

The Law of the Few

CONNECTORS, MAVENS,
AND SALESMEN

On the afternoon of April 18, 1775, a young boy who worked at a livery stable in Boston overheard one British army officer say to another something about “hell to pay tomorrow.” The stable boy ran with the news to Boston’s North End, to the home of a silversmith named Paul Revere. Revere listened gravely; this was not the first rumor to come his way that day. Earlier, he had been told of an unusual number of British officers gathered on Boston’s Long Wharf, talking in low tones. British crewmen had been spotted scurrying about in the boats tethered beneath the HMS *Somerset* and the HMS *Boyne* in Boston Harbor. Several other sailors were seen on shore that morning, running what appeared to be last-minute errands. As the afternoon wore on, Revere and his close friend Joseph Warren became more and more convinced that the British were about to make the major move that had long been rumored — to march to the town of Lexington, northwest

of Boston, to arrest the colonial leaders John Hancock and Samuel Adams, and then on to the town of Concord to seize the stores of guns and ammunition that some of the local colonial militia had stored there.

What happened next has become part of historical legend, a tale told to every American schoolchild. At ten o’clock that night, Warren and Revere met. They decided they had to warn the communities surrounding Boston that the British were on their way, so that local militia could be roused to meet them. Revere was spirited across Boston Harbor to the ferry landing at Charlestown. He jumped on a horse and began his “midnight ride” to Lexington. In two hours, he covered thirteen miles. In every town he passed through along the way — Charlestown, Medford, North Cambridge, Menotomy — he knocked on doors and spread the word, telling local colonial leaders of the oncoming British, and telling them to spread the word to others. Church bells started ringing. Drums started beating. The news spread like a virus as those informed by Paul Revere sent out riders of their own, until alarms were going off throughout the entire region. The word was in Lincoln, Massachusetts, by one A.M., in Sudbury by three, in Andover, forty miles northwest of Boston, by five A.M., and by nine in the morning had reached as far west as Ashby, near Worcester. When the British finally began their march toward Lexington on the morning of the nineteenth, their foray into the countryside was met — to their utter astonishment — with organized and fierce resistance. In Concord that day, the British were confronted and soundly beaten by the colonial militia, and from that exchange came the war known as the American Revolution.

Paul Revere's ride is perhaps the most famous historical example of a word-of-mouth epidemic. A piece of extraordinary news traveled a long distance in a very short time, mobilizing an entire region to arms. Not all word-of-mouth epidemics are this sensational, of course. But it is safe to say that word of mouth is — even in this age of mass communications and multimillion-dollar advertising campaigns — still the most important form of human communication. Think, for a moment, about the last expensive restaurant you went to, the last expensive piece of clothing you bought, and the last movie you saw. In how many of those cases was your decision about where to spend your money heavily influenced by the recommendation of a friend? There are plenty of advertising executives who think that precisely because of the sheer ubiquity of marketing efforts these days, word-of-mouth appeals have become the only kind of persuasion that most of us respond to anymore.

But for all that, word of mouth remains very mysterious. People pass on all kinds of information to each other all the time. But it's only in the rare instance that such an exchange ignites a word-of-mouth epidemic. There is a small restaurant in my neighborhood that I love and that I've been telling my friends about for six months. But it's still half empty. My endorsement clearly isn't enough to start a word-of-mouth epidemic, yet there are restaurants that to my mind aren't any better than the one in my neighborhood that open and within a matter of weeks are turning customers away. Why is it that some ideas and trends and messages "tip" and others don't?

In the case of Paul Revere's ride, the answer to this seems easy. Revere was carrying a sensational piece of news: the British were coming. But if you look closely at the events of that evening, that explanation doesn't solve the riddle either. At the same time that Revere began his ride north and west of Boston, a fellow revolutionary — a tanner by the name of William Dawes — set out on the same urgent errand, working his way to Lexington via the towns west of Boston. He was carrying the identical message, through just as many towns over just as many miles as Paul Revere. But Dawes's ride didn't set the countryside afire. The local militia leaders weren't alerted. In fact, so few men from one of the main towns he rode through — Waltham — fought the following day that some subsequent historians concluded that it must have been a strongly pro-British community. It wasn't. The people of Waltham just didn't find out the British were coming until it was too late. If it were only the news itself that mattered in a word-of-mouth epidemic, Dawes would now be as famous as Paul Revere. He isn't. So why did Revere succeed where Dawes failed?

The answer is that the success of any kind of social epidemic is heavily dependent on the involvement of people with a particular and rare set of social gifts. Revere's news tipped and Dawes's didn't because of the differences between the two men. This is the Law of the Few, which I briefly outlined in the previous chapter. But there I only gave examples of the kinds of people — highly promiscuous, sexually predatory — who are critical to epidemics of sexually transmitted disease. This chapter is about the

people critical to social epidemics and what makes someone like Paul Revere different from someone like William Dawes. These kinds of people are all around us. Yet we often fail to give them proper credit for the role they play in our lives. I call them Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen.

1.

In the late 1960s, the psychologist Stanley Milgram conducted an experiment to find an answer to what is known as the small-world problem. The problem is this: how are human beings connected? Do we all belong to separate worlds, operating simultaneously but autonomously, so that the links between any two people, anywhere in the world, are few and distant? Or are we all bound up together in a grand, interlocking web? In a way, Milgram was asking the very same kind of question that began this chapter, namely, how does an idea or a trend or a piece of news — the British are coming! — travel through a population?

Milgram's idea was to test this question with a chain letter. He got the names of 160 people who lived in Omaha, Nebraska, and mailed each of them a packet. In the packet was the name and address of a stockbroker who worked in Boston and lived in Sharon, Massachusetts. Each person was instructed to write his or her name on the packet and send it on to a friend or acquaintance who he or she thought would get the packet closer to the stockbroker. If you lived in Omaha and had a cousin outside of Boston, for example, you might send it to him, on the grounds that — even if your cousin did not himself know

the stockbroker — he would be a lot more likely to be able to get to the stockbroker in two or three or four steps. The idea was that when the packet finally arrived at the stockbroker's house, Milgram could look at the list of all those whose hands it went through to get there and establish how closely connected someone chosen at random from one part of the country was to another person in another part of the country. Milgram found that most of the letters reached the stockbroker in five or six steps. This experiment is where we get the concept of six degrees of separation.

That phrase is now so familiar that it is easy to lose sight of how surprising Milgram's findings were. Most of us don't have particularly broad and diverse groups of friends. In one well-known study, a group of psychologists asked people living in the Dyckman public housing project in northern Manhattan to name their closest friend in the project; 88 percent of the friends lived in the same building, and half lived on the same floor. In general, people chose friends of similar age and race. But if the friend lived down the hall, then age and race became a lot less important. Proximity overpowered similarity. Another study, done on students at the University of Utah, found that if you ask someone why he is friendly with someone else, he'll say it is because he and his friend share similar attitudes. But if you actually quiz the two of them on their attitudes, you'll find out that what they actually share is similar activities. We're friends with the people we do things with, as much as we are with the people we resemble. We don't seek out friends, in other words. We associate with the people who occupy the same small, physical

spaces that we do. People in Omaha are not, as a rule, friends with people who live halfway across the country in Sharon, Massachusetts. "When I asked an intelligent friend of mine how many steps he thought it would take, he estimated that it would require 100 intermediate persons or more to move from Nebraska to Sharon," Milgram wrote, at the time. "Many people make somewhat similar estimates, and are surprised to learn that only five intermediaries will — on average — suffice. Somehow it does not accord with intuition." How did the packet get to Sharon in just five steps?

The answer is that in the six degrees of separation, not all degrees are equal. When Milgram analyzed his experiment, for example, he found that many of the chains from Omaha to Sharon followed the same asymmetrical pattern. Twenty-four letters reached the stockbroker at his home in Sharon, and of those, sixteen were given to him by the same person, a clothing merchant Milgram calls Mr. Jacobs. The balance of letters came to the stockbroker at his office, and of those the majority came through two other men, whom Milgram calls Mr. Brown and Mr. Jones. In all, half of the responses that came back to the stockbroker were delivered to him by these same three people. Think of it. Dozens of people, chosen at random from a large Midwestern city, send out letters independently. Some go through college acquaintances. Some send their letters to relatives. Some send them to old workmates. Everyone has a different strategy. Yet in the end, when all of those separate and idiosyncratic chains were completed, half of those letters ended up in the hands of Jacobs, Jones, and Brown. Six degrees of separation doesn't mean that

everyone is linked to everyone else in just six steps. It means that a very small number of people are linked to everyone else in a few steps, and the rest of us are linked to the world through those special few.

There is an easy way to explore this idea. Suppose that you made a list of the forty people whom you would call your circle of friends (not including family and co-workers) and in each case worked backward until you could identify the person who is ultimately responsible for setting in motion the series of connections that led to that friendship. My oldest friend, Bruce, for example, I met in first grade, so I'm the responsible party. That's easy. I met my friend Nigel because he lived down the hall in college from my friend Tom, whom I met because in freshman year he invited me to play touch football. Tom is responsible for Nigel. Once you've made all of the connections, the strange thing is that you will find the same names coming up again and again. I have a friend named Amy, whom I met when her friend Katie brought her to a restaurant where I was having dinner one night. I know Katie because she is the best friend of my friend Larissa, whom I know because I was told to look her up by a mutual friend of both of ours — Mike A. — whom I know because he went to school with another friend of mine — Mike H. — who used to work at a political weekly with my friend Jacob. No Jacob, no Amy. Similarly, I met my friend Sarah S. at my birthday party a year ago, because she was there with a writer named David who was there at the invitation of his agent, Tina, whom I met through my friend Leslie, whom I know because her sister, Nina, is a friend of my friend Ann's, whom I met

through my old roommate Maura, who was my roommate because she worked with a writer named Sarah L., who was a college friend of my friend Jacob's. No Jacob, no Sarah S. In fact, when I go down my list of forty friends, thirty of them, in one way or another, lead back to Jacob. My social circle is, in reality, not a circle. It is a pyramid. And at the top of the pyramid is a single person — Jacob — who is responsible for an overwhelming majority of the relationships that constitute my life. Not only is my social circle not a circle, but it's not "mine" either. It belongs to Jacob. It's more like a club that he invited me to join. These people who link us up with the world, who bridge Omaha and Sharon, who introduce us to our social circles — these people on whom we rely more heavily than we realize — are Connectors, people with a special gift for bringing the world together.

