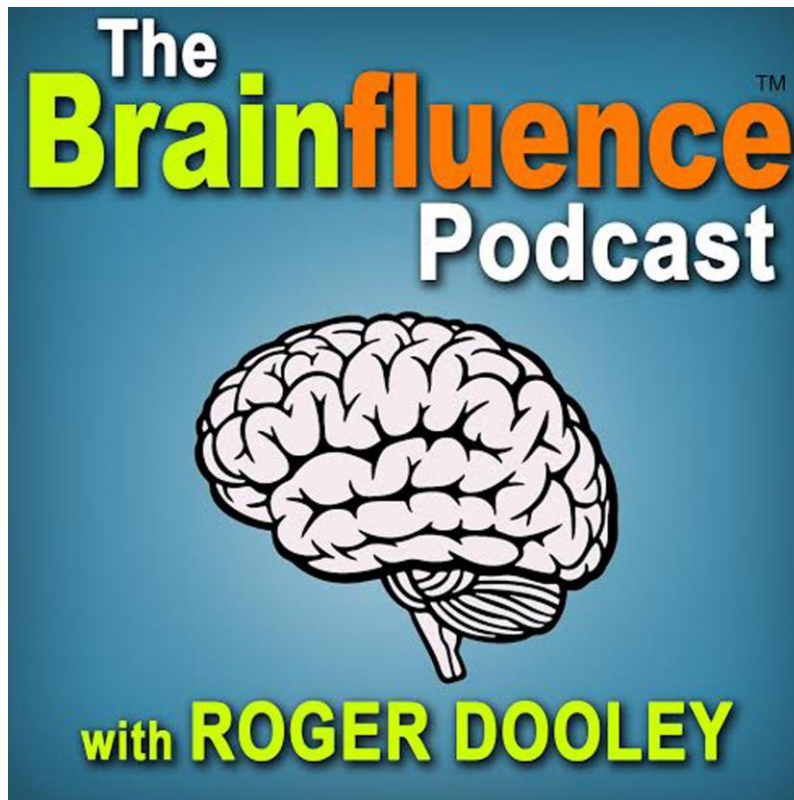


Ep #54: Connectional Intelligence with Erica Dhawan



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**Roger Dooley**

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## **Ep #54: Connectional Intelligence with Erica Dhawan**

Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley, author, speaker and educator on neuromarketing and the psychology of persuasion. Every week, we talk with thought leaders that will help you improve your influence with factual evidence and concrete research. Introducing your host, Roger Dooley.

Roger Dooley: Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast. This is Roger Dooley and our guest today is Erica Dhawan. Erica is a founder and CEO of Cotential, a consultancy that helps organizations accelerate the connectedness of their people, customer, clients and other stakeholders. She's a leadership expert and keynote speaker. Erica has a new book. She and her co-author Saj-nicole Joni are the authors of *Get Big Things Done: The Power of Connectional Intelligence*. Welcome to the show Erica.

Erica Dhawan: Thank you. Great to be here, Roger.

Roger Dooley: Erica, I see you've got degrees from Wharton, MIT and Harvard. I'm sure it keeps you busy but what's your next academic goal, you're surely not going to stop there are you?

Erica Dhawan: I guess I would say, I'm Indian by background. Studies are in my blood. I think I come from a family of all doctors and scientists. I guess, I'll say that I'm more of a scientist of our organization. I'll keep asking question, maybe not in academia but in the business world.

Roger Dooley: I was thinking maybe astrophysics or Cal Tech could be a next objective just to add a little roundness to the record-wonder achievement that you've put together. That's really amazing. Anyway, let's get to connectional intelligence which is the topic of your book. Explain what you mean by that, Erica, what exactly is connectional intelligence?

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Erica Dhawan: Absolutely, first, a lot of the ways that we measure relationships in the digital world is about quantity. How many Twitter followers we have? How many Facebook likes? How many YouTube subscribers? In our book, *Get Big Things Done* and in our research, we shift that focus from quantity of connections to quality of connections because building relationships that actually change people's lives that create value or meaning or both is about making smart connections, getting the right people together, collecting the important data and using resources in the smartest way and simply building a network doesn't necessarily lead to measurable outcomes, especially change.

The key is how you use that network. In our book, we described a 21<sup>st</sup>-century skill called connectional intelligence that we all need to maximize and develop to leverage all of our connections and connectiveness and put them to significant use. Our definition is really the human ability to combine knowledge, ambition and human capital, forging connections on a global scale that create unprecedented value and meaning. Even more grassroots, it's really this ability to combine people, ideas and resources to get big things done in today's over-connected worlds.

