

The Connector Playbook

Make work flow across teams, partners, and leaders.

People-first habits for leading across teams, without the org chart. For Chiefs of Staff, program leaders, and anyone whose job is to connect people, teams, and partners.

75%

of cross-functional teams in one study of 95 teams were dysfunctional, missing on budget, schedule, specs, or goals.

37%

of managers' time goes to decisions, and most say at least half of that time is wasted.

3–5%

of employees provide up to a third of the most valuable help, and they're the most at risk of burning out.

21%

of U.S. employees strongly agree they trust their organization's leadership.

Five layers of connection

1 Up

Leader ↔ You

Stay aligned with the leader you support. Be their honest view of what's really happening.

2 Across

You ↔ People

Build real relationships across the org. Hear what leaders don't. Make people feel known.

3 Between

Team ↔ Team

Make handoffs, decisions, and dependencies visible, so balls stop dropping between teams.

4 Outside

Company ↔ Partners

Treat suppliers, vendors, and customers like part of the team. No surprises.

5 Through

People ↔ Purpose

Keep information, decisions, and the why flowing to everyone. Close every loop.

How the 90-day cycle works

Day 0

Build your connection map. Run the people, partner, and leader checks. Score yourself first.

Days 1–30

Run the Core 6 only. Log handoffs, decisions, and open loops as they come up.

Days 31–60

Add 2 habits from the library aimed at your lowest check score.

Days 61–90

Keep going. Add 2 more if the first ones are sticking.

Day 90

Re-run the checks. Compare. Keep what worked. Start again.

What's in the kit

Start Here (pp. 2–3): the Core 6 habits, 8 principles, week-one setup, and boundaries.

Connection Map, Handoffs & Decisions (pp. 5–6): make the invisible visible.

Habit Library (pp. 9–11): 38 habits across all five layers, plus moments that matter.

Habit Tracker (p. 4): 13 weeks on one page, plus which habits fix which scores.

Connection Check & Scorecard (pp. 7–8): three short checks and 10 measures to prove results.

Spreadsheet tracker: every tool above, with the math done for you.

Six weekly habits that cover all five layers. Do these and nothing else for the first month. They target the places work most often breaks: unclear priorities, invisible handoffs, unmade decisions, and input that disappears.

1

Align with your leader every Monday **UP**

15 minutes. Agree on the top 3 priorities, the decisions needed this week, and the biggest risk. Then share what you're hearing that they may not be.

"What are the 3 things that matter most this week? What should I be telling you that no one else will?"

Time: ~15 min / week **Done when:** You and your leader name the same top 3 without comparing notes.

2

Walk the handoffs, inside and outside **BETWEEN · OUTSIDE**

Ask each team you connect, plus one key partner or supplier: what are you waiting on, from whom, and by when? Log anything at risk in the handoff tracker.

"What are you waiting on from someone else? When do you need it? Who owns getting it?"

Time: ~45 min / week **Done when:** Every at-risk handoff has an owner and a date. Nothing is blocked for more than a week without escalation.

3

Name the decider and log the decision **BETWEEN · UP**

Every cross-team decision gets one named decider and a due date. Log when the issue was raised, what was decided, who decided, why, and who needs to know.

"Who makes this call, and by when? Who needs to weigh in before then?"

Time: ~5 min per decision **Done when:** No decision gets argued twice, and your average days to decision keeps falling.

4

Two conversations, one introduction **ACROSS**

Talk with two people outside your usual circle: person first, work second. Then introduce two people who should know each other.

"How are things going for you? What's getting in the way? Who should I be talking to?"

Time: ~45 min / week **Done when:** Your connection map shows everyone you rely on contacted in the last 30 days.

5

Close every loop within a week **THROUGH · ACROSS**

When someone gives input, asks a question, or raises a risk, tell them what happened to it within 7 days, even if the answer is no or not yet.

"You raised _____. Here's what happened: _____. Here's why."