2.

What makes someone a Connector? The first — and most obvious — criterion is that Connectors know lots of people. They are the kinds of people who know everyone. All of us know someone like this. But I don't think that we spend a lot of time thinking about the importance of these kinds of people. I'm not even sure that most of us really believe that the kind of person who knows everyone really knows everyone. But they do. There is a simple way to show this. In the paragraph below is a list of around 250 surnames, all taken at random from the Manhattan phone book. Go down the list and give yourself a point every time you see a surname that is shared by someone you

know. (The definition of "know" here is very broad. For example, if you sat down next to that person on a train, you would know their name if they introduced themselves to you and they would know your name.) Multiple names count. If the name is Johnson, in other words, and you know three Johnsons, you get three points. The idea is that your score on this test should roughly represent how social you are. It's a simple way of estimating how many friends and acquaintances you have.

Algazi, Alvarez, Alpern, Ametrano, Andrews, Aran, Arnstein, Ashford, Bailey, Ballout, Bamberger, Baptista, Barr, Barrows, Baskerville, Bassiri, Bell, Bokgese, Brando, Bravo, Brooke, Brightman, Billy, Blau, Bohen, Bohn, Borsuk, Brendle, Butler, Calle, Cantwell, Carrell, Chinlund, Cirker, Cohen, Collas, Couch, Callegher, Calcaterra, Cook, Carey, Cassell, Chen, Chung, Clarke, Cohn, Carton, Crowley, Curbelo, Dellamanna, Diaz, Dirar, Duncan, Dagostino, Delakas, Dillon, Donaghey, Daly, Dawson, Edery, Ellis, Elliott, Eastman, Easton, Famous, Fermin, Fialco, Finklestein, Farber, Falkin, Feinman, Friedman, Gardner, Gelpi, Glascock, Grandfield, Greenbaum, Greenwood, Gruber, Garil, Goff, Gladwell, Greenup, Gannon, Ganshaw, Garcia, Gennis, Gerard, Gericke, Gilbert, Glassman, Glazer, Gomendio, Gonzalez, Greenstein, Guglielmo, Gurman, Haberkorn, Hoskins, Hussein, Hamm, Hardwick, Harrell, Hauptman, Hawkins, Henderson, Hayman, Hibara, Hehmann, Herbst, Hedges, Hogan, Hoffman, Horowitz, Hsu, Huber, Ikiz, Jaroschy, Johann, Jacobs, Jara, Johnson, Kassel, Keegan, Kuroda, Kavanau, Keller, Kevill, Kiew, Kimbrough, Kline, Kossoff, Kotzitzky, Kahn, Kiesler,

Kosser, Korte, Leibowitz, Lin, Liu, Lowrance, Lundh, Laux, Leifer, Leung, Levine, Leiw, Lockwood, Logrono, Lohnes, Lowet, Laber, Leonardi, Marten, McLean, Michaels, Miranda, Moy, Marin, Muir, Murphy, Marodon, Matos, Mendoza, Muraki, Neck, Needham, Noboa, Null, O'Flynn, O'Neill, Orłowski, Perkins, Pieper, Pierre, Pons, Pruska, Paulino, Popper, Potter, Purpura, Palma, Perez, Portocarrero, Punwasi, Rader, Rankin, Ray, Reyes, Richardson, Ritter, Roos, Rose, Rosenfeld, Roth, Rutherford, Rustin, Ramos, Regan, Reisman, Renkert, Roberts, Rowan, Rene, Rosario, Rothbart, Saperstein, Schoenbrod, Schwed, Sears, Statosky, Sutphen, Sheehy, Silverton, Silverman, Silverstein, Sklar, Slotkin, Speros, Stollman, Sadowski, Schles, Shapiro, Sigdel, Snow, Spencer, Steinkol, Stewart, Stires, Stopnik, Stonehill, Tayss, Tilney, Temple, Torfield, Townsend, Trimpin, Turchin, Villa, Vasillov, Voda, Waring, Weber, Weinstein, Wang, Wegimont, Weed, Weishaus.

I have given this test to at least a dozen groups of people. One was a freshman World Civilizations class at City College in Manhattan. The students were all in their late teens or early twenties, many of them recent immigrants to America, and of middle and lower income. The average score in that class was 20.96, meaning that the average person in the class knew 21 people with the same last names as the people on my list. I also gave the test to a group of health educators and academics at a conference in Princeton, New Jersey. This group were mostly in their forties and fifties, largely white, highly educated — many had Ph.D.'s — and wealthy. Their average score was 39.

Then I gave the test to a relatively random sample of my friends and acquaintances, mostly journalists and professionals in their late twenties and thirties. The average score was 41. These results shouldn't be all that surprising. College students don't have as wide a circle of acquaintances as people in their forties. It makes sense that between the ages of twenty and forty the number of people you know should roughly double, and that upper-income professionals should know more people than lower-income immigrants. In every group there was also quite a range between the highest and the lowest scorers. That makes sense too, I think. Real estate salesmen know more people than computer hackers. What was surprising, though, was how enormous that range was. In the college class, the low score was 2 and the high score was 95. In my random sample, the low score was 9 and the high score was 118. Even at the conference in Princeton, which was a highly homogenous group of people of similar age, education, and income — who were all, with a few exceptions, in the same profession — the range was enormous. The lowest score was 16. The highest score was 108. All told, I have given the test to about 400 people. Of those, there were two dozen or so scores under 20, eight over 90, and four more over 100. The other surprising thing is that I found high scorers in every social group I looked at. The scores of the students at City College were less, on average, than adult scores. But even in that group there are people whose social circle is four or five times the size of other people's. Sprinkled among every walk of life, in other words, are a handful of people with a truly extraordinary knack of making friends and acquaintances. They are Connectors.

One of the highest scorers on my acquaintance survey was a man named Roger Horchow, who is a successful businessman from Dallas. Horchow founded the Horchow Collection, a high-end mail order merchandise company. He has also enjoyed considerable success on Broadway, backing such hits as *Les Miserables* and *Phantom of the Opera* and producing the award-winning Gershwin musical *Crazy for You*. I was introduced to Horchow through his daughter, who is a friend of mine, and I went to see him in his Manhattan pied-à-terre, an elegant apartment high above Fifth Avenue. Horchow is slender and composed. He talks slowly, with a slight Texas drawl. He has a kind of wry, ironic charm that is utterly winning. If you sat next to Roger Horchow on a plane ride across the Atlantic, he would start talking as the plane taxied to the runway, you would be laughing by the time the seatbelt sign was turned off, and when you landed at the other end you'd wonder where the time went. When I gave Horchow the list of names from the Manhattan directory, he went through the list very quickly, muttering names under his breath as his pencil skimmed the page. He scored 98. I suspect that had I given him another 10 minutes to think, he would have scored even higher.

Why did Horchow do so well? When I met him, I became convinced that knowing lots of people was a kind of skill, something that someone might set out to do deliberately and that could be perfected, and that those techniques were central to the fact that he knew everyone. I kept asking Horchow how all of the connections in his life had helped him in the business world, because I thought

that the two things had to be linked, but the questions seemed to puzzle him. It wasn't that his connections hadn't helped him. It was that he didn't think of his people collection as a business strategy. He just thought of it as something he did. It was who he was. Horchow has an instinctive and natural gift for making social connections. He's not aggressive about it. He's not one of those overly social, back-slapping types for whom the process of acquiring acquaintances is obvious and self-serving. He's more an observer, with the dry, knowing manner of someone who likes to remain a little bit on the outside. He simply likes people, in a genuine and powerful way, and he finds the patterns of acquaintanceship and interaction in which people arrange themselves to be endlessly fascinating. When I met with Horchow, he explained to me how he won the rights to revive the Gershwin musical *Girl Crazy* as *Crazy for You*. The full story took twenty minutes. This is just a portion. If it seems at all calculating, it shouldn't. Horchow told this story with a gentle, self-mocking air. He was, I think, deliberately playing up the idiosyncrasies of his personality. But as a portrait of how his mind works — and of what makes someone a Connector — I think it's perfectly accurate:

I have a friend named Mickey Schaenen, who lives in New York. He said, I know you love Gershwin. I have met George Gershwin's old girlfriend. Her name is Emily Paley. She was also the sister of Ira Gershwin's wife, Lenore. She lives in the Village and she has invited us to dinner. So anyway, I met Emily Paley, and I saw a

picture Gershwin had painted of her. Her husband, Lou Paley, wrote with Ira Gershwin and George Gershwin early on, when Ira Gershwin still called himself Arthur Francis. That was one link. . . .