Roger Dooley: Just to put that in real terms, one thing that I enjoyed about the book was that it's full of little anecdotes and stories. What will a couple of different examples of these be from, in some of these anecdotes that you've collected.

Erica Dhawan: In the book we tell countless stories of individuals and companies who are harnessing the ideas of connectional intelligence. One of my favorite stories from the book is

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about a woman named Jeannie Peeper. Jeannie Peeper had a very rare disease called FOP and spent years in her life trying to diagnose this illness. It was something that was rarely seen by doctors. With the rise of our connective tools, one thing she decided to do after she met one doctor who had seen more patients with this disease than normal, she started to connect with all these patients.

She created an email newsletter and a Facebook group. Soon enough, over time, they were connecting his patients not just for emotional support but they became the first-ever knowledge network across the world of patients with FOP and they began to support doctors in better understanding how to diagnose and treat the illness. They even began to fund medical research for this rare disease that typically doesn't get funded because it's so rare.

What began for Jeannie as just asking a different question of what would happen if I connect to patients that are not connected in today's world around a disease that can be very lonely actually turned into an entirely built-out community that was funding medical research and teaching doctors and researches best practices as well as becoming a model for rare diseases and other categories as well. How to leverage the connectedness of patients in new ways? That's one of my favorite stories.

Roger Dooley: That's a great one. I've liked it too because I've been into building online communities for just about as long as there has been an online to speak of and I think while some of the things that we accomplish won't necessarily as, getting dramatic is getting closer to a cure for disease, you still see the tremendous transfer of knowledge that

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can take place and the people that can be helped by that. A site that I co-founded years ago back in 2001 was College Confidential. It started at a time when there weren't many resources for kids and parents who wanted to get into college particularly if they lack say, the local tools.

The kids that went through great preschools have those tools but if you were in a small town in the Midwest or if you were perhaps in another country, seeking to go to school in the US, you really didn't have a lot of information about the process and plus just the amount of knowledge transcends with any one individual can have with thousands of colleges and so many colleges that even the best experts can probably only speak knowledgeably about a few dozen or a couple of hundreds. It was very rewarding to see some of the outcomes from that where students and families would accomplish their objectives. I guess we were doing connectional intelligence all along, we just didn't call it that.

Erica Dhawan: Yeah, in many ways, connectional intelligence and we say this in our book isn't new. The great leaders of our time from Rosa Parks to Ben Franklin right to Mahatma Gandhi had very high connectional intelligence but today, the skill, depth and breadth of our connection is radically different. In our book, we showed that it can be used by really anyone, not just a business person, not just someone who's rich or successful but really anyone to get something big done. It's not only in arenas like healthcare or an online community. It's also for business problem solving.

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One of my favorite, other stories we feature in the book is the story of Colgate-Palmolive. A few years ago, Colgate had a science problem. They had developed a new fluoride. Their fluoride was getting stuck in the mechanical equipment and it wasn't meshing with their toothpaste well and all the best chemists were working on this but it was causing a lot of problems and they couldn't figure out why their fluoride was getting stuck. They decided over time when no one internally was able to figure it out that they would ask an external crowd.

They posted this question in an anonymous way on an online website called InnoCentive which is a community of problem solvers and hackers who like to scan and source ways to solve problems. Within just a few days, a physicist named Ed Melcarek saw the question Colgate posted it in an anonymous way so it protect their confidentiality issues. Ed, the physicist said, this isn't a chemistry problem. It's a physics problem. It's about charged particles. You charge the fluoride one way, you charge the toothpaste the other and instantly the problem was solved.

Today, now, he's continually engaged with Colgate but in our interview with him, he talked specifically about how he might have never been hired by Colgate. In today's world, he didn't fit the traditional resume. In today's world, we not only can get big things done through online communities on issues that we're really passionate about but we can solve business problems by accessing networks outside of our traditional employee base. People might ask the question how could regular people solve problems that even your best employees or your R-and-D teams are stumped on?

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I think using connectional intelligence, we can explore these new ways of solving problems by enlisting freelance problem solvers and tapping into the wisdom of individuals that we would have never had access to before.