Time: ~15 min / week **Done when:** Your open-loops list has nothing older than 7 days.

6

Send a 5-line Friday wrap **THROUGH · UP**

To your leader and the teams you connect: wins, risks, decisions made, what's next week, and one thank-you with a real name, ideally someone on another team.

"Wins · Risks · Decisions · Next week · Thank you, _____, for _____."

Time: ~15 min / week **Done when:** People start quoting your wrap, and fewer people ask "What did I miss?"

Eight Principles of a Connector

The why behind every habit

Connect people to each other, not through you.

If every question routes through you, you've become the bottleneck. Introduce, then step back.

Be an honest broker.

Your only agenda is the mission. Bring every side's view fairly, including the ones your leader won't like.

Close every loop.

Nothing kills speaking up faster than input that disappears. Tell people what happened, even when it's no.

Partners are part of the team.

Suppliers and vendors deliver for customers who treat them like partners. Be that customer.

Trust is your only authority.

You lead people who don't report to you. Every kept promise adds to the account.

Make the invisible visible.

Dependencies, decisions, risks, and people's quiet work. If it isn't written down, it's about to be dropped.

Never blame a team you need.

Bring problems, not villains. Speak well of every team and partner, especially when they're not in the room.

Keep confidences.

People tell a connector things they tell no one else. Share themes, never sources.

Week-one setup

- ☐ Build your connection map: the 15–25 people, teams, and partners your work depends on.
- ☐ Send the people check (anonymous), ask 2–3 partners for the partner check, and ask your leader the leader check.
- ☐ Score the people check yourself before you see the results.
- ☐ List every open handoff and every decision still waiting on someone.
- ☐ Agree with your leader on the Monday slot and what "honest broker" means between you.

Rules that make it stick

- ☐ **Route, don't carry.** Your job is to connect the people who can solve it, not to solve everything yourself.
- ☐ **Protect your own time.** Connectors are the first to burn out. Block two focus blocks a week and keep them.
- ☐ **Escalate with options, not blame.** "Here's the problem, here are two options, here's what I recommend."
- ☐ **Write it down.** If it lives only in your head, it leaves when you do.

Boundaries: Share themes, never sources. If someone tells you something in confidence, protect them. If someone shares a personal, health, family, or legal issue, be kind, keep it private, and connect them with HR or the Employee Assistance Program. You make other teams' work visible; you don't take it over.

Leading your own team? This kit is about the work that happens *between* teams. For the people who report to you (1:1s, growth, recognition, retention), use the companion kit: **The People-First Leader Checklist**.

90-Day Habit Tracker

Tick every Friday · aim for 80%+ on the Core 6

Put a check in the week you did the habit. Add new habits in months 2 and 3, not before. The spreadsheet works out your completion rate for you.

	Month 1					Month 2				Month 3			
Habit	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	W8	W9	W10	W11	W12	W13
Align with your leader every Monday													
Walk the handoffs, inside and outside													
Name the decider and log the decision													
Two conversations, one introduction													
Close every loop within a week													
Send a 5-line Friday wrap													
Added habit 1: _____													
Added habit 2: _____													
Added habit 3: _____													
Added habit 4: _____													
Core 6 done this week (of 6)													

If your lowest check score is..., add these habits

After Day 0, find your lowest-scoring area on the people check (the spreadsheet names it), and look at the partner and leader checks too. Pick 2 habits from that row for month 2.