I had lunch with a fellow called Leopold Godowsky, who is the son of Frances Gershwin, George Gershwin's sister. She married a composer named Godowsky. Arthur Gershwin's son was also there. His name is Mark Gershwin. So they said — well, why should we let you have the rights to *Girl Crazy*? Who are you? You've never been in the theater. So then I started pulling out my coincidences. Your aunt, Emily Paley. I went to her house. The picture with her in the red shawl — you've seen that picture? I pulled out all the little links. Then we all went to Hollywood and we went over to Mrs. Gershwin's house and I said, I'm so happy to meet you. I knew your sister. I loved your husband's work. Oh, and then I pulled out my Los Angeles friend. When I was at Neiman Marcus, a lady wrote a cookbook. Her name was Mildred Knopf. Her husband was Edwin Knopf, the movie producer. He did Audrey Hepburn's stuff. His brother was the publisher. We introduced her cookbook in Dallas, and Mildred became a good friend. We just loved her, and when I was in L.A. I would call on her. I always keep up with people. Well, it turns out Edwin Knopf was George Gershwin's closest friend. They had Gershwin's pictures all over their house. He was with Gershwin when he wrote "Rhapsody in Blue" in Asheville, North Carolina. Mr. Knopf died. But Mildred's still living. She's ninety-eight now. So when I went to see Lee Gershwin, we mentioned that we had just been to see Mildred Knopf. She said — You know her? Oh, why haven't we met before? She gave us the rights immediately.

In the course of our conversation, Horchow did this over and again, delighting in tying together the loose ends of a lifetime. For his seventieth birthday, he attempted to track down a friend from elementary school named Bobby Hunsicker, whom he hadn't seen in sixty years. He sent letters to every Bobby Hunsicker he could find, asking them if they were the Hunsicker who lived at 4501 Perth Lane in Cincinnati.

This is not normal social behavior. It's a little unusual. Horchow collects people the same way others collect stamps. He remembers the boys he played with sixty years ago, the address of his best friend growing up, the name of the man his college girlfriend had a crush on when she spent her junior year overseas. These details are critical to Horchow. He keeps on his computer a roster of 1,600 names and addresses, and on each entry is a note describing the circumstances under which he met the person. When we were talking, he took out a little red pocket diary. "If I met you and like you and you happen to mention your birthday, I write it in and you'll get a birthday card from Roger Horchow. See here — Monday was Ginger Vroom's birthday, and the Whittenburgs' first anniversary. And Alan Schwartz's birthday is Friday and our yard man's is Saturday."

Most of us, I think, shy away from this kind of cultivation of acquaintances. We have our circle of friends, to whom we are devoted. Acquaintances we keep at arm's length. The reason we don't send birthday cards to people we don't really care a great deal about is that we don't want to feel obliged to have dinner with them or see a movie with them or visit them when they're sick. The

purpose of making an acquaintance, for most of us, is to evaluate whether we want to turn that person into a friend; we don't feel we have the time or the energy to maintain meaningful contact with everyone. Horchow is quite different. The people he puts in his diary or on his computer are acquaintances — people he might run into only once a year or once every few years — and he doesn't shy away from the obligation that that connection requires. He has mastered what sociologists call the "weak tie," a friendly yet casual social connection. More than that, he's happy with the weak tie. After I met Horchow, I felt slightly frustrated. I wanted to know him better, but I wondered whether I would ever have the chance. I don't think he shared the same frustration with me. I think he's someone who sees value and pleasure in a casual meeting.

Why is Horchow so different from the rest of us? He doesn't know. He thinks it has something to do with being an only child whose father was often away. But that doesn't really explain it. Perhaps it is best to call the Connector impulse simply that — an impulse, just one of the many personality traits that distinguish one human being from another.

3.

Connectors are important for more than simply the number of people they know. Their importance is also a function of the kinds of people they know. Perhaps the best way to understand this point is through the popular parlor game "Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon." The idea behind the game is to try to link any actor or actress, through the

movies they've been in, to the actor Kevin Bacon in less than six steps. So, for example, O.J. Simpson was in *Naked Gun* with Priscilla Presley, who was in *Ford Fairlane* with Gilbert Gottfried, who was in *Beverly Hills Cop II* with Paul Reiser, who was in *Diner* with Kevin Bacon. That's four steps. Mary Pickford was in *Screen Snapshots* with Clark Gable, who was in *Combat America* with Tony Romano, who, thirty-five years later, was in *Starting Over* with Bacon. That's three steps. Recently, a computer scientist at the University of Virginia by the name of Brett Tjaden actually sat down and figured out what the average Bacon number is for the quarter million or so actors and actresses who have played in television films or major motion pictures and came up with 2.8312 steps. Anyone who has ever acted, in other words, can be linked to Bacon in an average of under three steps. That sounds impressive, except that Tjaden then went back and performed an even more heroic calculation, figuring out what the average degree of connectedness was for everyone who had ever acted in Hollywood. For example, how many steps on average does it take to link everyone in Hollywood to Robert DeNiro or Shirley Temple or Adam Sandler? Tjaden found that when he listed all Hollywood actors in order of their "connectedness," Bacon ranked only 669th. Martin Sheen, by contrast, can be connected to every other actor in 2.63681 steps, which puts him almost 650 places higher than Bacon. Elliot Gould can be connected even more quickly, in 2.63601. Among the top fifteen are people like Robert Mitchum and Gene Hackman and Donald Sutherland and Shelley Winters and Burgess Meredith. The best-connected actor of all time? Rod Steiger.

Why is Kevin Bacon so far behind these actors? One big factor is that Bacon is a lot younger than most of them and as a result has made fewer movies. But that explains only some of the difference. There are lots of people, for example, who have made lots of movies and aren't particularly well connected. John Wayne, for example, made an extraordinary 179 movies in his sixty-year career and still ranks only 116th, at 2.7173. The problem is that more than half of John Wayne's movies were Westerns, meaning that he made the same kind of movie with the same kind of actors over and over again.

But take someone like Steiger: he has made great movies like the Oscar-winning *On the Waterfront* and dreadful movies like *Car Pool*. He won an Oscar for his role in *In the Heat of the Night* and also made "B" movies so bad they went straight to video. He's played Mussolini, Napoléon, Pontius Pilate, and Al Capone. He's been in thirty-eight dramas, twelve crime pictures and comedies, eleven thrillers, eight action films, seven Westerns, six war movies, four documentaries, three horror flicks, two sci-fi films, and a musical, among others. Rod Steiger is the best-connected actor in history because he has managed to move up and down and back and forth among all the different worlds and subcultures and niches and levels that the acting profession has to offer.

This is what Connectors are like. They are the Rod Steigers of everyday life. They are people whom all of us can reach in only a few steps because, for one reason or another, they manage to occupy many different worlds and subcultures and niches. In Steiger's case, of course,

his high connectedness is a function of his versatility as an actor and, in all likelihood, some degree of good luck. But in the case of Connectors, their ability to span many different worlds is a function of something intrinsic to their personality, some combination of curiosity, self-confidence, sociability, and energy.

I once met a classic Connector in Chicago by the name of Lois Weisberg. Weisberg serves as the Commissioner of Cultural Affairs for the City of Chicago. But that is only the latest in what has been an extraordinary string of experiences and careers. In the early 1950s, for example, Weisberg ran a drama troupe in Chicago. In 1956, she decided to stage a festival to mark the centenary of George Bernard Shaw's birth, and then began putting out a newspaper devoted to Shaw, which mutated into an underground, alternative weekly called *The Paper*. On Friday nights people from all over the city would gather there for editorial meetings. William Friedkin, who would go on to direct *The French Connection* and *The Exorcist*, was a regular, as was the attorney Elmer Gertz (who was one of Nathan Leopold's attorneys) and some of the editors from *Playboy*, which was just up the street. People like Art Farmer and Thelonius Monk and John Coltrane and Lenny Bruce would stop by when they were in town. (Bruce actually lived with Weisberg for a while. "My mother was hysterical about it, especially one day when she rang the doorbell and he answered in a bath towel," Weisberg says. "We had a window on the porch, and he didn't have a key, so the window was always left open for him. There were a lot of rooms in that house, and a lot of

people stayed there and I didn't know they were there. I never could stand his jokes. I didn't really like his act. I couldn't stand all the words he was using.") After *The Paper* folded, Lois took a job doing public relations for an injury rehabilitation institute. From there, she went to work for a public interest law firm called BPI, and while at BPI she became obsessed with the fact that Chicago's parks were crumbling and neglected, so she gathered together a motley collection of nature lovers, historians, civic activists, and housewives and founded a lobbying group called Friends of the Parks. Then she became alarmed because a commuter railroad that ran along the south shore of Lake Michigan — from South Bend to Chicago — was about to shut down, so she gathered together a motley collection of railway enthusiasts, environmentalists, and commuters and founded South Shore Recreation, and saved the railroad. Then she became executive director of the Chicago Council of Lawyers, a progressive legal group. Then she ran a local congressman's campaign. Then she got the position of director of special events for the first black mayor of Chicago, Harold Washington. Then she quit government and opened a small stand in a flea market. Then she went to work for Mayor Richard Daley — where she is to this day — as Chicago's Commissioner of Cultural Affairs.

If you go through that history and keep count, the number of worlds that Lois has belonged to comes to eight: the actors, the writers, the doctors, the lawyers, the park-lovers, the politicians, the railroad buffs, and the flea market aficionados. When I asked Weisberg to make her own list, she came up with ten, because she added the

architects and the hospitality industry people she works with in her current job. But she was probably being modest, because if you looked harder at Weisberg's life you could probably subdivide her experiences into fifteen or twenty worlds. They aren't separate worlds, though. The point about Connectors is that by having a foot in so many different worlds, they have the effect of bringing them all together.

