We're In This Together

Connection & purpose for food & beverage, built into the product, not the ad.

Connection Facts

Per table, first meal to fiftieth

Made to share	Yes
Eating alone	Still welcome
Purpose	In the product
Claims	Proven
Seats	Everyone at the table

Contains no cause-washing.

The fourth in a series taking The Joy Dividend into practice, and the last step of the sequence: deepen with purpose.

ON THE TITLE

The book's promise for this lever, word for word. Easy to print on a pack. Harder to build into one.

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OPENING

One in four Americans ate every meal of the day alone.

That's from the World Happiness Report 2025, using the American Time Use Survey: in 2023, roughly one in four Americans reported eating all of their meals alone the previous day, up 53% since 2003.[1] The same chapter found that sharing meals is "an exceptionally strong indicator of subjective wellbeing – on par with income and unemployment." The authors call it an association: they can't yet say whether shared meals make people happier or happier people share more meals.[1]

Food is the oldest connection technology there is. The category spent decades making it easier to use alone: single serves, desk lunches, breakfast in the car. No. 01 would defend most of that.

This paper is about the other half of the job. Every food ad sells togetherness. Far fewer products are designed for it.

Put the connection in the product, not the ad.



The oldest connection technology.

01

THE ORDER

Purpose comes last. That's what makes it last.

The Joy Dividend runs in a fixed order: remove noise, layer delight, deepen with purpose. In the book's words, at this final step "community and meaning convert momentary highs into durable attachment." That's the order in which customers come to care, not the order a product gets built. Purpose belongs in the brief from the first day, because it shapes formulation, sourcing and format.

STEP 1 · NO. 01	STEP 2 · NOS. 02–03	STEP 3 · THIS PAPER
Remove noise	**Layer delight**	**Deepen with purpose**
The Calm Advantage	Playful Design, then Surprise & Delight	Connection & Purpose

The lever's promise is the title of this paper: "We're in this together." Its job is to build belonging and shared meaning. It addresses social isolation and the meaning deficit, and it works through community and impact, the route to bonds that last.

Three different things get blurred under this lever, and they work differently: enjoying food together, belonging to a brand, and supporting what it stands for. A product can deliver the first without the other two. This paper takes them in that order.

Eating together
The table.

Belonging
The brand.

Purpose
What it stands for.

The guard rail for this step is the authenticity test. Any gap between message and practice "will be immediately detected and rejected, especially by younger consumers." A mission statement on a pack that won't open is a joke on the customer.

02

THE TABLE

Similar food builds trust. So does a shared plate.

In a survey of 2,000 UK adults, Dunbar found that people who eat socially more often "feel happier and are more satisfied with life," are "more trusting of others" and "have more friends they can depend on for support."[2] His path analysis points from eating together to feeling bonded, though a survey can't settle cause.

Woolley and Fishbach went further. Strangers assigned to eat similar foods trusted each other more in a trust game, and cooperated more in a labor negotiation, earning more money.[3] Observers read pairs eating similar foods as more trusting, but not pairs wearing similar colored shirts.

Then the plate. Across three studies with 1,476 people, diners who shared a plate "cooperated more in social dilemmas and negotiations than those eating from separate plates."[4]

For product teams, that turns two old decisions into connection decisions. Formulation decides how many people at the table can share the dish. Sharing doesn't require identical diets, but every avoidable exclusion takes someone out of it. Format decides whether there's anything to share.

CONNECTION MOVES

Reduce the exclusions that make sharing hard: an allergen, a heat level, an ingredient half the table avoids.
Design for the middle of the table: a format that passes, pours, or splits.
Keep the single serve good. Sharing is an opportunity, not a requirement.

03

RITUALS

A ritual makes the same chocolate worth more.

$0.59

what people would pay for chocolate eaten with a ritual[5]

$0.34

for the same chocolate without one[5]

Vohs, Wang, Gino and Norton gave people a chocolate bar and, for half of them, a ritual: break it in half without unwrapping it, unwrap one half and eat it, then the other. The ritual group enjoyed the chocolate more and would have paid more for it, $0.59 against $0.34.[5]

Two details matter for product teams. A short delay before eating made the ritual more enjoyable still, and doing a ritual yourself beat watching someone else do it.[5]

On its own, that's enjoyment and value, not belonging: people did the ritual by themselves. It becomes connection when it's shared. Done the same way by everyone at the table, or recognized by everyone at the bar, a private habit turns into a tradition. That's why Rituals & Traditions is one of the five pillars of the Community Strength Framework.

Guinness built a public one. It calls its draught pour “our famous ‘two-part’ pour”: fill three-quarters, let the surge settle, then top up. Diageo's bar-training site puts the perfect pint at 119.5 seconds.[6] The wait is part of the product, and it happens in front of everyone.