Priorities / Purpose	Cascade decisions across teams · Share one impact story · Monday alignment (core)
Information	Use the 5-part change message · Friday wrap (core) · Run the question pipeline
Decisions	Name the decider (core) · Send one-page pre-reads · Pre-wire the stakeholders
Handoffs	Write interface agreements · Run a cross-team risk review · Use the 48-hour rule
Help	Hold open office hours · Introduce new people to the network · Find the overloaded helpers
Loops	Close every loop (core) · Protect the people who escalate
Relationships	Two conversations, one intro (core) · Ask "Who else should I talk to?" · Celebrate cross-team wins
Voice up	Be the honest broker · Hold open office hours · Ask your leader: start, stop, keep
Partner check	Acknowledge partners within 24 hours · Share the plan early · Joint relationship review
Leader check	Send one-page pre-reads · Audit your leader's calendar · Pre-wire big decisions

Connection Map

The 15–25 people, teams, and partners your work depends on · touch each one at least monthly

Layer: **Up** (your leader and their peers), **Across** (people in other teams), **Between** (team leads at key handoffs), **Outside** (suppliers, vendors, customers).
Relationship: 1 = strained, 5 = strong. Anyone at 1–2, or not contacted in 30+ days, goes on next week’s list.

Name	Team / company	Layer	Why they matter	Relationship (1–5)	Last contact	Next touch	Notes

Handoff Tracker & Decisions Log

Update during your weekly handoff walk · log every cross-team decision

Handoffs and dependencies Status: On track · At risk · Blocked · Done. Blocked 48+ hours → escalate with options.

From (who delivers)	To (who's waiting)	What is being handed over	Needed by	Owner	Status	Blocked since	Delivered on

Decisions log One named decider. Days = decided minus raised. Tell everyone affected within 48 hours.

Raised	Decided	Days	Decision	Decider	Consulted	Why	Told?	Reopened?

Connection Check

Day 0 and Day 90 · 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree

- 1** Copy the people check into Google Forms or Microsoft Forms. Turn off names and emails. Send it to the people across teams you work with.
- 2** Before you see results, score each statement the way you think people will answer.
- 3** Ask 2–5 partner leads the partner check. Ask your leader the leader check, face to face.
- 4** Paste results into the spreadsheet. Share the top-line results and one action you'll take.

People check	Statement	You	Day 0	Day 90
P1 Priorities	I know the organization's top priorities right now.			
P2 Purpose	I understand how my work connects to the company's goals.			
P3 Information	I hear about decisions that affect my work before they affect my work.			
P4 Decisions	It's clear who makes the decisions that affect my work.			
P5 Handoffs	Work handed to my team from other teams arrives clear and on time.			
P6 Help	I can get help from other teams when I need it.			
P7 Loops	When I raise an issue or idea, I hear back about what happened to it.			
P8 Relationships	I have good working relationships outside my own team.			
P9 Voice up	Leadership understands what's really happening on the ground.			
Open	<i>Where do things get stuck between teams most often?</i>			

Partner check	Statement (about your team)	Day 0	Day 90
R1	They are easy to work with.		
R2	They communicate clearly, and tell us about changes early.		
R3	We get decisions and answers when we need them.		
R4	They keep their commitments, including paying on time.		
R5	It feels like a real partnership, not just a transaction.		

Leader check	Statement (your leader answers)	Day 0	Day 90
L1	I hear about risks and problems early.		
L2	My time goes to what matters most.		
L3	Decisions get made, communicated, and stick.		

Average 4.2+ = strong · 3.5–4.1 = solid · below 3.5 = focus area. If your self-score is much higher than theirs, that's a blind spot, and the most useful thing you'll learn.

90-Day Scorecard

Three areas, ten measures · the spreadsheet fills in most of them

Measure	Day 0	Day 90	Change	Better is
Connection & trust				
People check average (9 questions, 1–5)				Higher
Relationships: % who agree (4–5) they have good relationships outside their team				Higher
Partner check average (1–5)				Higher
Connection map: % of key contacts reached in the last 30 days				Higher
Flow & handoffs				
Handoffs delivered on the agreed date (%)				Higher
Items blocked more than 7 days (count, right now)				Lower
Loops closed within 7 days (%)				Higher
Decision speed & alignment				
Average days from issue raised to decision				Lower
Decisions reopened after being made (count)				Lower
Leader check average (1–5)				Higher

Decisions reopened: a falling number means decisions are being made well and explained, not avoided. **Blocked items:** anything blocked more than 7 days right now; the goal is zero.

