PRAISE FOR GET BIG THINGS DONE

“The opportunity is even bigger than you imagined it. Don’t look away, don’t blink, this book and this moment are your chance to matter.”

—Seth Godin, author, What to Do When It’s Your Turn

“Good leaders increasingly need to nurture new sources of expertise and ideas beyond what they know . . . to succeed and to be inspired. Get Big Things Done is just the guidebook for making the most use of your networks to spark change and meaning.”

—Beth Comstock, Chief Marketing Officer, GE

“Get Big Things Done is a passionate look at a new wave of leaders. It’s full of inspiring stories about imaginative ways to forge meaningful connections and achieve audacious goals.”

—Adam Grant, Wharton professor and New York Times bestselling author of Give and Take

“As our interconnectedness grows, so does our collective responsibility to ask the hard questions. Get Big Things Done reminds us not only that our action and inaction can have enormous consequences, but that we have the tools we need to tackle the world’s biggest problems. It is both an inspiration and provocation to create the world of which we dream. Buy this book for yourself and share with others who want to act now.”

—Jacqueline Novogratz, CEO, Acumen and author of The Blue Sweater

“Innovation in the Social Era happens when we connect people, ideas and things. Get Big Things Done spotlights the power each of us has to generate big value.”

—Nilofer Merchant, author of 11 Rules for Creating Value in the Social Era

“The essence of creative inspiration is seeing something in a new way. This inspiring book shows us the incredible creative power we have when we connect outside ourselves in meaningful ways. What the authors call Connectional Intelligence will be at the heart of how we as individuals, teams, and companies create—solutions, value, trust, and loyalty—in the twenty-first century.”

—John Seifert, Chairman/CEO, Ogilvy & Mather North America

“Erica and Saj-nicole get it. We have to connect to create—and the way we connect creates who we are and what we do. With sage observations, keen advice, and great stories, this book gets to the heart of what the authors aptly call ‘the power of us.’”

—Joshua Wolf Shenk, author of Powers of Two

“We have big things to do in this world and making them happen requires ambition, courage, and above all, each other. Get Big Things Done shows the power that is unleashed when we as human beings connect with others. It is an inspirational read that makes you not only want to tackle your biggest, wildest, most ambitious dreams, but shows you how.”

—Maria Eitel, Founding President and CEO, NIKE Foundation
“Get Big Things Done is the rare book that shows us how to understand and harness the tremendous value of today’s connected world and how leaders must put this to work in both strategy and execution. It’s part map and part inspiration for unlocking the extraordinary potential of our ecosystems and succeeding in our most important endeavors.”
—Johan Aurik, Managing Partner and Chairman, A.T. Kearney

“Erica and Saj-nicole have created an important resource for anyone trying to leverage the value of our world’s interconnectedness for tangible impact. I am particularly proud that as one of our Global Shapers, Erica is enlisting readers into communities of interests, purpose and finally impact. These are the most core principles of the World Economic Forum.”
—Professor Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman, World Economic Forum

“Understanding the power that comes through connecting and combining each of our talents and gifts with others in this world will be one of our most powerful assets in making the world a better place. Get Big Things Done shows us not just the why but the how.”
—Helene Gayle, M.D., M.P.H., President and CEO, CARE

“The future success of business requires recognizing the changing work landscape. While talent models have evolved over time, approaches that resonate with one segment of the employee population may fall flat with others. Get Big Things Done teaches us all how to connect across generations to achieve breakthrough results and grow into the future. Anyone in a leadership position today, or who aspires to be in one in the future, should read this book.”
—Jim Moffatt, Chairman and CEO, Deloitte Consulting LLP

“Connected-ness is the way forward for women and men that want break-through results. Connectional Intelligence is the how. A must read for anyone with big goals in mind.”
—Sallie Krawcheck, Chairman, Ellevate

“Not only is Get Big Things Done rich in stories and brimming with motivation, it gives a practical framework to help business leaders and entrepreneurs leverage Connectional Intelligence to radically transform their organizations. I’ll be referencing this book for a long time.”
—Scott Gerber, CEO, Young Entrepreneur Council

“Connectional Intelligence is a timely and important concept to understand. In an ever-increasingly interconnected world, the opportunity to integrate knowledge to create innovative solutions has never been greater.”
—Jeff Rosenthal, Co-founder, Summit
GET
BIG
THINGS DONE