CONNECTION MOVES
Give the product a sequence people can repeat, and make their own.
Build in a short wait where the anticipation pays.
Let people do the ritual, not watch it in an ad.



Break it, then unwrap it.

04

BELONGING

Belong to something, and be seen in it.

The book's Connection Matrix crosses community with personalization. The prize is the top right, where people feel "both part of something meaningful and personally recognized."

THE CONNECTION MATRIX, TRANSLATED FOR FOOD

	LOW PERSONALIZATION	HIGH PERSONALIZATION
STRONG COMMUNITY	**One of Us** Fans with a shared identity, and no faces.	**Best of Both Worlds** Your name on the bottle, and someone to hand it to.
WEAK COMMUNITY	**Anonymous Transaction** A shelf of identical boxes. Most of the category.	**VIP Treatment** A personalized order nobody else ever sees.

Coca-Cola's Share a Coke started in Australia in 2011, with the 150 most popular names printed on bottles. Coca-Cola says it sold more than 250 million named bottles and cans there, in a country of just under 23 million people.[7] The name made it personal. The word "share" pointed it at someone else. That's recognition plus a gesture, not community on its own: nobody who bought a bottle had to talk to anyone else who did.

Co-creation goes a step further, because customers shape the product itself: the Governance & Influence pillar of the Community Strength Framework. Lay's Do Us a Flavor asked Americans to invent a chip flavor, for $1 million or 1% of the winner's sales, whichever was higher, and drew nearly 3.8 million submissions in under three months.[8]

05

PURPOSE

Sustainability is a growth line. Proof is the price of entry.

44.9%

of U.S. branded CPG growth, 2013–2025, came from products marketed as sustainable[9]

42%

of green claims screened by EU authorities looked exaggerated, false or deceptive[10]

NYU Stern's Center for Sustainable Business tracks U.S. branded consumer goods across 36 categories. Products marketed as sustainable reached a 25.4% market share and grew 10.9% a year over five years, against 2.2% for their conventional counterparts. From 2013 to 2025 they delivered 44.9% of the market's growth.[9] That's sustainability, one kind of purpose, and the index tracks growth alongside the claim. It doesn't isolate the claim as the cause.

The proof is where it breaks. When EU consumer authorities screened 344 green claims, they had reason to believe 42% were "exaggerated, false or deceptive." In 59% of cases, the company hadn't provided easily accessible evidence.[10]

One loyalty program in the book shows where demand can sit. There, the incentives the company expected to be least popular, sustainability, social responsibility and sharing, attracted the highest demand.

PURPOSE MOVES

Put the purpose where the product can prove it: sourcing, formulation, format, end of life.

Publish the numbers, including the ones that don't flatter you.

Make it visible in use, not only on the back panel.

06

WORKED EXAMPLE

Tony's put the problem in the bar.

Tony's Chocolonely divides its bars into unequal chunks. Its own explanation: "It doesn't make sense for chocolate bars to be divided into equal-sized chunks when there is so much inequality in the chocolate industry!"[11] The purpose isn't on the back panel. It's in every piece you break off.

3,448

cases of child labor Tony's says it found in its own supply chain, 2024/25[11]

Then it publishes the numbers a brand chasing a clean story would bury. In its 2024/25 Annual FAIR Report, Tony's says it found 3,448 cases of child labor in its supply chain and closed 813, with every case in remediation. It credits the finds to expanding monitoring, which now covers 93.7% of the households it works with, so a higher count partly measures better detection. At its longest-term partner cooperatives, it reports child-labor rates below 5% for five years running.[11]

CHILD-LABOR RATES, AS REPORTED BY TONY'S



Tony's own figures, 2024/25 Annual FAIR Report. Tony's doesn't publish the year, population or source behind the industry average, so read this as a contrast, not a matched comparison.

In 2019 it launched Tony's Open Chain, an industry initiative to end exploitation in cocoa, and counts 20+ Mission Allies.[11] It also doesn't pretend to pass every test. In 2021 it was removed from one list of ethical chocolate makers because it works with Barry Callebaut. It answered in public: it chose that partnership "to show that it is possible to be fully traceable."[11]

07

THE JOURNEY

Connection belongs at the table, and in the proof.

The eight stages from No. 01 still apply. Connection shows up most where people eat together and where they come back. Purpose gets tested at the two ends: the claim on the shelf and the empty package.

HOW MUCH CONNECTION, STAGE BY STAGE

STAGE	CONNECTION	WHERE IT FITS
A Need and occasion	**High**	The shared occasion: dinner, the office, the holiday table. And the solo one, designed with the same care.
B The shelf or the screen	**Some**	One purpose claim, provable in one line.
C The trip	**Low**	Where sourcing claims are earned, not advertised.
D The threshold	**Some**	A pack people are glad to put on the table.
E Open and prepare	**Some**	Cooking together, when it's chosen and finishable.
F Consumption	**High**	The same food for everyone, from a plate in the middle.
G Every return	**High**	Rituals, traditions, and recognition of the tenth order.
H The empty package	**Some**	Where purpose claims get checked. Make disposal match the promise.

