

The Cure of Connection

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The Well Workout's mission is to ignite a wellbeing revolution based on one simple belief: *that doing well* – at work and in life – *starts with being well*.

Using practices that are easy, effective and enjoyable, our one-of-a-kind wellbeing experiences are designed to increase energy, balance, connection, and joy – all in minutes a day and without breaking a sweat.

Four Themes

The Well Workout's philosophy is rooted in two evidence-based premises:

- First, that the *stressors of modern work and life have thrown our collective wellbeing out of balance* – physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially
- Second, that *wellbeing is a skill* that can be learned and practiced just like playing an instrument or a sport.

The Well Workout helps people rebalance holistically and, when done with others, helps foster cultures of wellbeing.

Participants achieve measurable results by engaging in interval-style workouts that leverage four practice pillars:

- **Play** – to rebalance from a focus on work as the core driver of identity and self-worth
- **Rest** – to rebalance from a life of perpetual *motion* and a culture that rewards busyness as a badge of honor
- **Reflection** – to rebalance from an addiction to action and the cycle of deciding and doing
- **Connection** – to rebalance from the heroes' journey of individual achievement

In this brief, we'll examine the value of social **connection** (the fourth practice pillar) as a way to rebalance from time spent alone, pursuing individual goals and developing our personal identities.

Born to Connect

It is well understood that humans are by nature social creatures, and that our need to connect with each other is hard-wired into our biology.

As early as two months of age, infants are able to make eye contact, recognize faces, and instinctively reach out to touch familiar caregivers. Sadly, it has also been shown that babies and toddlers who do not receive sufficient physical and emotional human contact during the first years of life will stop growing, fail to thrive, and can even die. It is not melodramatic to say that we literally cannot fully live without human connection.

The Erosion of Social Engagement

Until quite recently, our innate human need for connection was satisfied through the ordinary interactions of civic and family life. Our ancestors roamed the earth in tribes, eventually settling to hunt, farm and live in small, tight knit communities. The network of mutual support extended far beyond the nuclear family, where three and sometimes four generations lived and worked side by side.

This arrangement of connected living and working began to slowly change in the US during the Industrial Revolution of the early 1900s, when factory work emerged as the new centerpiece of the American economy and people began working in more routinized, autonomous jobs.

A second, more dramatic cultural shift occurred in the later third of 20th century, famously documented by Robert Putnam in his 2000 book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*.

Putnam's research demonstrated a significant drop in various measures of social engagement starting around 1970 – including a decline in religious participation, membership in community organizations, and the frequency with which people invited friends over to their homes.

This loss of 'social capital' – namely 'the connections among individuals' social network and the norms of reciprocity and trust that arise from them', caused a steady erosion of the fabric of society according to Putnam, even as economic prosperity continued to rise.

Since Putnam first sounded the alarm two decades ago, other researchers have continued to study the many societal impacts of individualism at the expense of social connectedness – including on our health.

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In one striking study published in 2010, Dr. Julianne Holt-Lunstad from Brigham Young University reported that the impact of **low social connection on life span is equal to the risk of smoking fifteen cigarettes a day.**

Similar studies have confirmed that lack of social connection poses a greater risk to our health than obesity, excess alcohol consumption, and lack of exercise. Loneliness, it turns out, is a silent killer.

After witnessing this 'epidemic of loneliness' firsthand during his three-year stint as the 19th Surgeon General of the United States which ended in 2017, Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, wrote a book on the topic called, *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*. In it, he lamented:

"We have veered too far away from the group and toward the individual – throwing culture out of balance in the process."

Dr. Murthy further elaborates on *the need to recapture our investment in the 'collective elements that matter while continuing to protect individual expression.'* He spoke, in effect, about our need to rebalance.

Lonely at Work

The growing impacts of low social connection have also been documented in employees across America, as evidenced by these statistics:

Gallup's 2020 State of the American Workplace Report revealed that just 4 in 10 US employees strongly agree that their supervisor or someone at work seems to care about them as a person.