THE POWER OF
CONNECTIONAL
INTELLIGENCE

ERICA DHAWAN AND SAJ-NICOLE JONI

palgrave
macmillan
THE BIG WAVE

THEY CALL THEM SIMPLY “BIG WAVES.” BUT THE PHRASE seems hardly adequate to describe the towering avalanches of water that can rise between sixty and one hundred feet above sea level. If you’ve never seen such a wave, it can be hard to comprehend just how big it is. Imagine six cars piled bumper to bumper, vertically, into the sky. A wave as tall as a small office building, as long as the distance between first base and third base on a baseball diamond. These monster waves don’t look like normal waves, and they don’t behave like them either. They reach their incredible size by gathering strength from neighboring waves, absorbing three or four into one massive swell. Their energy is almost kinetic; their movements are impossible to predict.

We believe that connectional intelligence is, metaphorically speaking, the monster wave of our time. Since the turn of the twentieth century, people have dreamt of a world in which technology will enable men and women to create things with their minds, just as machines transformed the means of production in the Industrial Age.

In 1945, Dr. Vannevar Bush published his groundbreaking essay “As We May Think” in *The Atlantic Monthly*. The editors of the magazine
marveled at Bush’s premise, which might well be called a manifesto for connectional intelligence. They wrote that, after the weapons of war have been put down,

. . . men [and women] of science should then turn to the massive task of making more accessible our bewildering store of knowledge. For years inventions have extended man’s physical powers rather than the powers of his mind. Trip hammers that multiply the fists, microscopes that sharpen the eye, and engines of destruction and detection are new results, but not the end results, of modern science. Now, says Dr. Bush, instruments are at hand which, if properly developed, will give man access to and command over the inherited knowledge of the ages.1

We believe that we are now unlocking what those editors called, nearly seventy years ago, “our bewildering store of knowledge,” because today, for the first time in history, billions of people from all walks of life, races, countries and social economic status are inclusively connected. Previously, new forms of connection and communications were primarily reserved for and used by the elite. Never before have so many people had access, through mobile, social and digital technology, to so much data, knowledge and collective brainpower. We believe that this connectedness gives us power to solve big problems, turn dreams into realities, create amazing products, upgrade survival to prosperity, change social policy, discover life-saving medical cures and much, much more. When we combine this with the inclusive imagination and insight of billions of people—all connected—we begin to comprehend the monster wave of connectional intelligence that is transforming our lives.

Here’s what we think is happening. We all know about the value of having high IQ, but historically, the importance of high intelligence rose after the advent of the printing press, when people could share ideas in the form of reading and books. This led to rapid advances in science,
Never before have so many people had access, through mobile, social and digital technology, to so much collective brain power.

widespread literacy, new forms of governance and the many inventions that brought us to the modern world.

Similarly, the importance of EQ (emotional intelligence) rose dramatically with the rise of large, densely populated cities and as organizations with thousands of people spread across the globe. Having high EQ is always valuable to leaders, but when leading large groups, it becomes a critical capability. Indeed, today, in both the private and nonprofit sectors, high EQ is recognized as a must-have ability for anyone seeking to lead a large, diverse and geographically dispersed organization.

And now, we are seeing the rise of something we call connectional intelligence (CxQ). Our definition: Connectional Intelligence is the ability to combine the world’s diversity of people, networks, disciplines and resources, forging connections that create value, meaning and breakthrough results.

For us, the promise of connectional intelligence couldn’t be simpler, more powerful or more inspiring:

Take a Dream.
Add Connection.
Dream Bigger.
Get Big Things Done.

The word connection gets thrown around a lot today. Faced with an abundance of tools for connecting, we are often left overwhelmed,
without a clear sense of how to use the myriad forms of connection in the service of human potential. To some people, “connection” simply means being constantly online: social media, technology, apps, entertainment, digital sharing and all the forms of instant communication that are becoming a pervasive part of the fabric of how we live.

Connectional intelligence is the ability to combine the world’s diversity of people, networks, disciplines and resources, forging connections that create value, meaning and breakthrough results.

For those of you who think connectional intelligence sounds good, but feel that you don’t need to be more connected than you already are, know that we’re talking about something much broader and more profound than a new-and-cool set of digital tools. And for those of you who think that hyper-connectivity is just about teenagers on Twitter and twenty-somethings on Instagram, know that inclusive connection is the foundation on which the next wave of human potential will rise.