Once — and this would have been in the mid-1950s — Weisberg took the train to New York to attend, on a whim, the Science Fiction Writers Convention, where she met a young writer by the name of Arthur C. Clarke. Clarke took a shine to Weisberg, and next time he was in Chicago he called her up. "He was at a pay phone," Weisberg recalls. "He said, is there anyone in Chicago I should meet. I told him to come over to my house." Weisberg has a low, raspy voice, baked hard by half a century of nicotine, and she pauses between sentences to give herself the opportunity for a quick puff. Even when she's not smoking, she pauses anyway, as if to keep in practice for those moments when she is. "I called Bob Hughes. Bob Hughes was one of the people who wrote for my paper." Pause. "I said, do you know anyone in Chicago interested in talking to Arthur Clarke. He said, yeah, Isaac Asimov is in town. And this guy Robert, Robert — Robert Heinlein. So they all came over and sat in my study." Pause. "Then they called over to me and they said, Lois . . . I can't remember the word they used. They had some word for me. It was something about how I was the kind of person who brings people together."

This is in some ways the archetypal Lois Weisberg story. First she reaches out to somebody, to someone outside her world. She was in drama at the time. Arthur Clarke wrote science fiction. Then, equally important, that person responds to her. Lots of us reach out to those different from ourselves, or to those more famous or successful than we are, but that gesture isn't always reciprocated. Then there's the fact that when Arthur Clarke comes to Chicago and wants to be connected, to be linked up with someone else, Weisberg comes up with Isaac Asimov. She says it was a fluke that Asimov was in town. But if it wasn't Asimov, it would have been someone else.

One of the things that people remember about Weisberg's Friday night salons back in the 1950s was that they were always, effortlessly, racially integrated. The point is not that without that salon blacks wouldn't have socialized with whites on the North Side. It was rare back then, but it happened. The point is that when blacks socialized with whites in the 1950s in Chicago, it didn't happen by accident; it happened because a certain kind of person made it happen. That's what Asimov and Clarke meant when they said that Weisberg has this thing — whatever it is — that brings people together.

"She doesn't have any kind of snobbery," says Wendy Willrich, who used to work for Weisberg. "I once went with her on a trip to someone's professional photography studio. People write her letters and she looks at all of her mail, and the guy who owned the studio invited her out and she said yes. He was basically a wedding photographer. She decided to check it out. I was thinking, ohmigod, do we have to hike out forty-five minutes to this studio? It was

out by the airport. This is the Commissioner of Cultural Affairs for the City of Chicago we're talking about. But she thought he was incredibly interesting." Was he actually interesting? Who knows? The point is that Lois found him interesting, because, in some way, she finds everyone interesting. Weisberg, one of her friends told me, "always says — 'Oh, I've met the most wonderful person. You are going to love her,' and she is as enthused about this person as she was about the first person she has met and you know what, she's usually right." Helen Doria, another of her friends, told me that "Lois sees things in you that you don't even see in yourself," which is another way of saying the same thing, that by some marvelous quirk of nature, Lois and the other people like her have some instinct that helps them relate to the people they meet. When Weisberg looks out at the world or when Roger Horchow sits next to you on an airplane, they don't see the same world that the rest of us see. They see possibility, and while most of us are busily choosing whom we would like to know, and rejecting the people who don't look right or who live out near the airport, or whom we haven't seen in sixty-five years, Lois and Roger like them all.

4.

There is a very good example of the way Connectors function in the work of the sociologist Mark Granovetter. In his classic 1974 study *Getting a Job*, Granovetter looked at several hundred professional and technical workers from the Boston suburb of Newton, interviewing them in some detail on their employment history. He found that

56 percent of those he talked to found their job through a personal connection. Another 18.8 percent used formal means — advertisements, headhunters — and roughly 20 percent applied directly. This much is not surprising; the best way to get in the door is through a personal contact. But, curiously, Granovetter found that of those personal connections, the majority were “weak ties.” Of those who used a contact to find a job, only 16.7 percent saw that contact “often” — as they would if the contact were a good friend — and 55.6 percent saw their contact only “occasionally.” Twenty-eight percent saw the contact “rarely.” People weren’t getting their jobs through their friends. They were getting them through their acquaintances.

Why is this? Granovetter argues that it is because when it comes to finding out about new jobs — or, for that matter, new information, or new ideas — “weak ties” are always more important than strong ties. Your friends, after all, occupy the same world that you do. They might work with you, or live near you, and go to the same churches, schools, or parties. How much, then, would they know that you wouldn’t know? Your acquaintances, on the other hand, by definition occupy a very different world than you. They are much more likely to know something that you don’t. To capture this apparent paradox, Granovetter coined a marvelous phrase: the strength of weak ties. Acquaintances, in short, represent a source of social power, and the more acquaintances you have the more powerful you are. Connectors like Lois Weisberg and Roger Horchow — who are masters of the weak tie — are extraordinarily powerful. We rely on them to give us access to opportunities and worlds to which we don’t belong.

This principle holds for more than just jobs, of course. It also holds for restaurants, movies, fashion trends, or anything else that moves by word of mouth. It isn’t just the case that the closer someone is to a Connector, the more powerful or the wealthier or the more opportunities he or she gets. It’s also the case that the closer an idea or a product comes to a Connector, the more power and opportunity it has as well. Could this be one of the reasons Hush Puppies suddenly became a major fashion trend? Along the way from the East Village to Middle America, a Connector or a series of Connectors must have suddenly become enamored of them, and through their enormous social connections, their long lists of weak ties, their role in multiple worlds and subcultures, they must have been able to take those shoes and send them in a thousand directions at once — to make them really tip. Hush Puppies, in a sense then, got lucky. And perhaps one of the reasons why so many fashion trends don’t make it into mainstream America is that simply, by sheerest bad fortune, they never happen to meet the approval of a Connector along the way.

Horchow’s daughter, Sally, told me a story of how she once took her father to a new Japanese restaurant where a friend of hers was a chef. Horchow liked the food, and so when he went home he turned on his computer, pulled up the names of acquaintances who lived nearby, and faxed them notes telling them of a wonderful new restaurant he had discovered and that they should try it. This is, in a nutshell, what word of mouth is. It’s not me telling you about a new restaurant with great food, and you telling a friend and that friend telling a friend. Word

of mouth begins when somewhere along that chain, someone tells a person like Roger Horchow.

5.

Here, then, is the explanation for why Paul Revere's midnight ride started a word-of-mouth epidemic and William Dawes's ride did not. Paul Revere was the Roger Horchow or the Lois Weisberg of his day. He was a Connector. He was, for example, gregarious and intensely social. When he died, his funeral was attended, in the words of one contemporary newspaper account, by "troops of people." He was a fisherman and a hunter, a cardplayer and a theater-lover, a frequenter of pubs and a successful businessman. He was active in the local Masonic Lodge and was a member of several select social clubs. He was also a doer, a man blessed — as David Hackett Fischer recounts in his brilliant book *Paul Revere's Ride* — with an "uncanny genius for being at the center of events." Fischer writes:

When Boston imported its first streetlights in 1774, Paul Revere was asked to serve on the committee that made the arrangement. When the Boston market required regulation, Paul Revere was appointed its clerk. After the Revolution, in a time of epidemics, he was chosen health officer of Boston, and coroner of Suffolk County. When a major fire ravaged the old wooden town, he helped to found the Massachusetts Mutual Fire Insurance Company, and his name was first to appear on its charter of incorporation. As poverty became a growing problem in the new republic, he called the meeting that organized the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association, and

was elected its first president. When the community of Boston was shattered by the most sensational murder trial of his generation, Paul Revere was chosen foreman of the jury.

Had Revere been given a list of 250 surnames drawn at random from the Boston census of 1775, there is no question he would have scored well over 100.

After the Boston Tea Party, in 1773, when the anger of the American colonists against their British rulers began to spill over, dozens of committees and congresses of angry colonists sprang up around New England. They had no formal organization or established means of community. But Paul Revere quickly emerged as a link between all those far-flung revolutionary dots. He would routinely ride down to Philadelphia or New York or up to New Hampshire, carrying messages from one group to another. Within Boston as well, he played a special role. There were, in the revolutionary years, seven groups of "Whigs" (revolutionaries) in Boston, comprising some 255 men. Most of the men — over 80 percent — belonged to just one group. No one was a member of all seven. Only two men were members of as many as five of the groups: Paul Revere was one of those two.

It is not surprising, then, that when the British army began its secret campaign in 1774 to root out and destroy the stores of arms and ammunition held by the fledgling revolutionary movement, Revere became a kind of unofficial clearing house for the anti-British forces. He knew everybody. He was the logical one to go to if you were a stable boy on the afternoon of April 18th, 1775, and

overheard two British officers talking about how there would be hell to pay on the following afternoon. Nor is it surprising that when Revere set out for Lexington that night, he would have known just how to spread the news as far and wide as possible. When he saw people on the roads, he was so naturally and irrepressibly social he would have stopped and told them. When he came upon a town, he would have known exactly whose door to knock on, who the local militia leader was, who the key players in town were. He had met most of them before. And they knew and respected him as well.

But William Dawes? Fischer finds it inconceivable that Dawes could have ridden all seventeen miles to Lexington and not spoken to anyone along the way. But he clearly had none of the social gifts of Revere, because there is almost no record of anyone who remembers him that night. "Along Paul Revere's northern route, the town leaders and company captains instantly triggered the alarm," Fischer writes. "On the southerly circuit of William Dawes, that did not happen until later. In at least one town it did not happen at all. Dawes did not awaken the town fathers or militia commanders in the towns of Roxbury, Brookline, Watertown, or Waltham." Why? Because Roxbury, Brookline, Watertown, and Waltham were not Boston. And Dawes was in all likelihood a man with a normal social circle, which means that — like most of us — once he left his hometown he probably wouldn't have known whose door to knock on. Only one small community along Dawes's ride appeared to get the message, a few farmers in a neighborhood called Waltham Farms. But alerting just those few houses wasn't enough

to tip the alarm. Word-of-mouth epidemics are the work of Connectors. William Dawes was just an ordinary man.