Open Loops

Close every one within 7 days, even if the answer is no

Date raised	Who raised it	What they raised	What happened (your answer)	Date closed

Great people. Connected teams. Extraordinary results.

REFERENCE

The Habit Library

Every habit in the playbook, by layer. Don't try to do it all. Pull from here when a check points to a gap, and add habits two at a time.

Layer 1 · Up: Leader ↔ You

7 habits

WHY IT MATTERS A connector is only as useful as their alignment with the leader they serve, and their honesty with them. Leaders who hear bad news early can still fix it.

- ☐ **Weekly** **Align with your leader every Monday.** Top 3 priorities, decisions needed, biggest risk, and what you're hearing that they may not be. (Core)
- ☐ **Before key meetings** **Send a one-page pre-read.** Purpose, decision needed, options, and your recommendation. Meetings become decisions, not updates.
- ☐ **Before big decisions** **Pre-wire the stakeholders.** Talk with each key person before the meeting so nobody is surprised in the room.
- ☐ **Always** **Be the honest broker.** "Here's what I'm hearing that you may not be." Bring the view from the floor, fairly and early.
- ☐ **Always** **Represent, don't impersonate.** When you speak for your leader, say so. Never invent a position they haven't taken.
- ☐ **Monthly** **Audit your leader's calendar.** Compare where their time went against the top 3 priorities. Cut or delegate one recurring meeting.
- ☐ **Quarterly** **Ask your leader: start, stop, keep.** How is our working relationship going? What should I start, stop, or keep doing?

Layer 2 · Across: You ↔ People

7 habits

WHY IT MATTERS People whose networks bridge separate groups come up with ideas that leaders rate as more valuable, and they get promoted more often. Relationships are a connector's real infrastructure.

- ☐ **Weekly** **Two conversations, one introduction.** Person first, work second. Then connect two people who should know each other. (Core)
- ☐ **Weekly** **Hold open office hours.** 30 minutes anyone can drop into with a blocker, an idea, or a worry.
- ☐ **Always** **Ask "Who else should I talk to?".** End every conversation with it. Your network grows one honest referral at a time.
- ☐ **Monthly** **Find the overloaded helpers.** Notice the few people everyone depends on. Protect their time and spread their knowledge.
- ☐ **Always** **Pass credit forward.** Tell people's managers about the good work you saw them do for other teams.
- ☐ **New joiners** **Introduce new people to the network.** Three introductions in their first two weeks: someone to learn from, someone to work with, someone to have lunch with.
- ☐ **Always** **Protect the people who escalate.** Thank whoever raised a cross-team issue, keep the source confidential, and act on it.

Layer 3 · Between: Team ↔ Team

8 habits

WHY IT MATTERS Most cross-functional teams miss on budget, schedule, specs, or goals, usually because ownership and decisions are unclear. A named decider and visible handoffs fix much of it.

- ☐ **Weekly** **Walk the handoffs.** What are you waiting on, from whom, by when? Log what's at risk. (Core)
- ☐ **Every decision** **Name the decider and log the decision.** One decider, a date, the why, and who needs to know. (Core)
- ☐ **Each key handoff** **Write an interface agreement.** Like an interface spec for people: what is handed over, in what form, by when, what "done" means, and an owner on each side.
- ☐ **Weekly** **Run a 15-minute cross-team risk review.** Top risks across teams, one owner each, next step and date. No status reading.
- ☐ **Always** **Use the 48-hour rule.** If something is blocked for 48 hours, escalate with the problem, two options, and a recommendation.
- ☐ **As needed** **Resolve conflict at the right level.** Bring the two leads together. Agree on the shared goal first, then the trade-off.
- ☐ **After milestones** **Run a cross-team retro.** What slowed our handoffs? What one change would help most next time?
- ☐ **Quarterly** **Kill duplicate meetings and reports.** Find two meetings or reports that cover the same ground. Merge or retire one.