Humans have always been connectional. We’ve always been curious. We’ve always combined things. We’ve always been travelers. We’ve always been conversationalists. We are living in a new era in which the traditional routes to power—the schools you go to, the contacts in your address book, the families you are born to—are no longer the only ways to get ahead. Never before have so many people, of so many different backgrounds, been able to connect with such a vast network of ideas, information and resources. One of the key things to understand is that connectional intelligence combined with inclusive connection is inherently democratic.

One of the questions that we seek to address in this book is how do you cut through the noise of e-mail and social media to connect
How do we marshal what we know that much more quickly? How do we find and keep supporters? How do we influence the greatest number of people? How do we propel connectional intelligence beyond traditional networking and the massive entertainment element of our digital lives toward a loftier purpose? In short, how do we get behind this newfound connectivity and use it to get to the places where we want to go?

Two decades after the Internet blasted into our collective lives, it’s time for a guidebook that shows us all how to access and launch this innate human capability to make connections. The big news, especially for anyone who’s experienced digital overload or fatigue, is that there are many real-life applications for all of your connectedness that are bigger and more powerful than how many followers you have on Twitter or how many likes your post gets on Facebook. Connectional intelligence propels us all beyond networking and entertainment toward a loftier purpose—improving people’s lives, building sustainable societies and creating the futures we want. Soon it will also be a required skill: today’s and tomorrow’s generations will know no world without smart connection, and we can’t ask them to park or squander what they do best.

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*Connectional intelligence is bigger and more powerful than how many followers you have on Twitter or how many likes your post gets on Facebook.*

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So what does this look like in our modern world? A few examples of connectional intelligence at work (and at play) are discussed below.

It’s used by Ben Kaufman, CEO and founder of the company Quirky, to help average, everyday people bring their inventions to life. In just a few short years, Ben has shepherded hundreds of inventors through the process of developing, manufacturing and distributing
hundreds of products into major retail outlets such as Best Buy, Home Depot and Williams-Sonoma. Quirky’s recent ad campaign shows how it upends traditional corporate structures and attitudes. In a series of ads called, “The World’s Least Important CEO,” Ben underscores that it’s the team, not the boss, that matters. In one of the ads, he posts his phone number and promises that “The World’s Least Important CEO Is Not Too Busy to Take Your Call.” When one media reporter called and got Ben himself, she was so stunned that she hung up. When the reporter’s friend called to pitch an idea, Ben gave the budding inventor two minutes of his time, offering advice about how to get a product into Home Depot. For a CEO of even a small company to post his phone number, share his personal e-mail (Ben does that too), and still manage to get big things done rewrites (or at least revises) the rules of leadership in a significant way. We’ll be talking more about Quirky later in this book.

Nike believes that the best way to stimulate environmentally sustainable innovation is through connectional intelligence. This is evident in Nike’s GreenXchange (GX), a web-based marketplace where companies can collaborate and share intellectual property to foster new environmentally sustainable business models and innovation. Nike took the substantial risk of making available on GX more than four hundred of its own patents for public research. The risk paid off. Soon enough, a mountain-biking company used a rubber patent to innovate their tire inner tubes, thus bringing a greener product to market more quickly and cheaply than the manufacturer could on its own.

Using its MyStarbucks platform, Starbucks tasked its loyal fans to come up with new product and service innovations. Within five years customers presented 150,000 new ideas. One of the first of these consumer-centric designs that Starbucks rolled out was a little green combination swizzle stick/stopper that keeps hot coffee from burning your fingers and does away with the need for flat lids with holes in them.
That's connectional intelligence at work: elegant solutions, created by the
kind of broad-based outreach that could only be possible in our age of
inclusive connection, brought to market quickly and decisively by a di-
verse but unified group, working collaboratively toward a common goal.

Just a few years ago, there had never been a nationally ranked pro
surfer from Maui—in surfing circles, Hawaii’s second-largest island was
considered something of a joke—but Dusty Payne, a young surfing fa-
natic, wanted to change all that. Rounding up four local surfing bud-
dies who believed that, as a group, they could help each other become
great, the five boys vowed to learn as much as they could by competing
against and critiquing one another.5

They carried out frame-by-frame analyses of DVD and YouTube
videos of the top surfers, skateboarders, windsurfers, mountain bikers
and motor-cross champions on the planet, and spent hours comparing
their own filmed techniques against them. Combining ideas that came
from connections to adjacent sports and competitors, Dusty came up
with his own signature “Superman” move, a key factor in helping him
win a world junior surfing championship. Today Dusty and his pals are
all nationally ranked pros—and Maui is finally on the map as a surfing
incubator.