A guide for product teams, not a measurement.

08

GUARD RAILS

Four ways connection goes wrong.

This is the lever where audiences are quickest to smell a fake.

It's cause-washing.

The authenticity test is a guard rail for a reason. A cause on the pack with no change in the product is a claim waiting to be checked, and the EU's screen flagged 42% of the green claims it examined.[10]

It's community in name only.

Calling customers a community doesn't make them one. In the Community Strength Framework, a community needs meaningful interaction: regular, valuable exchanges between members, not just between a brand and its followers.

It forgets the person eating alone.

One in four Americans ate every meal alone on a given day in 2023.[1] A brand that only sells togetherness tells them the product isn't for them. The single serve deserves the same care as the family pack.

It's surveillance.

Personalization creates recognition only when it feels like help. The line between help and intrusion is the reaction: “that's exactly what I needed” moments versus “how did they know that?” discomfort.

09

THE REVIEW

Eight questions before you call it a community.

If the answer to the first one is no, go back to No. 01.

- [ ] Is the product calm before we ask anyone to belong?
- [ ] Can everyone at the table eat the same thing?
- [ ] Is there a format to share, and a good one for one?
- [ ] What's the ritual, and can people make it their own?
- [ ] Where do customers get to shape the product?
- [ ] Is the purpose in the product, or only on the pack?
- [ ] Can we prove every claim, including the unflattering numbers?
- [ ] Would a customer call it “ours” without being asked?



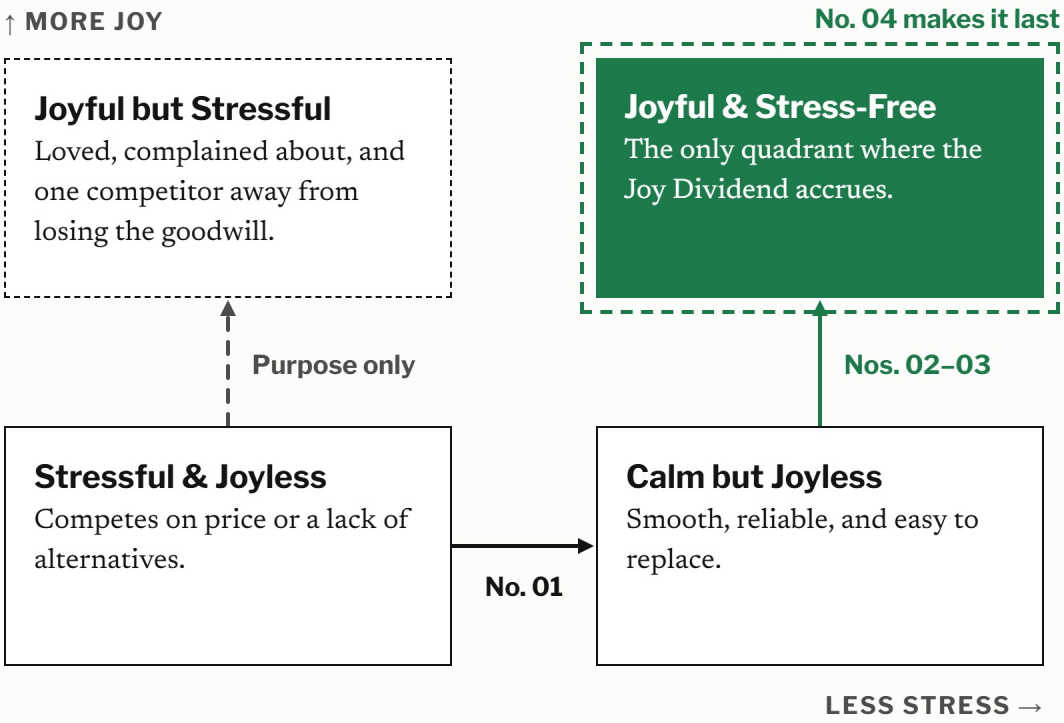
A table for one is still a table.

10

THE WHOLE SEQUENCE

Calm, then delight, then belonging. In that order.

Purpose on top of friction lives in Joyful but Stressful: admired, complained about, and one competitor away from losing the goodwill. Connection is what keeps a calm, delightful product in the only quadrant where the Joy Dividend accrues.



The Joy–Stress Matrix. No. 01 removes noise. Nos. 02 and 03 layer delight. No. 04 deepens with purpose, so the move holds. Purpose on its own goes up, and stays stressful.

That completes the sequence for food and beverage. It's the order in which customers come to care, not the order of the brief, where purpose belongs from day one. Next: the same four levers in beauty.

Connection isn't a campaign. It's who the food is for.

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