Layer 4 · Outside: Company ↔ Partners

8 habits

WHY IT MATTERS In the auto industry's supplier surveys, suppliers feel like true partners about 12 times more often with the best-rated automakers, and those automakers get their best ideas and priority.

- ☐ **Weekly** **Walk one partner handoff.** Ask a key supplier, vendor, or customer: "What do you need from us that you're not getting?" (Core)
- ☐ **Always** **Acknowledge partners within 24 hours.** Even if the answer isn't ready, say when it will be.
- ☐ **Always** **Share the plan early.** Forecasts, changes, and risks. Partners can handle bad news; they can't handle surprises.
- ☐ **Per partner** **Name one owner and one backup.** Every key partner knows exactly who to call, and who to call when that person is out.
- ☐ **Quarterly** **Hold a joint relationship review.** Both sides score the relationship 1–5 and each commits to one improvement.
- ☐ **Always** **Unblock internal approvals.** Chase the purchase orders, payments, and decisions that hold partners up. Paying late is a relationship decision.
- ☐ **Always** **Fix the system before blaming the supplier.** Find the root cause together. Often the problem started on your side of the handoff.
- ☐ **Always** **Recognize partner people too.** Tell a supplier's management when their person went above and beyond.

Layer 5 · Through: People ↔ Purpose

8 habits

WHY IT MATTERS Organizations that act on what their people tell them are far more likely to keep their people and hit their financial goals. Closing the loop is how people know they were heard.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Weekly | Send a 5-line Friday wrap. Wins, risks, decisions, next week, one named thank-you. (Core) |
| ☐ Weekly | Close every loop within a week. Tell people what happened to their input, even if it's no. (Core) |
| ☐ Within 48 hours | Cascade decisions across teams. Tell every affected team what was decided, why, what it means for them, and what we don't know yet. |
| ☐ For every change | Use the 5-part change message. What's changing · why · what it means for you · what we don't know yet · when you'll hear next. |
| ☐ Monthly | Share one impact story. Show how cross-team work helped a real customer or user. Name the teams involved. |
| ☐ Always | Celebrate cross-team wins. Name both teams, and every partner who helped, in public. |
| ☐ Quarterly | Run the question pipeline. Collect anonymous questions before all-hands. Make sure every one gets answered. |
| ☐ As it happens | Welcome and farewell well. Introduce new joiners across teams. Thank people who leave, by name, for what they built. |

Moments That Matter

Within 24–48 hours

WHY IT MATTERS People judge a connector by how they show up when things go sideways.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ A new leader arrives or a reorg hits | Map who now decides what. Meet every affected team lead within a week. Send a change message, and update your connection map. |
| ☐ Two teams are in conflict | Meet each lead separately, then together. Start from the shared goal. Agree on the decider and the date, then log it. |
| ☐ A program is slipping | Find the real blocker, not the reported one. Escalate within 48 hours with options. Tell partners early. |
| ☐ A key partner relationship sours | Call, don't email. Listen first. Find your side of the problem. Agree on one fix and a date to check it. |
| ☐ Bad news needs to travel up | Bring it the same day with facts, impact, options, and a recommendation. Protect whoever raised it. |
| ☐ Your leader makes an unpopular call | Make sure the why is explained. Hear people out. Carry the strongest concerns back up honestly. |
| ☐ Someone tells you something in confidence | Protect them. If it affects others, share the theme without the source, or ask their permission first. |

Warning signs to watch for

- "I found out in the meeting"
- Every question routes through you
- Status is green until it's suddenly red
- Decisions get reopened after the meeting
- The same debate happens twice
- Partners chase you for answers
- Teams blame each other in meetings
- The same few helpers are always exhausted