Most powerfully, connectional intelligence can, and does, save lives
and improve the quality of life for people who need it most. It was
by using the tools and tenets of connectional intelligence that a ragtag
group in Boston helped the United Nations, the Coast Guard and the
Marines rescue thousands of survivors of the 2010 Haitian earthquake.
It was connectional intelligence that inspired one woman to petition
Victoria’s Secret to begin manufacturing a “mastectomy bra,” hoping
to aid the thousands of women like her mother, a breast cancer survi-
vor. And it’s connectional intelligence that’s helping Harvard Medical
School researchers come up with solutions that are raising the bar on
care and treatment of people living with Type 1 diabetes.
As co-authors, we’ve now spent the last few years riding the wave of connectional intelligence together. The exciting news is that we found it everywhere we looked: in corporations and in public schools, in agriculture and sports, in the United States and around the world. We didn’t invent it, and we’re not trying to can it. It’s as old as tribal wisdom and as ever-changing as the models of your favorite handheld device. This book isn’t about the “25 Most Connectionally Intelligent People” in the world. It’s not a who’s who or a greatest hits list. It’s a guidebook for people from all walks of life who want to get big things done.

The stories we present ask and answer the question: What can anyone and everyone accomplish when they connect intelligently? At the core of our work is the knowledge that these stories of how men and women (and sometimes kids) are making these huge intellectual and creative leaps aren’t just one-offs. Connectional intelligence is more than the cool YouTube video of someone doing something amazing; it’s more than viral, crowd-sourced campaigns, or one out-the-box company that created something brand new. The very way we do business is changing. The way we’re learning is changing. We cannot get where we want to go, as creative individuals and as innovative companies, if we view these “oh wow” stories in isolation. They need to be understood as a very exciting, very powerful, new whole.

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This book isn’t about the “25 Most Connectionally Intelligent People” in the world. It’s not a who’s who or a greatest hits list. It’s about what anyone and everyone can accomplish when they connect intelligently.

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So how did this book get started?

Perhaps in today’s world of hyper-connectivity, it was almost inevitable that we would connect. When we first met, what jumped out at us
right away was that despite our generational differences, we had a lot to talk about: Saj-nicole was in the midst of doing work she loves. As CEO of Cambridge International Group, she serves as a confidential advisor and thinking partner to CEOs around the world, helping them work through their most difficult challenges; Erica was a fellow at Harvard’s Center for Public Leadership. Today, as CEO of Cotential, she works with organizations to drive innovation across cultures and generations to prepare the global workforce for the future. The generational differences were real: One of us got her start as the first woman to join the faculty of MIT’s applied mathematics department. (How long ago was that? Back then, there were no women’s bathrooms in MIT’s entire mathematics building.) The other started off as a young social change leader when she was named to Teen People magazine’s “20 Teens Who Will Change the World.” (By then, bathrooms in many colleges were co-ed.) Our generational differences were real but so was a common strand that we recognized in each other’s work. We were both committed to the ideal of helping people get big things done and felt that our moment in history offered more opportunity for more types of people than ever before. The question became: How can we inspire and teach people everywhere to harness connectional intelligence in order to live and work that much better?

One of the discoveries that surprised us is that connectional intelligence works across all personality types. You might think, at first, that it requires an outgoing personality—someone who loves networking, real-life socializing and being known, and who values a stage and media presence. But we’ve seen that this is not the only type of person who accesses profound connectional intelligence to get big things done. The self-described introvert who finds it difficult to introduce himself to strangers at a networking conference might establish a blog presence online and then extend these online relationships into the real world.
Today, you can source energy and capacity from different forms of connection—like extroverts, you can start from networks of people to spark ideas that then mobilize more people. But also, like introverts, you can draw from different sources like books, nature and music that then form the basis of relationships that generate more ideas and possibilities. If connectional intelligence was merely about traditional networking, only extroverts would excel at it. But connectional intelligence is built on a use of technology and traditional forms of information, as well as an emotional intelligence, which makes it a resource that introverts can tap into as well. In connectional intelligence, the big picture and big ideas matter as much as how well you sell yourself in a meeting or in a professional setting.

