

## Sweetness

By Joe Gerstandt



Expert Forum



Want to know what my work is really all about? **Sweetness**. With a little help from one of my favorite authors, I will share an example of what I am talking about.

Carbon, hydrogen and oxygen walk into a bar...  
No seriously.

An excerpt from [The Hidden Connections](#), by [Fritjof Capra](#):

*“When carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen atoms bond in a certain way to form sugar, the resulting compound has a sweet taste. The sweetness resides neither in the carbon, nor in the oxygen, nor in the hydrogen; it resides in the pattern that emerges from their interaction. It is an emergent property.”*

So, sugar has a unique characteristic which many of us are intimately familiar with...sweetness. The truly interesting thing about sweetness, is that it does not exist in a carbon atom or in a hydrogen atom or in an atom of oxygen. It is an emergent property, existing within the context of the relationship between these three different atoms...at that intersection where different things interact, something new is created.

No matter how wonderful carbon is, you cannot make sweetness with just carbon atoms...whether you have 100 of them, 1,000 of them, or 1,000,000 of them. No sweetness. We are all big fans of oxygen, but it alone will not give you sweetness. Hydrogen can do a lot of wonderful things, but on its own cannot give you sweetness. You need to facilitate new intersections to create something that does not already exist. You need to **include** things that are **different** from each other, provide the opportunity for them to bond and become cohesive. **Including difference can be generative.**

If an organization wants to learn, if it wants to be innovative and creative (and truly benefit from diversity and inclusion) it can invest in consistently bringing different people together around different types of opportunities. A simple yet powerful example of this lies in bringing different departments together on a regular basis. At the very least, a new working relationship can be created, as far too often departments do not interact with each other much, and create their own stories about each other often based mostly on assumptions and stereotypes.

One of the things to keep in mind is that we do not and cannot always know what the outcome is going to be. There is nothing about carbon or hydrogen or oxygen that tells us in advance that their relationship will produce the sweetness. We cannot know in advance what might come from two or more people (or

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departments or organizations or professions) crossing paths and exploring a challenge or an opportunity together. **We have to believe in and invest in the value of creating intersections.**

A great example of this is the [Santa Fe Institute](#), which brings people from very different disciplines together to study complex issues in natural, social and artificial systems. [Twitter](#) is also a great example of creating sweetness, as it makes it very easy for people to crash into each other...people different by profession, education, age, geography, race, ethnicity, gender, orientation, gender identity, religious belief, political affiliation, etc.

**It is in our relationships, conversations, and collaborations that we create the future.** Everybody wants the sweetness. Everyone wants synergy. Everybody wants new ideas and innovation. But they are things that cannot be pursued directly; they are by-products, much like happiness or trust. **You get sweetness by investing in people investing in each other and in their relationships.** Be good to each other.