Roger Dooley: Sure. I think of communities like Stack Exchange for example as a tech problem-solving place where hundreds of thousands of people have gone for answers. I'm sure many of those folks were in large corporations whether there was a bash of experts, there's an IT staff and all kinds of expertise but it was either easier to go to this outside resource or in some cases, the knowledge was so specific that it made more sense to go to this large group of outside experts as opposed to talking to some really smart general since he may not have encountered that particular problem before.

Erica Dhawan: Yeah. I think there's this huge wave of how online problem-solving communities are actually becoming recruiting platforms Quora and Stack Overflow which are question-and-answer sites. Quora has now created a recruiting platform or companies like Google, Apple and LinkedIn are hiring and recruiting some of the most active users of these question-and-answer sites to apply for jobs. It's also helping to change how we recruit in the future, you know? Moving away from the construct of just handpicking resumes let's say, some great colleges to finding the great talent across the world that is already showing their knowledge in these areas.

Roger Dooley: Right, what they're seeing there really are work samples of these people rather than claimed accomplishments on a resume, these are actual samples of what they can do. That makes a lot of sense. One surprising trivia fact that I

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learn, Erica, was that Florence Nightingale, the famous nurse was one of the first experts in data visualization. Maybe I'm paraphrasing a little bit there but explain how that happened to be and how she employed connectional intelligence?

Erica Dhawan: Florence Nightingale is an amazing woman. We know her for her great work and hospitals and in communities but one of the things that is really unique about her is she tapped into a lot of different areas. She tried to study as much as possible. When she was young, she was tutored largely by her father in subjects like Italian, Greek, Latin, History and Mathematics. She ended up at a very young age getting involved in traveling across the world. She was training in nurse camps and then one of them, she began to discover the unsanitary conditions and unregulated medical practices that were causing such high mortality rates among wounded soldiers in the British camp.

At that time, the military doctors were scrambling to decrease the death rate as one out of two wounded soldiers died in camp hospitals. Nightingale had gained this advanced mathematical training from her father who she was tutored by and began collecting data on the unsanitary conditions and showed how her methods might decrease the mortality rate. She was credited for creating the first polar area diagram and was a pioneer in the use of graphics display, statistical data. While she was making the case to doctors and military officials on the ground, she also deployed this letter-writing campaign to the presented government officials back home.

Think of it as a modern-day social media campaign. Her letter writing and her mathematics training led the British



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government to commission the design and building of a new hospital, the Renkioi Hospital. The mortality rate for all wounded soldiers in that hospital dropped more than 90%. She was able to take what she learned from statistics, sanitary conditions, public health to dramatically decrease the death rate of wounded soldiers.

Roger Dooley: It's a great story and probably a good thing that she didn't have today's technology. Otherwise, she might have ended up being a PowerPoint guru or something instead of saving lives. Did you employ connectional intelligence when you and your co-author were writing this book?

Erica Dhawan: Yeah, that's a great question. We have lived it in our own journey as we've written this book. The first thing was that we come from two different generations and backgrounds and perspectives. We used our own connectional intelligence to find stories from different walks of life. I'm a connector that tends to be I am online a lot. I found stories through Twitter. I connected with interviews through Facebook, through LinkedIn, through social networks. Saj-nicole is definitely a great renaissance thinker. She's an amazing when it comes to ideas.

We were able to tap into our different forms of connecting to find our stories and what you'll find in our book is that we did not highlight the 10 most successful people in the world that have connectional intelligence. We highlighted everyday people that are doing big things and using connectional intelligence as if as a force to help them to amplify their work, to make a larger difference in the world. We feature stories from everyone, from plumbers to surfers to engineers to scientists, to freelancers to Fortune 500 CEOs.

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What we found through that is to really show that connectional intelligence is coming from anywhere and it's really about investing and taking a dream and opening yourself up to new people and ideas to get big things done. The other thing ...

Roger Dooley: Go ahead.

Erica Dhawan: ... we are doing is we have a really active Twitter engagement through the hashtag get big things done. We have people all over the world that are sharing their ideas, their connectional intelligence stories, their results of the connectional intelligence quizzes to keep the conversation going. Our mission is to keep the movement going in a really important way to help people get big things done from all walks of life.

Roger Dooley: I noticed that, again, you have several right in the book text, some sort of pre-written tweet summaries of the book which is very kind of a healthy little idea complete with the hashtag of course. What is the hashtag for those folks who want to check it out right now?

Erica Dhawan: Get big things done.

Roger Dooley: It's actually using abbreviation, GBTD, right?

