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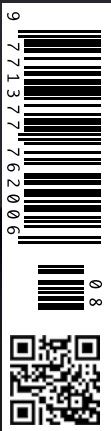
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#PINKSOCKS: CHANGING THE
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#Pinksocks: Changing the World With Heart Speak, Hugs and Gifting

Nick Adkins

Founder
#pinksocks

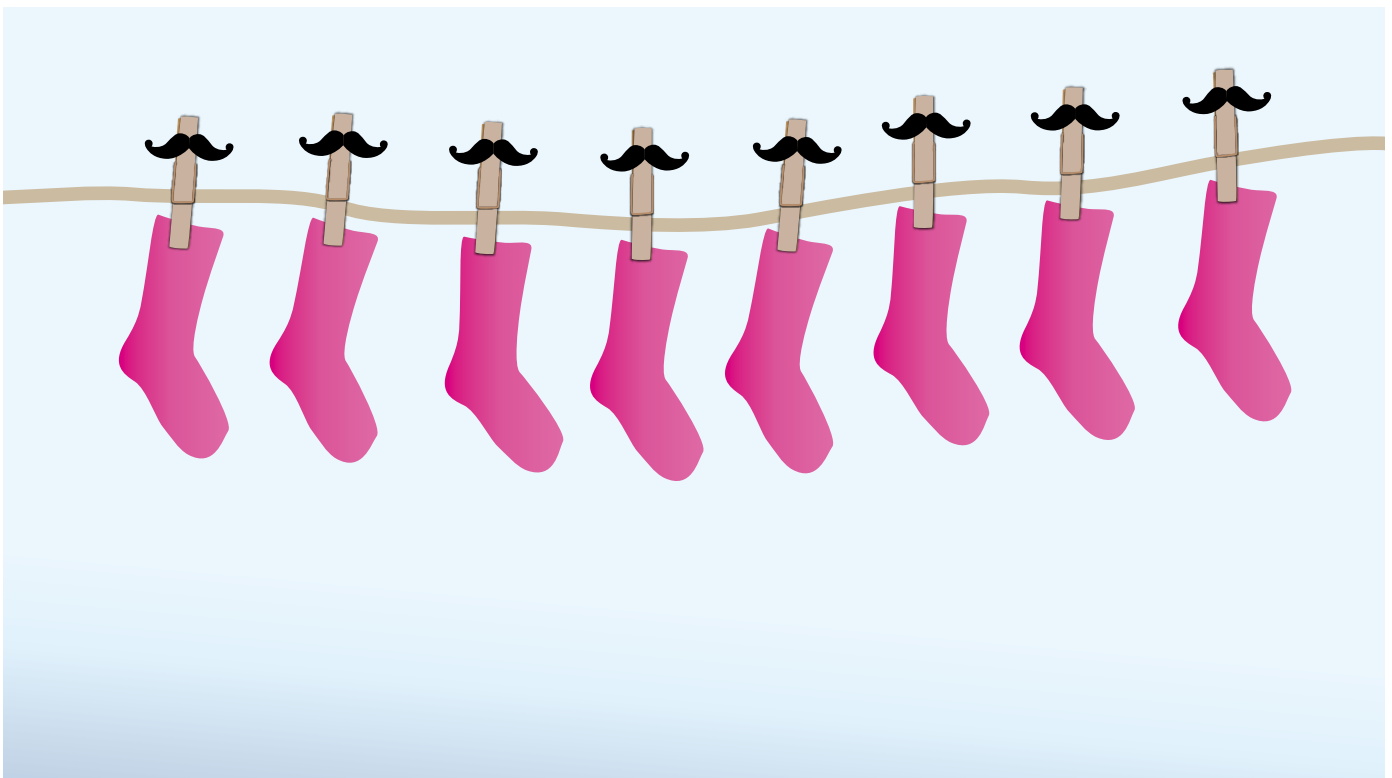
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Summary: HealthManagement spoke to Nick Adkins, founder of #pinksocks, a movement that began in healthcare and spreading like wildfire in all industries by activating people to connect by sharing each other's stories with compassion and empathy to work together as one.



What does it mean to be part of the pink socks tribe?