We’ve seen this in our own work and life. Saj-nicole is the classic “Renaissance” thinker when it comes to connectional intelligence. She starts by learning from every field, and it is the pull of ideas that prompts her to meet people. As an integrative thinker, it has often been her connected thinking, sourced from the arts, humanities, sports and science, that fuels her biggest business ideas and leads her to connections with people to get big things done. Erica started more as an outside-in thinker: her initial connection to people sparks her curiosity, creating new ideas, which in turn mobilize more people to get big things done. This kind of thinking was shown when Erica co-hosted gatherings with hundreds of young professionals in New York on social entrepreneurship. The events led to a broader team of young professionals who took the next step in co-creating NY+acumen, a local community of social change leaders in New York in partnership with Acumen, a nonprofit that raises charitable donations to invest in companies, leaders and ideas that are changing the way the world tackles poverty. The initial pilot was a success and the +Acumen network, led by Acumen’s Jo-Ann Tan, is now a global community of social change leaders in over 26 cities.
When it comes to getting big things done in organizations, we urge managers and senior leaders to fully encourage the connectional intelligence of introverts and remember to avoid situations in which overcollaboration and over-connection kill creativity and allow groupthink to take over. Being connectionally intelligent is just as much about understanding when and how to work alone as it is about knowing how to collaborate.

This book is divided into three parts. Part One introduces our story and the concept of connectional intelligence. Part Two is a collection of stories that exhibits the breadth and potential of connectional intelligence. Taken together, these stories give you a panoramic view of how connectional intelligence adds possibility to all aspects of our lives, work and society. These are stories about real people who have accomplished things that would not have been imaginable a generation ago, or even—in some cases—five years ago. We think you’ll see yourself in at least a few of these stories and, possibly, in many. As we’ve shared these stories in our work, consulting with CEOs, executives, boards and organizations, we’ve seen again and again how the stories aren’t merely inspiring; they’re practical and applicable. The spark they create is both immediate and useful. Part Three is all about you, the reader. It’s a handbook to guide you in using connectional intelligence to power your dreams, in your work and in your life.

One of the core elements of connectional intelligence is a fundamentally cross-generational, know-the-rules-and-then-break-them ethos. The new tech-savvy generation is unleashing its connectional intelligence and is not willing to wait until the older generations leave power. But they also cannot fix things alone; they need the knowledge, experience and wisdom of the older generation. If we want to go fast to solve our most pressing challenges, we all have to come together in connectionally intelligent ways to use everything we have.
If you remember nothing else from this book, remember this: connectional intelligence is the best, most efficient, most powerful way to supersize any dream.

In the journey that resulted in this book, we’ve lived this. It hasn’t always been easy. But we have emerged as a cross-generational team in which both of us have been transformed, able to do so much more together than if we had stayed in our respective generational spheres. We meet at the intersection of our generations and our perspectives; we embody connectional intelligence in almost everything we do. We both believe that if more people and organizations harnessed the force of connectional intelligence, they’d radically transform how they live and work now and in the future.

What we know, for sure, is that connectional intelligence is an unstoppable force available to all of us. We hope you’ll find this book an inspiring, engaging read—and an opportunity to connect the dots between groups and individuals who are getting big things done using the same social media tools and technology we all use every day.

But the real power of this book, we believe, will come later. After you’ve read the last chapter, when you’re at home or at work, in your car or on vacation, and something sparks. Maybe there’s something you want to create. Or maybe something unthinkable is happening and you want to help or inspire others to join with you to make a change. Maybe you have a business problem and you know that you need more brains at the metaphorical boardroom table and you remember a connectional intelligence story that helps you figure out how to get big things done. If you remember nothing else from this book, remember this: connectional intelligence is the best, most efficient, most powerful way to supersize any dream.
We believe that harnessing connectional intelligence calls on us, individually and collectively, to go on what writer and mythologist Joseph Campbell named the “hero’s journey.”

As Campbell and others defined it, a hero’s journey typically begins with a need or inspiration, followed by a call to adventure, the crossing of a threshold, a joining-in of accomplices, a road of trials, a confrontation, an apotheosis and a return threshold, until at last the hero, or heroine, becomes “the master of two worlds.”

Whether you’re an individual or part of a team, like the hero’s journey, your road toward connectional intelligence will also begin with passion, and then you will make a decision, assemble accomplices, face down barriers and boundaries until you finally accomplish your goal.

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*If you could multiply what you know in your head and your heart by the power of everyone you could contact, what would you do?*

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Understanding connectional intelligence is only the first step of your hero’s journey. To accomplish what the men and women in this book have done takes dedication, courage, perseverance and, sometimes, luck.

We want to ask you a question now that we’ll return to at the end of the book: If you could multiply what you know in your head and your heart, your IQ and EQ, by the power of everyone you’ve ever e-mailed or could contact by social media and other technology, what would you do? Which is, of course, to say, if you could do anything, what would you do?
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