Erica Dhawan: Yes. What we found actually in this is connectional intelligence that while we use GBTD, the shorthand in the book, GBTD is a hashtag for many other things including guest blog of the day. We've used our connectional intelligence and really focused more on hashtag get big things done.

Roger Dooley: Okay, great. You have a change of that for version 3.0 of the book.

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Erica Dhawan: Yes, exactly.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, that's a problem with hashtags. It happens with conferences too sometimes where suddenly you realize that the hashtag that the conference chose is the same as some other hashtag and all these people are saying, what the heck are you talking about and it's strange. Your mantra in the book is take a dream, add connection, dream bigger, get big things done. In practical terms, what do you mean by that? Say, you're talking to an entrepreneur or a small-business person, translate that into something that they could deal with.

Erica Dhawan: Sure, the first step is called take a dream. Take a dream from our perspective might be a dream that you have that you've been yearning to do or it might be something that comes up to you that is something that comes into your life and is something that someone else might be trying to achieve. I'll frame it more in sort of where the world tips, where you can move from taking a dream to getting big thing done. There's three key tips. The first is opening yourself up to new people and ideas. This means really connecting with people of different cultures, different backgrounds, different disciplines or ages.

Connectional intelligence is about bridging from across lines because we all have something to teach each other. An idea that might revolutionize your normal way of operating might come from a completely different silo where it's common place. One of my favorite examples of this is a surfer named Ben Thompson is also an engineer and he created something called the Smart Fin which is a sensor that surfers put underneath their surfboard to track the salinity, acidity and temperature of water.

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Interestingly enough, climate change researchers have a lot of trouble tracking these types of stats because they can't put sensors in the water because that forms algae and gets ruined but by partnering with the surfer community through these sensors, they're able to get data according to surfers' locations that they couldn't have gotten before. Really, by opening themselves up, they're connecting the surfer and the climate change research community to discover new data while they're surfing.

A second key point for entrepreneurs is to make connections and partnerships that you truly care about. To you to not focus just on getting obsessed with how many Twitter followers you have or how many views a video gets. Reaching an audience is obviously important but only if you are proud with your message that you truly value and want to sustain over the long term. I think Jeannie Peeper and her story around her rare disease is a great example. She was committed for years to bridging this community.

To really think about what are the things that you dare and you care so much about that you can't not do it. The third key tip for those out there is to leverage what's been done before. We all don't need to come up with multi-million-dollar idea, right? We don't have to reinvent the wheel and we don't have to be the boss of our own company right away to do this. Just think about where your passion lies and then look at what already exists because often times, we have to be open to various ways people are already taking action around their dreams and how to learn to work with them in new ways.

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This idea of connectional intelligence isn't about using people. It's about intentionally creating more impact in your life and then the lives of other by opening yourselves up to the possibilities of ways of connecting with each other with ideas or resources that wouldn't have been possible before.

Roger Dooley: Those were good points. I think they play into human psychology too because first of all people want to be part of the community and they want to be helpful. That's something that, I think, often individuals and not just entrepreneurs but just about everybody underestimates if they're reaching out for advice, they think they're going to look stupid or they're going to somehow embarrass themselves or that the other person is simply too busy or won't care or would feel put upon by that request for advice or help and in fact the reverse is true.

Asking for advice makes you look smarter in most cases, assuming you asked the right person. The fear of looking stupid is false but also people are flattered if they're asked for advice in an area that is their expertise. If you ask them for advice that they really don't know anything about, on a topic they don't know about then that diminishes that perception of you and your intelligence and they don't like that. If you can involve somebody else's expertise in an area often they're very willing to help out. It's really makes both parties feel better.

Erica Dhawan: Absolutely. I was doing a Get Big Things Done book event in Seattle last week and one of the questions I got was, how do you create a culture where people want to share their knowledge if they're all competing with each other for promotions or inside a company and there's not really an incentive or collaboration because those that

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have the knowledge oftentimes lies but we ended up exploring this idea of internal TED talks. The mindset is not that you should keep your knowledge to yourself but actually share it and be known as an informal thought leader in your company.

By doing these internal company TED talks, you can become the expert but you're actually sharing it with the world. I think in different environments we have to shape this and design this in the right way. Things like video TED talks and company blogging and obviously tools like Twitter are great ways for people not only to share knowledge but to be known as thought leaders and also to build their brand or their network around the topic.