6.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that Connectors are the only people who matter in a social epidemic. Roger Horchow sent out a dozen faxes promoting his daughter's friend's new restaurant. But he didn't discover that restaurant. Someone else did and told him about it. At some point in the rise of Hush Puppies, the shoes were discovered by Connectors, who broadcast the return of Hush Puppies far and wide. But who told the Connectors about Hush Puppies? It's possible that Connectors learn about new information by an entirely random process, that because they know so many people they get access to new things wherever they pop up. If you look closely at social epidemics, however, it becomes clear that just as there are people we rely upon to connect us to other people, there are also people we rely upon to connect us with new information. There are people specialists, and there are information specialists.

Sometimes, of course, these two specialties are one and the same. Part of the particular power of Paul Revere, for example, was that he wasn't just a networker; he wasn't just the man with the biggest Rolodex in colonial Boston. He was also actively engaged in gathering information about the British. In the fall of 1774, he set up a secret group that met regularly at the Green Dragon Tavern with the express purpose of monitoring British troop movements. In December of that year, the group learned

that the British intended to seize a cache of ammunition being stored by a colonial militia near the entrance to Portsmouth Harbor, fifty miles north of Boston. On the icy morning of December 13th, Revere rode north through deep snow to warn the local militia that the British were on their way. He helped find out the intelligence, and he passed it on. Paul Revere was a Connector. But he was also — and this is the second of the three kinds of people who control word-of-mouth epidemics — a Maven.

The word *Maven* comes from the Yiddish, and it means one who accumulates knowledge. In recent years, economists have spent a great deal of time studying Mavens, for the obvious reason that if marketplaces depend on information, the people with the most information must be the most important. For example, sometimes when a supermarket wants to increase sales of a given product, they'll put a promotion sticker in front of it, saying something like "Everyday Low Price!" The price will stay the same. The product will just be featured more prominently. When they do that, supermarkets find that invariably the sales of the product will go through the roof, the same way they would if the product had actually been put on sale.

This is, when you think about it, a potentially disturbing piece of information. The whole premise behind sales, or supermarket specials, is that we, as consumers, are very aware of the prices of things and will react accordingly: we buy more in response to lower prices and less in response to higher prices. But if we'll buy more of something even if the price hasn't been lowered, then what's to stop supermarkets from never lowering their prices? What's to stop them from cheating us with meaningless "everyday low

price" signs every time we walk in? The answer is that although most of us don't look at prices, every retailer knows that a very small number of people do, and if they find something amiss — a promotion that's not really a promotion — they'll do something about it. If a store tried to pull the sales stunt too often, these are the people who would figure it out and complain to management and tell their friends and acquaintances to avoid the store. These are the people who keep the marketplace honest. In the ten years or so since this group was first identified, economists have gone to great lengths to understand them. They have found them in every walk of life and in every socioeconomic group. One name for them is "price vigilantes." The other, more common, name for them is "Market Mavens."

Linda Price, a marketing professor at the University of Nebraska and a pioneer in Maven research, has made videotapes of interviews she's done with a number of Mavens. In one, a very well dressed man talks with great animation about how he goes about shopping. Here is the segment, in full:

Because I follow the financial pages closely, I start to see trends. A classic example is with coffee. When the first coffee crunch came ten years ago, I had been following the thing about Brazilian frost and what it would do to the long-term price of coffee, and so I said I'm going to stockpile coffee.

At this point in the interview, an enormous smile breaks across the man's face.

I ended up with probably somewhere between thirty-five and forty cans of coffee. And I got them at these ridiculous prices, when the three-pound cans were \$2.79 and \$2.89. . . . Today it's about \$6 for a three-pound can. I had fun doing that.

Do you see the level of obsession here? He can remember prices, to the cents, of cans of coffee he bought ten years ago.

The critical thing about Mavens, though, is that they aren't passive collectors of information. It isn't just that they are obsessed with how to get the best deal on a can of coffee. What sets them apart is that once they figure out how to get that deal, they want to tell you about it too. "A Maven is a person who has information on a lot of different products or prices or places. This person likes to initiate discussions with consumers and respond to requests," Price says. "They like to be helpers in the marketplace. They distribute coupons. They take you shopping. They go shopping for you. . . . They distribute about four times as many coupons as other people. This is the person who connects people to the marketplace and has the inside scoop on the marketplace. They know where the bathroom is in retail stores. That's the kind of knowledge they have." They are more than experts. An expert, says Price, will "talk about, say, cars because they love cars. But they don't talk about cars because they love you, and want to help you with your decision. The Market Maven will. They are more socially motivated."

Price says that well over half of Americans know a Maven, or someone close to the Maven's description. She

herself, in fact, based the concept around someone she met when she was in graduate school, a man so memorable that his personality serves as the basis for what is now an entire field of research in the marketing world.

"I was doing my Ph.D. at the University of Texas," Price said. "At the time I didn't realize it, but I met the perfect Maven. He's Jewish and it was Easter and I was looking for a ham and I asked him. And he said, well, you know I am Jewish, but here's the deli you should go to and here's the price you should pay." Price started laughing at the memory. "You should look him up. His name is Mark Alpert."

7.

Mark Alpert is a slender, energetic man in his fifties. He has dark hair and a prominent nose and two small, burning, intelligent eyes. He talks quickly and precisely and with absolute authority. He's the kind of person who doesn't say that it was hot yesterday. He would say that we had a high of 87 degrees yesterday. He doesn't walk up stairs. He runs up them, like a small boy. He gives the sense that he is interested in and curious about everything, that, even at his age, if you gave him a children's chemistry set he would happily sit down right then and there and create some strange new concoction.

Alpert grew up in the Midwest, the son of a man who ran the first discount store in northern Minnesota. He got his doctorate from the University of Southern California and now teaches at the University of Texas School of Business Administration. But there is really no connection

between his status as an economist and his Mavenism. Were Alpert a plumber, he would be just as exacting and thorough and knowledgeable about the ways of the marketplace.

We met over lunch at a restaurant on the lakefront in Austin. I got there first and chose a table. He got there second and persuaded me to move to another table, which he said was better. It was. I asked him about how he buys whatever he buys, and he began to talk. He explained why he has cable TV, as opposed to a dish. He gave me the inside scoop on Leonard Maltin's new movie guide. He gave me the name of a contact at the Park Central Hotel in Manhattan who is very helpful in getting a great deal. ("Malcolm, the hotel is ninety-nine dollars. And the rack rate is a hundred and eighty-nine dollars!") He explained what a rack rate is. (The initial, but soft, retail asking price for a hotel room.) He pointed at my tape recorder. "I think your tape is finished," he said. It was. He explained why I should not buy an Audi. ("They're Germans, so it's a pain dealing with them. For a while they would give you an under-the-counter warranty, but they don't anymore. The dealer network is small, so it's hard to get service. I love driving them. I don't like owning them." What I should drive, he told me, is a Mercury Mystique because they drive like a much more expensive European sedan. "They aren't selling well, so you can get a good deal. You go to a fleet buyer. You go in on the twenty-fifth of the month. You know this...") Then he launched into an impossibly long, sometimes hilarious, description of the several months he took to buy a new TV. If you or I had gone through the same experience — which involved sending televisions back, and

laborious comparison of the tiniest electronic details and warranty fine print — I suspect we would have found it hellish. Alpert, apparently, found it exhilarating. Mavens, according to Price, are the kinds of people who are avid readers of *Consumer Reports*. Alpert is the kind of Maven who writes to *Consumer Reports* to correct them. "One time they said that the Audi 4000 was based on the Volkswagen Dasher. This was the late 1970s. But the Audi 4000 is a bigger car. I wrote them a letter. Then there was the Audi 5000 fiasco. *Consumer Reports* put them on their list of thou shalt not buy because of this sudden acceleration problem. But I read up on the problem in the literature and came to believe it was bogus. . . . So I wrote them and I said, you really ought to look into this. I gave them some information to consider. But I didn't hear back from them. It annoyed the hell out of me. They are supposed to be beyond that." He shook his head in disgust. He had out-Mavened the Maven bible.

Alpert is not, it should be said, an obnoxious know-it-all. It's easy to see how he could be, of course. Even Alpert is aware of that. "I was standing next to a kid in the supermarket who had to show his I.D. to buy cigarettes," Alpert told me. "I was very tempted to tell him I was diagnosed with lung cancer. In a way, that desire to be of service and influence — whatever it is — can be taken too far. You can become nosy. I try to be a very passive Maven. . . . You have to remember that it's their decision. It's their life." What saves him is that you never get the sense that he's showing off. There's something automatic, reflexive, about his level of involvement in the marketplace. It's not an act. It's very similar to the social instinct of Horchow and

Weisberg. At one point Alpert launched into a complicated story of how to make the best use of coupons in renting videos at Blockbuster. Then he stopped himself, as if he realized what he was saying, and burst out laughing. "Look, you can save a whole dollar! In a year's time I could probably save enough for a whole bottle of wine." Alpert is almost pathologically helpful. He can't help himself. "A Maven is someone who wants to solve other people's problems, generally by solving his own," Alpert said, which is true, although what I suspect is that the opposite is also true, that a Maven is someone who solves his own problems — his own emotional needs — by solving other people's problems. Something in Alpert was fulfilled in knowing that I would thereafter buy a television or a car or rent a hotel room in New York armed with the knowledge he had given me.

