zoom, everything, all the time that it has made you more candid and honest in your conversations, like versus if — okay, I have relationships now with people that were always just mainly over email, or perhaps a phone call once in a while, but now we're talking more in person. I can see the person. It almost put your guard down in a way, like you can't escape. You're actually in this like 360 with this person. Like I'll show up on Zoom calls without makeup on obviously.

[00:25:15]

SM: You're in your home.

[00:25:17]

FT: I'm in my home, like I really don't care what the optics are anymore. My daughter is over there in the corner — and I think that's made us all a bit more real with one another, and I think a very positive way.

[00:25:30]

SM: I agree with you 100%, and I hope that is one of the tenants that we will continue, honestly. I hope we can take that person into the real world as well, because, do you know what? I still love you even though you don't have make up on, right? Okay?

[00:25:46]

FT: Right. Yeah. Thanks. Yeah, I just can't. Versus an email that you'll edit, and you'll think of — when you're just on the go talking to someone in real time, I think that you have to just be a lot more comfortable with yourself, and trust that whatever happens is not going to — whether that's something that happens at your home, or disruption and you can't hide that you're like — you have bags under your eyes because you didn't sleep the night before. All of that is now part of the context where we're connecting. I think it makes us just feel more like we're not alone.

[00:26:30]

SM: Right. Well, again, this has been a great equalizer in so many ways. I want to caveat that with, so many people had tremendous trauma, and death, and horror, horror. I mean, I can't even begin. Then there's the vast majority of us who have been effective, and had to disrupt our world. I think of you with little ones at home, and trying to run a company, continue writing books, running a podcast. I mean, that's a lot to manage. But the thing is, so many people are dealing with some disruption. It levels the playing field when you're having conversations with people.

[00:27:12]

FT: I should mentioned, your book is funny, it's encouraging. I mean, it's basically Susan in a book format. I'm so excited for you. How do you feel on the other side of this project? It's always such a journey. It's like a two-month pregnancy. I'm sorry. Two years long, not two months. Sorry.

[00:27:34]

SM: I was going to say, well, considering I have never gone through a pregnancy or childbirth, I guess I now kind of know a little bit, maybe, but without, obviously the pain. But I have to say, it's terrifying. It's really, really scary. I feel like — I've always been very open and vulnerable. Now, I feel like I literally have unzipped my dress for the world to see. That is scary, but I have to step back and be like, "I have to feel good. I have to feel proud." But you noticed, I'm putting that have in front of it, which are my own neuroses. But I'm excited, and I hope if anything, maybe it might help some people get over a few of their challenges, and then I'm doing a good service.

[00:28:24]

FT: Absolutely. Susan McPherson, thank you so much. *The Lost Art of Connecting*. Congratulations.

[00:28:30]

SM: Thank you, Farnoosh. I just adore you and so grateful.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:28:37]

FT: Thanks so much to Susan for joining us. You can pick up her book, *The Lost Art of Connecting*, available everywhere. Check out the website, thelostartofconnecting.com. Stay tuned for Wednesday's episode when we invite Jennifer Barrett on the show. She is the author of a book called, *Think Like a Breadwinner*, as you know, a topic near and dear to my heart. In the meantime, I hope your day is so money

[END]