Roger Dooley: I recall one of the examples in the book was ... the law firm where the associates in big law firms are tend to be hypercompetitive and you would think that if anything they'd be attempting to undermine their peers but you found out that wasn't the case at least in their willingness to share experiences and information.

Erica Dhawan: Absolutely. We found that the associates at this leading law firm were actually collaborating through a Twitter at work network to help each other solve cases faster. Questions like legal citations or finding a reference for something. What happened is it became such a rapidly productive community. It was reducing their billing hours. That's how the senior leaders noticed what they were doing but even more importantly, I think, it just shows that there is a rising generation that's come of age in a time of only hyperconnectivity.

I think the younger generation is demanding to live and work in a connectionally intelligent age. One of the most powerful things in my work at Cotential is really around

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how to engage and advise senior leaders to enable the connectional intelligence of their youngest and really work across generations, identifying, solve the breakers that we're facing today.

Roger Dooley: One thing you talked about are role models. What do you mean by role models? Can anybody assume any role or do we tend to individually be cut out for particular role or roles?

Erica Dhawan: Are you speaking more specifically about the role models at the end of the book?

Roger Dooley: Yes, uh-huh.

Erica Dhawan: In part three of the book, we talked about that there are different types or archetypes of connectionally intelligent people. We showcase 10 different role models that really under three different types. The first type are the thinkers. These are the ideas people. They love connecting ideas. They are the curious minds. The second are the enablers who are the community builders who love to forge ties with people. The third type are the connection executors. These might be those legal associates that are using a Twitter network to get something big done in the organization.

What we found actually is that in different job environments, you have to use different role models versus others. People might have a natural type of role model, they might naturally be more of a thinker type but their job might require them, say, in customer service to be a connection executor. A lot of this is about understanding what are you naturally like. I think that people can be more than one. You might be an enabler in your home life and you might be a thinker at work if you're

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in a research job. Part of it is to understand what type you naturally are in your role and what type will most support you in the big thing you're trying to get done.

If you find that you're a naturally a thinker but you need to be a connection executer for your job, it also helps you understand who are the connection executers around you that you can forge ties with to help you get your big thing done. It also helps people that, for example aren't savvy on social media or aren't the ideas people, always asking questions and reading new books and ideas to partner with each other in new ways to get big things done.

Roger Dooley: One other thing that I really like, Erica about the book is that you used a lot of examples that are more or less regular people or smaller companies. It's not the, you really want to do customer service like Zappos does, where want to have the same design effort that Apple does and things that are certainly desirable goals but also likely to be not achieved in any reasonable timeframe but you give a lot of really down-to-earth examples of people who have used connectional intelligence to accomplish, really, in some cases significant goals.

In some cases maybe the goals were of significance to them. In other cases, maybe they're globally significant but I really enjoy that aspect of the book. Let me remind our listeners that we are talking to Erica Dhawan. She's the co-author of the new book *Get Big Things Done: The Power of Connectional Intelligence*. Erica, how can folks find your stuff online and connect with you? I believe you also have an offer for our listeners?

Erica Dhawan: Yeah, absolutely. First, I encourage you to check out the book on Amazon, *Get Big Things Done* or our book website [GetBigThingsDone.com](http://GetBigThingsDone.com). You can find me at

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EricaDhawan.com, E-R-I-C-A-D-H-A-W-A-N. I'm also an active Twitter user at edhawan, E-D-H-A-W-A-N. Send me a learning there. Follow us at the hashtag get big things done. I have a special giveaway for podcast listeners. It's through text. If you text the number with the key code, I will send you a free connectional intelligence quiz and a manager guide so you can run a little connectional intelligence assessment with your team. The code is for you to text by phone the numbers 66866 with the word Erica, E-R-I-C-A. You'll get the details for how to get the free quiz and manager guide so that's texting the number 66866 with the word Erica. You can also get both of those by going to EricaDhawan.com/managerguide online and you can get those tools there as well.

Roger Dooley: Great. We will be linking too all of these resources on the show notes page at RogerDooley.com. Just go to RogerDooley.com/podcast and look for the show notes page with Erica and everything will be there including links to her book and the resources that you just mentioned. Erica, thanks so much for being part of the show. I really enjoyed it.

Erica Dhawan: Thank you. Great to be on.

Thank you for joining me for this episode of the Brainfluence Podcast. To continue the discussion and to find your own path to brainy success, please visit us at [RogerDooley.com](http://RogerDooley.com).