"Mark Alpert is a wonderfully unselfish man," Leigh MacAllister, a colleague of his at the University of Texas, told me. "I would say he saved me fifteen thousand dollars when I first came to Austin. He helped me negotiate the purchase of a house, because he understands the real estate game. I needed to get a washer and dryer. He got me a deal. I needed to get a car. I wanted to get a Volvo because I wanted to be just like Mark. Then he showed me an on-line service that had the prices of Volvos all over the State of Texas and went with me to buy the car. He helped me through the maze of all the retirement plans at the University of Texas. He simplified everything. He has everything processed. That's Mark Alpert. That's a Market Maven. God bless him. He's what makes the American system great."

8.

What makes people like Mark Alpert so important in starting epidemics? Obviously they know things that the rest of us don't. They read more magazines than the rest of us, more newspapers, and they may be the only people who read junk mail. Mark Alpert happens to be a connoisseur of electronic equipment. If there was a breakthrough new television or videocamera, and you were a friend of his, you can bet you would hear all about it quickly. Mavens have the knowledge and the social skills to start word-of-mouth epidemics. What sets Mavens apart, though, is not so much what they know but how they pass it along. The fact that Mavens want to help, for no other reason than because they like to help, turns out to be an awfully effective way of getting someone's attention.

This is surely part of the explanation for why Paul Revere's message was so powerful on the night of his midnight ride. News of the British march did not come by fax, or by means of a group e-mail. It wasn't broadcast on the nightly news, surrounded by commercials. It was carried by a man, a volunteer, riding on a cold night with no personal agenda other than a concern for the liberty of his peers. With Hush Puppies as well, perhaps the shoes caught the attention of Connectors precisely because they weren't part of any self-conscious, commercial fashion trend. Maybe a fashion Maven went to the East Village, looking for new ideas, and found out that you could get these really cool old Hush Puppies at a certain thrift store, for a very good price, and told his friends, who bought the shoes for themselves because there is something about the

personal, disinterested, expert opinion of a Maven that makes us all sit up and listen. And why are the Zagat restaurant guides so popular? Partly it is because they are a convenient guide to all the restaurants in a given town. But their real power derives from the fact that the reviews are the reports of volunteers — of diners who want to share their opinions with others. Somehow that represents a more compelling recommendation than the opinion of an expert whose job it is to rate restaurants.

When I was talking to Alpert, I happened to mention that I was going to be in Los Angeles in a few weeks. “There is a place I really like, in Westwood,” he said, without hesitation. “The Century Wilshire. It’s a European bed-and-breakfast. They have very nice rooms. A heated pool. Underground parking. Last time I was there, five, six years ago, rooms started in the seventies and junior suites were a hundred and ten. They’ll give you a rate for a week. They’ve got an 800 number.” Since he was, after all, the Ur-Maven, I stayed at the Century Wilshire when I was in L.A., and it was everything he said it was and more. Within a few weeks of coming home, I had — completely out of character, I might add — recommended the Century Wilshire to two friends of mine, and within the month two more, and as I began to imagine how many people of those I told about the hotel had told about the hotel, and how many people like me Mark Alpert had himself told about the hotel, I realized that I had stepped into the middle of a little Mark Alpert-generated, word-of-mouth epidemic. Alpert, of course, probably doesn’t know as many people as a Connector like Roger Horchow, so he doesn’t quite have the same raw transmission power. But then again, if

Roger Horchow talked to you on the eve of a trip to Los Angeles, he might not give you advice on where to stay. Alpert always would. And if Horchow did make a recommendation, you might take him up on it or you might not. You would take the advice as seriously as you take advice from any friend. But if Mark Alpert gave you advice, you would *always* take it. A Connector might tell ten friends where to stay in Los Angeles, and half of them might take his advice. A Maven might tell five people where to stay in Los Angeles but make the case for the hotel so emphatically that all of them would take his advice. These are different personalities at work, acting for different reasons. But they both have the power to spark word-of-mouth epidemics.

9.

The one thing that a Maven is not is a persuader. Alpert’s motivation is to educate and to help. He’s not the kind of person who wants to twist your arm. As we talked, in fact, there were several key moments when he seemed to probe me for information, to find out what I knew, so he could add it to his own formidable database. To be a Maven is to be a teacher. But it is also, even more emphatically, to be a student. Mavens are really information brokers, sharing and trading what they know. For a social epidemic to start, though, some people are actually going to have to be persuaded to do something. A good number of the young people who bought Hush Puppies, for instance, were people who once upon a time wouldn’t have been caught dead in them. Similarly, after Paul Revere had passed on his

news, you can imagine that all of the men in the militia movement gathered around and made plans to confront the British the following morning. But it can't have been an automatic process. Some people were probably gung ho. Some may have doubted the wisdom of confronting a trained, professional army with a homegrown militia. Others — who may not have known Revere personally — might have been skeptical about the accuracy of his information. That almost everyone, in the end, fell in line is something that we would normally credit to peer pressure. But peer pressure is not always an automatic or an unconscious process. It means, as often as not, that someone actually went up to one of his peers and pressured him. In a social epidemic, Mavens are data banks. They provide the message. Connectors are social glue: they spread it. But there is also a select group of people — Salesmen — with the skills to persuade us when we are unconvinced of what we are hearing, and they are as critical to the tipping of word-of-mouth epidemics as the other two groups. Who are these Salesmen? And what makes them so good at what they do?

Tom Gau is a financial planner in Torrance, California, just south of Los Angeles. His firm — Kavesh and Gau — is the biggest in its field in southern California and one of the top financial planning firms in the country. He makes millions of dollars a year. Donald Moine, a behavioral psychologist who has written widely on the subject of persuasion, told me to look up Gau because Gau is “mesmerizing.” And so he is. Tom Gau happens to sell financial planning services. But he could, if he wanted

to, sell absolutely anything. If we want to understand the persuasive personality type, Gau seems a good place to start.

Gau is in his forties. He is good-looking, without being pretty at all. He is of medium height, lean, with slightly shaggy dark hair, a mustache, and a little bit of a hangdog expression. Give him a horse and a hat and he'd make an excellent cowboy. He looks like the actor Sam Elliot. When we met, Gau shook my hand. But as he told me later, usually when he meets someone he gives him a hug or — if it is a woman — a big kiss. As you would expect from a great salesman, he has a kind of natural exuberance.

“I love my clients, okay? I'll bend over backwards for them,” Gau said. “I call my clients my family. I tell my clients, I've got two families. I've got my wife and my kids and I've got you.” Gau talks quickly, but in fits and starts. He's always revving up and gearing down. Sometimes when he is making an aside he will rev up even further, as if to put in his own verbal parentheses. He asks lots of rhetorical questions. “I love my job. I love my job. I'm a workaholic. I get here at six and seven in the morning. I get out at nine at night. I manage a lot of money. I'm one of the top producers in the nation. But I don't tell my clients that. I'm not here because of that. I'm here to help people. I love helping people. I don't have to work anymore. I'm financially independent. So why am I here working these long hours? Because I love helping people. I love people. It's called a relationship.”

Gau's pitch is that his firm offers clients a level of service and expertise they'll have difficulty getting anywhere

else. Across the hall from his office is a law firm, affiliated with Kavesh and Gau, that handles wills and living trusts and all other legal matters related to financial planning. Gau has insurance specialists to handle insurance needs and stockbrokers to handle investments and retirement specialists for older clients. His arguments are rational and coherent. Moine has put together, in cooperation with Gau, what he calls a financial planner's script book. Moine's argument is that what separates a great salesman from an average one is the number and quality of answers they have to the objections commonly raised by potential clients. He sat down with Gau, then, and tape-recorded all of Gau's answers and wrote them up in a book. Moine and Gau calculate that there are about twenty questions or statements that a planner needs to be prepared for. For example: "I can do it myself" is one, and for that the script book lists fifty potential answers. "Aren't you concerned about making the wrong moves and having no one there to help you?" for instance. Or "I'm sure you do a good job at money management. However, did you know most wives outlive their husbands? If something should happen to you, would she be able to handle everything by herself?"

I can imagine someone buying this script book and memorizing each of these potential responses. I can also imagine that same person, over time, getting familiar enough with the material that he begins to judge, very well, what kinds of responses work best with what kinds of people. If you transcribed that person's interactions with his clients, he would sound just like Tom Gau because he would be using all of Tom Gau's words. According to the

standard ways by which we measure persuasiveness — by the logic and appropriateness of the persuader's arguments — that should make the people using the script book every bit as persuasive as Tom Gau. But is that really true? What was interesting about Gau is the extent to which he seemed to be persuasive in a way quite different from the content of his words. He seems to have some kind of indefinable trait, something powerful and contagious and irresistible that goes beyond what comes out of his mouth, that makes people who meet him want to agree with him. It's energy. It's enthusiasm. It's charm. It's likability. It's all those things and yet something more. At one point I asked him whether he was happy, and he fairly bounced off his chair.

"Very. I'm probably the most optimistic person you could ever imagine. You take the most optimistic person you know and take it to the hundredth power, that's me. Because you know what, the power of positive thinking will overcome so many things. There are so many people who are negative. Someone will say, you can't do that. And I'll say, what do you mean I can't do that? We moved up to Ashland, Oregon, a little over five years ago. We found a house we really liked. It had been on the market for some time and it was a bit expensive. So I said to my wife, you know what, I'm going to make a ridiculously low offer. And she said, they're never going to take that. I said, maybe not. What have we got to lose? The worst thing they can say is no. I'm not going to insult them. I'm going to give them my little pitch of here's why I'm doing this. I'm going to make it clear what I'm suggesting. And you know what? They accepted the offer." As Gau told

me this story, I had no difficulty at all seeing him back in Ashland, somehow convincing the seller to part with his beautiful home for a ridiculous price. "Gosh darn it," Gau said, "if you don't try, you'll never succeed."