It means there's a bunch of happy smiling people around the world trying to do good things to make the world a better place. The label on the socks says the world is full of good and when you believe that, you see it. We're making a choice to focus on the good positive things and celebrate them. It doesn't take a lot of effort to focus on the negative. What does take effort is people who are full of light and love and

joy. To rise above the negative stuff and to be a voice and echo for good positive and happy things. When you follow the #pinksocks hashtag on Twitter, it's a steady stream of happy stories. People post things that have to do with kindness and love and empathy. It started in healthcare but it's transcended healthcare.

When I give people their pinksocks in person I say you can't always control governance and politics, but what we can control is how we interact with

people. One person at a time, one smile at a time, one pair of pinksocks at a time. Every time you wear them, you connect with somebody new because somebody sees those in the market or on the train or bus and they comment on it. That's the universe tapping you on the shoulder and giving you an opportunity to connect with someone. If you were not wearing the pinksocks that day you would have missed that.

You stop doing what you were doing, get off your phone, stay and introduce

yourself and in that moment of connection you see each other just as you are—as fellow humans. You don't know them, what their job title is, where they work, what they have or don't have. In that moment we see each other and realise that we're all trying to get through this moment together. That's the real message of pinksocks—we're all in this together and we will focus on what's good. Digital stuff has made us so connected that we've become disconnected. Pinksocks allows us to have a real connection.

How did the pinksocks movement begin?

It's from the principle of gifting that the pinksocks were born. I started wearing kilts in 2012 and when you wear a kilt, you have to wear fun socks. My friend, and co-founder at a healthtech startup, Andrew Richards (@andrewintech) and I were on a business trip to San Francisco. There was an older couple from Israel we met at the hotel one morning over coffee. The husband's name was Shlomo and he had one of the most contagious smiles! He was crazy about the robot monkey socks I was wearing. I had a new pair in my bag that I hadn't worn yet, so I gave them to him as a gift. And, I remembered I felt—how amazing the connection between two people can be from gifting!

So it all began by accident—I started giving them away. Andrew and I we packed our bags full of what had turned out to be the crowd favourites every time I wore them – the pinksocks with the moustaches. Every time someone came up to us and commented on our socks- we gave them a pair of pinksocks. When I gift the socks, I always look the other person in the eyes and say, Every time you wear your pinksocks you're going to make people smile! People will come up to you and ask you about your pinksocks. That's your opportunity to connect with another person that had you not have been wearing your pinksocks that day, the two of you would have missed each other in the universe.

Don't miss that moment to connect and share space! Get off your bike, stay on the train or bus for another stop, look each other in the eyes and connect. That's what we're here for! Don't miss each of those moments!

The pinksocks aren't about one company, brand, logo or mission. There's no money in them. They are just a fun gift. Someone gifted your socks to you and somebody gifted those socks to them. There is probably only one or two degrees of separation from where your pinksocks came from. It's really

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awesome to see how it's grown since 2015. Three and half years roughly and over 40,000 people around the world who have gifted pinksocks.

We had the conferences for a year and had a great time on Twitter with it. I was like let's just be done. Kind of like Elvis. There's young Elvis and there's fat old Elvis. And I was like let the pinksocks go out as young Elvis.

Somebody reached out to me on Twitter and said, “did you send some picksocks to this group over in the Netherlands?” There's a group that's gifting pinksocks to help increase awareness for dementia care and Alzheimer's. We got another message a group in Wales that's gifting pinksocks for drug awareness for the work they're doing for ataxia, which is a rare disease. At that point we knew we had gone organic and people were sourcing pinksocks and gifting them on their own to celebrate whatever work they were doing. And people on Twitter were starting to follow, like, tweet and retweet #pinksocks. The next thing you know, it's a thing.

Are there any standout cases where pinksocks has effected change in the healthcare setting?

If you look at hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, start-ups, IT companies, everything, it's not really that the pinksocks are effecting the change, but that people who have pinksocks connect with each other. Like attracts like. I encourage people to give pinksocks as a gift. It's about wearing them, gifting them; wear a pair, gift a pair. Don't walk up to someone and say I would like to give you these. Wait for the person to say, “cool socks.” When that happens, the pinksocks have just found their next person. All of these people said I want to think outside the box, I want to be celebrated, I want to be part of this, I want people to know I am doing this.

In healthcare you have burnout, and the phenomenon of professionals just becoming machines, just performing the task. There was another movement “Hello my name is” movement because it's come to the point that professionals don't even introduce themselves to patients. Has the pinksocks movement inspired them or created even a small shift in their approach?