According to Cigna's 2020 Loneliness Report, more than one in three employees surveyed reported feeling a general sense of emptiness (35%) or disconnection from others (37%) when they are at work, and 39% feel the need to hide their true self when they go to work.

A 2018 study by the Wharton School of Business found a strong correlation between loneliness and under-performance. The lonelier people were, the lower the rating was of their performance by their immediate supervisor.

In summary, this alarming snapshot of the contemporary American society and business signals that we are out balance and in need of a reset in the area of social connection.

So, what then are the proposed solutions?

Two recommendations from scholars whose work we have already discussed are as follows:

The establishment of a honeycomb structure of thousands of **small groups** who gather around a common interest or goal (described by Putnam in *Bowling Alone*).

The expansion of a healthcare practice called **social prescribing** in which clinicians 'prescribe' resources and activities in the community that help patients forge healthy social connections (advocated by Murthy in *Together*).

Let's look now at The Well Workout's approach to enhancing social wellbeing, which was created in alignment with both of these recommendations.

Practicing Connection

Connection is the fourth and final practice pillar in The Well Workout by design. This sequencing allows participants to rebalance the personal aspects of their wellbeing (physical, mental, and emotional) first before addressing their social wellbeing needs.

Our approach is consistent with the Hierarchy of Human Needs model outlined by psychologist Abraham Maslow – as well as the commonly accepted airline safety advice to 'put on your own oxygen mask first before helping others.'

Participants in The Well Workout are united by their shared interest and motivation to enhance their total wellbeing and build 'social capital' with one another. This is accomplished through focused conversation and sharing that leverages the following techniques:

- **Eye contact** – purposeful gazing (without staring) to signal engagement
- **Name calling** (the good kind!) – addressing each other by first name whenever possible, to increase psychological safety
- **Authentic speaking** – 'dropping the water line' to share something about yourself that you would like others to know.
- **Deep listening** – when not speaking, attending to both words and emotions

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- **Gratitude** – expressing appreciation for some aspect of your life and/or the connection practice itself

Note that participants are always in choice about what they would like to share and have the option to be silent or say ‘pass.’

The ultimate goal of the Connection practice is the same as that of The Well Workout in general: to support people in practicing the skills of wellbeing in community so that we can *be well to do well* – together.

What Scientists Say

The behavioral benefits associated with having strong interpersonal connections are many, and include:

- Reduction in impulsive behavior
- Enhanced judgment and decision-making
- Better sleep
- Improved immune system functioning

In addition, higher levels of social connection are correlated with a decreased risk for:

- Coronary heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Stroke
- Dementia
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Changes in gene expression

In addition, the long running Harvard Grant and Glueck Study, which has been continuously tracking physical and emotional wellbeing since 1938 using blood samples, self-report surveys, and brain scans, has reported the following findings:

Strong inner circle relationships are a better predictor of health and happiness throughout life than IQ, wealth, or social class.

People with strong social relationships are 50% less likely to die prematurely.

When asked what the key take-aways were from this over 90-year investigation, The Harvard Study of Adult Development’s current director, Robert Waldinger, said quite succinctly:

“Good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period.”

What our Clients Say

Here is what several Well Workout participants have said about their connection experiences:

“The workouts were a great bonding experience with teammates.”

“The activities were fun and encouraged us to step outside of our comfort zone and connect in a meaningful way.”

“The Well Workout was a much appreciated and enjoyable highlight of my day. It was just the perfect dose of energy and connection.”

In closing

- Social connection is a universal human need; without it, we fail to thrive.
- Practicing the skills of connection requires both intention and a safe community in which to both ‘see and be seen.’
- The Well Workout offers an innovative approach to experiencing the curative effects of human connection, while also supporting the most important relationship we have – namely, the one with ourselves.

If you are ready join the wellbeing revolution to experience the cure of connection, please reach out and connect at hello@thewellworkout.com.

To our wellth,
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References

Bowling Alone—The Collapse and Revival of American Community by Robert D. Putnam, Simon & Schuster, 2000

Together—The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World by Vivek H. Murthy, MD, HarperCollins, 2020