10.

The question of what makes someone — or something — persuasive is a lot less straightforward than it seems. We know it when we see it. But just what "it" is is not always obvious. Consider the following two examples, both drawn from the psychological literature. The first is an experiment that took place during the 1984 presidential campaign between Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale. For eight days before the election, a group of psychologists led by Brian Mullen of Syracuse University videotaped the three national nightly news programs, which then, as now, were anchored by Peter Jennings at ABC, Tom Brokaw at NBC, and Dan Rather at CBS. Mullen examined the tapes and excerpted all references to the candidates, until he had 37 separate segments, each roughly two and a half seconds long. Those segments were then shown, with the sound turned off, to a group of randomly chosen people, who were asked to rate the facial expressions of each newscaster in each segment. The subjects had no idea what kind of experiment they were involved with, or what the newscasters were talking about. They were simply asked to score the emotional content of the expressions of these three men on a 21-point scale, with the lowest being "extremely negative" and the highest point on the scale "extremely positive."

The results were fascinating. Dan Rather scored 10.46 — which translates to an almost perfectly neutral expression — when he talked about Mondale, and 10.37 when he talked about Reagan. He looked the same when he talked about the Republican as he did when he talked about the Democrat. The same was true for Brokaw, who scored 11.21 for Mondale and 11.50 for Reagan. But Peter Jennings of ABC was much different. For Mondale, he scored 13.38. But when he talked about Reagan, his face lit up so much he scored 17.44. Mullen and his colleagues went out of their way to try to come up with an innocent explanation for this. Could it be, for example, that Jennings is just more expressive in general than his colleagues? The answer seemed to be no. The subjects were also shown control segments of the three newscasters, as they talked about unequivocally happy or sad subjects (the funeral of Indira Gandhi; a breakthrough in treating a congenital disease). But Jennings didn't score any higher on the happy subjects or lower on the sad subjects than his counterparts. In fact, if anything, he seemed to be the least expressive of the three. It also isn't the case that Jennings is simply someone who has a happy expression on his face all the time. Again, the opposite seemed to be true. On the "happy" segments inserted for comparison purposes, he scored 14.13, which was substantially lower than both Rather and Brokaw. The only possible conclusion, according to the study, is that Jennings exhibited a "significant and noticeable bias in facial expression" toward Reagan.

Now here is where the study gets interesting. Mullen and his colleagues then called up people in a number of cities around the country who regularly watch the evening

network news and asked them who they voted for. In every case, those who watched ABC voted for Reagan in far greater numbers than those who watched CBS or NBC. In Cleveland, for example, 75 percent of ABC watchers voted Republican, versus 61.9 percent of CBS or NBC viewers. In Williamstown, Massachusetts, ABC viewers were 71.4 percent for Reagan versus 50 percent for the other two networks; in Erie, Pennsylvania, the difference was 73.7 percent to 50 percent. The subtle pro-Reagan bias in Jennings's face seems to have influenced the voting behavior of ABC viewers.

As you can imagine, ABC News disputes this study vigorously. ("It's my understanding that I'm the only social scientist to have the dubious distinction of being called a 'jackass' by Peter Jennings," says Mullen.) It is hard to believe. Instinctively, I think, most of us would probably assume that the causation runs in the opposite direction, that Reagan supporters are drawn to ABC because of Jennings's bias, not the other way around. But Mullen argues fairly convincingly that this isn't plausible. For example, on other, more obvious levels — like, for example, story selection — ABC was shown to be the network most hostile to Reagan, so it's just as easy to imagine hard-core Republicans deserting ABC news for the rival networks. And to answer the question of whether his results were simply a fluke, four years later, in the Michael Dukakis–George Bush campaign, Mullen repeated his experiment, with the exact same results. "Jennings showed more smiles when referring to the Republican candidate than the Democrat," Mullen said, "and again in a phone

survey, viewers who watch ABC were more likely to have voted for Bush."

Here is another example of the subtleties of persuasion. A large group of students were recruited for what they were told was a market research study by a company making high-tech headphones. They were each given a headset and told that the company wanted to test to see how well they worked when the listener was in motion — dancing up and down, say, or moving his or her head. All of the students listened to songs by Linda Ronstadt and the Eagles, and then heard a radio editorial arguing that tuition at their university should be raised from its present level of \$587 to \$750. A third were told that while they listened to the taped radio editorial they should nod their heads vigorously up and down. The next third were told to shake their heads from side to side. The final third were the control group. They were told to keep their heads still. When they were finished, all the students were given a short questionnaire, asking them questions about the quality of the songs and the effect of the shaking. Slipped in at the end was the question the experimenters really wanted an answer to: "What do you feel would be an appropriate dollar amount for undergraduate tuition per year?"

The answers to that question are just as difficult to believe as the answers to the newscasters poll. The students who kept their heads still were unmoved by the editorial. The tuition amount that they guessed was appropriate was \$582 — or just about where tuition was already. Those who shook their heads from side to side as they listened to the editorial — even though they thought they were

simply testing headset quality — disagreed strongly with the proposed increase. They wanted tuition to fall on average to \$467 a year. Those who were told to nod their heads up and down, meanwhile, found the editorial very persuasive. They wanted tuition to rise, on average, to \$646. The simple act of moving their heads up and down, ostensibly for another reason entirely — was sufficient to cause them to recommend a policy that would take money out of their own pockets. Somehow nodding, in the end, mattered as much as Peter Jennings's smiles did in the 1984 election.

There are in these two studies, I think, very important clues as to what makes someone like Tom Gau — or, for that matter, any of the Salesmen in our lives — so effective. The first is that little things can, apparently, make as much of a difference as big things. In the headphone study, the editorial had no impact on those whose heads were still. It wasn't particularly persuasive. But as soon as listeners started nodding, it became very persuasive. In the case of Jennings, Mullen says that someone's subtle signals in favor of one politician or another usually don't matter at all. But in the particular, unguarded way that people watch the news, a little bias can suddenly go a long way. "When people watch the news, they don't intentionally filter biases out, or feel they have to argue against the expression of the newscaster," Mullen explains. "It's not like someone saying: this is a very good candidate who deserves your vote. This isn't an obvious verbal message that we automatically dig in our heels against. It's much more subtle and for that reason much more insidious, and that much harder to insulate ourselves against."

The second implication of these studies is that non-verbal cues are as or more important than verbal cues. The subtle circumstances surrounding how we say things may matter more than what we say. Jennings, after all, wasn't injecting all kinds of pro-Reagan comments in his newscasts. In fact, as I mentioned, ABC was independently observed to have been the most hostile to Reagan. One of the conclusions of the authors of the headphones study — Gary Wells of the University of Alberta and Richard Petty of the University of Missouri — was that "television advertisements would be most effective if the visual display created repetitive vertical movement of the television viewers' heads (e.g., bouncing ball)." Simple physical movements and observations can have a profound effect on how we feel and think.

The third — and perhaps most important — implication of these studies is that persuasion often works in ways that we do not appreciate. It's not that smiles and nods are subliminal messages. They are straightforward and on the surface. It's just that they are incredibly subtle. If you asked the head nodders why they wanted tuition to increase so dramatically — tuition that would come out of their own pockets — none of them would say, because I was nodding my head while I listened to that editorial. They'd probably say that it was because they found the editorial particularly insightful or intelligent. They would attribute their attitudes to some more obvious, logical cause. Similarly the ABC viewers who voted for Reagan would never, in a thousand years, tell you that they voted that way because Peter Jennings smiled every time he mentioned the President. They'd say that it was because

they liked Reagan's policies, or they thought he was doing a good job. It would never have occurred to them that they could be persuaded to reach a conclusion by something so arbitrary and seemingly insignificant as a smile or a nod from a newscaster. If we want to understand what makes someone like Tom Gau so persuasive, in other words, we have to look at much more than his obvious eloquence. We need to look at the subtle, the hidden, and the unspoken.

11.

What happens when two people talk? That is really the basic question here, because that's the basic context in which all persuasion takes place. We know that people talk back and forth. They listen. They interrupt. They move their hands. In the case of my meeting with Tom Gau, we were sitting in a modest-size office. I was in a chair pulled up in front of his desk. I had my legs crossed and a pad and pen on my lap. I was wearing a blue shirt and black pants and a black jacket. He was sitting behind the desk in a high-backed chair. He was wearing a pair of blue suit pants and a crisply pressed white shirt and a red tie. Some of the time he leaned forward and planted his elbows in front of him. Other times he sat back in his chair and waved his hands in the air. Between us, on the blank surface of the desk, I placed my tape recorder. That's what you would have seen, if I showed you a videotape of our meeting. But if you had taken that videotape and slowed it down, until you were looking at our interaction in slices of a fraction of a second, you would have seen something

quite different. You would have seen the two of us engaging in what can only be described as an elaborate and precise dance.

The pioneer of this kind of analysis — of what is called the study of cultural microrhythms — is a man named William Condon. In one of his most famous research projects in the 1960s he attempted to decode a four-and-a-half-second segment of film, in which a woman says to a man and a child, over dinner: "You all should come around every night. We never have had a dinnertime like this in months." Condon broke the film into individual frames, each representing about $\frac{1}{45}$ th of a second. Then he watched — and watched. As he describes it:

To carefully study the organization and sequence of this, the approach must be naturalistic or ethological. You just sit and look and look and look for thousands of hours until the order in the material begins to emerge. It's like sculpturing. . . . Continued study reveals further order. When I was looking at this film over and over again, I had an erroneous view of the universe that communication takes place between people. Somehow this was the model. You send the message, somebody sends the message back. The messages go here and there and everywhere. But something was funny about this.