Yes, pinksocks helps start a conversation in small organisations and very large global organisations, primarily around empathy and connection and kindness and there's a lot of conversation on physician burnout. I've seen the pinksocks in different groups be a catalyst to say hey it's okay that you're not okay. That you want to talk about this. The connection with the person you have, we're all just trying to survive this thing. I've been in talks where we break into spontaneous hugging, I have seen people cry. Each time I go somewhere I know that at least one person that I have never met before, at least one person, is going to come up to me and they'll say, “I need to tell you a story,” and I will look them right in the eye, and I will get a little closer to them, and I will say, “I need to hear a story.”

And they'll tell me stories: my wife just died of cancer, I just found out I have stage 4 cancer, my son just had to go to rehab, my daughter just killed herself. A stranger that I've never met is telling me the most intimate, heart-wrenching story of their life. That's the power of connection and it took a pair of pinksocks to do that.

There's over 40,000 people that have pinksocks, and then there are other people who make badges and buttons, if we could build just one connection a day, if we meet five people a day, stop and connect with that person, ten, oh we're almost at half a million people creating good energy, love. I mean can that effect change? Does that have a ripple effect? Is there some exponential piece to that? Absolutely! And so when you blow it out, it's not really about healthcare. It's about humanity. It's about you and me. It's about all of us. In the beginning it was the pinksocks but now you've trained yourself, retrained yourself to think, I need to talk to this person, I need to say hi, I need to listen to their story.

There are a couple of things that help the movement spread. One is that it is totally decommodified. It's not about money, it's not about one brand logo, mission, no sponsorships, no corporate stuff on this. It's all about gifting. There is no one definition as to what it is so it can be what you need it to be. It's fluid and dynamic and so you watch it just grow and thrive at its own will.

You're involved with artificial intelligence (AI) and AI powered medical research. There's this whole debate about AI versus humans especially in healthcare. How has pinksocks shaped your point of view?

I don't really know if pinksocks has influenced this but there will be functions where AI will replace humans altogether. We're not going to see that in our lifetime, but definitely AI is going to augment a lot of work, and it should. There's no reason why we shouldn't be using technology to its fullest to help us. There are so many awesome things that

AI can do right now and it's only growing exponentially. I'm a huge fan of AI.

You say that we've allowed tech to get in the way versus using it as a tool. Do you think there will be harmony using tech as a tool and enhancing it with empathy?

Look up #applewon on Twitter and you will see that Apple is already doing that here in the U.S. Everything we've been talking about for years, about getting rid of fax machines, and finding an easy way for patients to communicate with their families and their care team. Apple is already doing that. The harmony is already there. So I tell people if I have to go to a hospital, take me to one that has partnered with Apple.

Empathy. Saying yes. Disconnecting, giving yourself permission to see each other, to hear each other, to feel somebody else's story or see someone feel your story. Have you seen this applied in healthcare?

I see stories. I read stories. I hear stories in person. I read things on Twitter. I see doctors wearing pinksocks, nurses wearing pinksocks. It lightens the mood. They can begin a conversation and change the tone of the conversation, encounter or meeting. In a way sometimes it's so simple, it's surprising. A simple pair of pinksocks can change the attitude of a room. If you're an executive and you come in and everybody is dressed like a bunch of bankers, in suits and all of a sudden you have these bright pinksocks popping out, it changes the energy. It takes it from being so serious to lighten up and really talk. Get to what matters. Let's get out of our head and more into our heart. Let's just talk as humans. What we really want to talk about is what's real for you in your life. Pinksocks starts off that conversation a lot of times.

If you're planning a trip and you search #pinksocks and whatever city, country, Denver, London, Paris, New Zealand, etc., you will find your tribe there. People are having pinksocks

meetups all around the world. Not just conferences. They just get together. All these like minded people that are out there. People will see each other hugging and smiling and people will come up and ask hey what's going on here and they will say we're the pinksocks tribe and they will give them pinksocks and so it goes on. It's really awesome to watch.

You say there's a difference between having the socks and wearing the socks. What is it?

I stole that from Morpheus in The Matrix: "There's a difference between knowing the path and walking the path." There's a difference between having pinksocks and wearing pinksocks. Someone gifts you pinksocks. You may take a picture on Twitter holding your pinksocks and tweet that. Yeah that's fun. But the real magic comes when you wear them. Because every time you wear them you're going to have a connection with someone new.

And, it's also making a statement to yourself: "I am going to be an agent of change. I'm going to wear these pinksocks and go out in the world and make some connections." ■