Condon spent a year and a half on that short segment of film, until, finally, in his peripheral vision, he saw what he had always sensed was there: "the wife turning her head exactly as the husband's hands came up." From there he picked up other micromovements, other patterns that

occurred over and over again, until he realized that in addition to talking and listening, the three people around the table were also engaging in what he termed “interactional synchrony.” Their conversation had a rhythmic physical dimension. Each person would, within the space of one or two or three 1/45th-of-a-second frames, move a shoulder or cheek or an eyebrow or a hand, sustain that movement, stop it, change direction, and start again. And what’s more, those movements were perfectly in time to each person’s own words — emphasizing and underlining and elaborating on the process of articulation — so that the speaker was, in effect, dancing to his or her own speech. At the same time the other people around the table were dancing along as well, moving their faces and shoulders and hands and bodies to the same rhythm. It’s not that everyone was moving the same way, any more than people dancing to a song all dance the same way. It’s that the timing of stops and starts of each person’s micromovements — the jump and shifts of body and face — were perfectly in harmony.

Subsequent research has revealed that it isn’t just gesture that is harmonized, but also conversational rhythm. When two people talk, their volume and pitch fall into balance. What linguists call speech rate — the number of speech sounds per second — equalizes. So does what is known as latency, the period of time that lapses between the moment one speaker stops talking and the moment the other speaker begins. Two people may arrive at a conversation with very different conversational patterns. But almost instantly they reach a common ground. We all do it, all the time. Babies as young as one or two days old synchronize their head, elbow, shoulder, hip, and foot

movements with the speech patterns of adults. Synchrony has even been found in the interactions of humans and apes. It’s part of the way we are hardwired.

When Tom Gau and I sat across from each other in his office, then, we almost immediately fell into physical and conversational harmony. We were dancing. Even before he attempted to persuade me with his words, he had forged a bond with me with his movements and his speech. So what made my encounter with him different, so much more compelling than the conversational encounters I have every day? It isn’t that Gau was deliberately trying to harmonize himself with me. Some books on salesmanship recommend that persuaders try to mirror the posture or talking styles of their clients in order to establish rapport. But that’s been shown not to work. It makes people more uncomfortable, not less. It’s too obviously phony.

What we are talking about is a kind of super-reflex, a fundamental physiological ability of which we are barely aware. And like all specialized human traits, some people have much more mastery over this reflex than others. Part of what it means to have a powerful or persuasive personality, then, is that you can draw others into your own rhythms and dictate the terms of the interaction. In some studies, students who have a high degree of synchrony with their teachers are happier, more enthused, interested, and easygoing. What I felt with Gau was that I was being seduced, not in the sexual sense, of course, but in a global way, that our conversation was being conducted on his terms, not mine. I felt I was becoming synchronized with him. “Skilled musicians know this, and good speakers,” says Joseph Cappella, who teaches at the Annenberg

School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. "They know when the crowds are with them, literally in synchrony with them, in movements and nods and stillness in moments of attention." It is a strange thing to admit, because I didn't want to be drawn in. I was on guard against it. But the essence of Salesmen is that, on some level, they cannot be resisted. "Tom can build a level of trust and rapport in five to ten minutes that most people will take half an hour to do," Moine says of Gau.

There is another, more specific dimension to this. When two people talk, they don't just fall into physical and aural harmony. They also engage in what is called motor mimicry. If you show people pictures of a smiling face or a frowning face, they'll smile or frown back, although perhaps only in muscular changes so fleeting that they can only be captured with electronic sensors. If I hit my thumb with a hammer, most people watching will grimace: they'll mimic my emotional state. This is what is meant, in the technical sense, by empathy. We imitate each other's emotions as a way of expressing support and caring and, even more basically, as a way of communicating with each other.

In their brilliant 1994 book *Emotional Contagion*, the psychologists Elaine Hatfield and John Cacioppo and the historian Richard Rapson go one step further. Mimicry, they argue, is also one of the means by which we infect each other with our emotions. In other words, if I smile and you see me and smile in response — even a microsmile that takes no more than several milliseconds — it's not just you imitating or empathizing with me. It may also be a way that I can pass on my happiness to you. Emotion is contagious. In a way, this is perfectly intuitive. All of us

have had our spirits picked up by being around somebody in a good mood. If you think about this closely, though, it's quite a radical notion. We normally think of the expressions on our face as the reflection of an inner state. I feel happy, so I smile. I feel sad, so I frown. Emotion goes inside-out. Emotional contagion, though, suggests that the opposite is also true. If I can make you smile, I can make you happy. If I can make you frown, I can make you sad. Emotion, in this sense, goes outside-in.

If we think about emotion this way — as outside-in, not inside-out — it is possible to understand how some people can have an enormous amount of influence over others. Some of us, after all, are very good at expressing emotions and feelings, which means that we are far more emotionally contagious than the rest of us. Psychologists call these people "senders." Senders have special personalities. They are also physiologically different. Scientists who have studied faces, for example, report that there are huge differences among people in the location of facial muscles, in their form, and also — surprisingly — even in their prevalence. "It is a situation not unlike in medicine," says Cacioppo. "There are carriers, people who are very expressive, and there are people who are especially susceptible. It's not that emotional contagion is a disease. But the mechanism is the same."

Howard Friedman, a psychologist at the University of California at Riverside, has developed what he calls the Affective Communication Test to measure this ability to send emotion, to be contagious. The test is a self-administered survey, with thirteen questions relating to things like whether you can keep still when you hear good

dance music, how loud your laugh is, whether you touch friends when you talk to them, how good you are at sending seductive glances, whether you like to be the center of attention. The highest possible score on the test is 117 points, with the average score, according to Friedman, somewhere around 71.

What does it mean to be a high-scorer? To answer that, Friedman conducted a fascinating experiment. He picked a few dozen people who had scored very high on his test — above 90 — and a few dozen who scored very low — below 60 — and asked them all to fill out a questionnaire measuring how they felt “at this instant.” He then put all of the high-scorers in separate rooms, and paired each of them with two low-scorers. They were told to sit in the room together for two minutes. They could look at each other, but not talk. Then, once the session was over, they were asked again to fill out a detailed questionnaire on how they were feeling. Friedman found that in just two minutes, without a word being spoken, the low-scorers ended up picking up the moods of the high-scorers. If the charismatic person started out depressed, and the inexpressive person started out happy, by the end of the two minutes the inexpressive person was depressed as well. But it didn’t work the other way. Only the charismatic person could infect the other people in the room with his or her emotions.

Is this what Tom Gau did to me? The thing that strikes me most about my encounter with him was his voice. He had the range of an opera singer. At times, he would sound stern. (His favorite expression in that state: “Excuse me?”) At times, he would drawl, lazily and easily. At other times, he would chuckle as he spoke, making his words sing with

laughter. In each of those modes his face would light up accordingly, moving, easily and deftly, from one state to another. There was no ambiguity in his presentation. Everything was written on his face. I could not see my own face, of course, but my guess is that it was a close mirror of his. It is interesting, in this context, to think back on the experiment with the nodding and the headphones. There was an example of someone persuaded from the outside-in, of an external gesture affecting an internal decision. Was I nodding when Tom Gau nodded? And shaking my head when Gau shook his head? Later, I called Gau up and asked him to take Howard Friedman’s charisma test. As we went through the list, question by question, he started chuckling. By question 11 — “I am terrible at pantomime, as in games like charades” — he was laughing out loud. “I’m great at that! I always win at charades!” Out of a possible 117 points, he scored 116.

12.

In the early hours of April 19, 1775, the men of Lexington, Massachusetts, began to gather on the town common. They ranged in age from sixteen to sixty and were carrying a motley collection of muskets and swords and pistols. As the alarm spread that morning, their numbers were steadily swelled by groups of militia from the surrounding towns. Dedham sent four companies. In Lynn, men left on their own for Lexington. In towns further west that did not get the news until morning, farmers were in such haste to join the battle in Lexington that they literally left their plows in the fields. In many towns, virtually the whole

male population was mustered for the fight. The men had no uniforms, so they wore ordinary clothes: coats to ward off the early morning chill and large-brimmed hats.

As the colonists rushed toward Lexington, the British Regulars (as they were known) were marching in formation toward the town as well. By dawn, the advancing soldiers could see figures all around them in the half-light, armed men running through the surrounding fields, outpacing the British in their rush to get to Lexington. As the Regulars neared the town center, they could hear drums beating in the distance. Finally the British came upon Lexington Common and the two sides met face-to-face: several hundred British soldiers confronting less than a hundred militia. In that first exchange, the British got the best of the colonists, gunning down seven militiamen in a brief flurry of gunshots on the common. But that was only the first of what would be several battles that day. When the British moved on to Concord, to systematically search for the cache of guns and ammunition they had been told was stored there, they would clash with the militia again, and this time they would be soundly defeated. This was the beginning of the American Revolution, a war that before it was over would claim many lives and consume the entire American colony. When the American colonists declared independence the following year, it would be hailed as a victory for an entire nation. But that is not the way it began. It began on a cold spring morning, with a word-of-mouth epidemic that spread from a little stable boy to all of New England, relying along the way on a small number of very special people: a few Salesmen and a man with the particular genius of both a Maven and a Connector.