



Great leaders connect with their hearts

Everyone communicates in business. Not everyone makes connections. When we communicate without connection, our engagement with others is merely a transaction driven from the head. Communication with connection means that we go beyond a transaction at a head level, to experiencing a moment where we see each other as human beings. It means that we become a vulnerable and caring human being in the situation, and we appreciate that we are dealing with another human being. It means that we go beyond head connection to a more human connection, including heart. Great leaders and influencers connect with gut, head and heart – they create moments of human connection every day.

So why is connection relevant in the business context? Are we not most successful when we are strategic, rational, tough, bottom-line business people who focus on results? Modern psychology and neuroscience research shows that an integral part of human nature is that we need real human connection to thrive in the same way that we need healthy food and exercise. This is not just true in our personal life. It is also true in the world of business. It becomes even truer in our current complex and turbulent environment.

Communication without connection may make things happen and get results in the short-term, but long-term it results in a disengaged workplace. It is when we feel connected to the people in our workplace that we feel connected to our organisation.

What happens when we enrich our business communication with moments of human connection?

- Trust increases in the relationship. We do not trust leaders and colleagues that deliver reliable and credible results in a robotic, uncaring and detached manner. Trust grows when we know that we are dealing with a caring human being who consistently delivers results. Without trust, we cannot influence or lead.
- We spontaneously feel more warmth and caring. We authentically treat each other with more compassion without having to rely on interpersonal techniques or pretence.
- It creates a safe space where people start to communicate more openly and we get access to more relevant information. People start dropping their defences and opening up.

- Research shows that when people feel a moment of human connection with a leader, significant changes happen in their brains. The parts of the brain associated with motivating learning and behavioural change quite literally "light up" in the context of a safe relationship.
- Moments of human connection help us to deal with stress and fatigue as they stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system associated with relaxation.
- Moments of human connection help the brain make specific connections that are associated with happiness, amusement, and feeling "excited, enthusiastic and interested".
- In general it has been shown that people respond much better to a colleague and a leader they find inspiring and who makes contact on a human level, rather than one who they perceive to be judging, pushing or driving them.
- Connection is our nature. All human beings need real human connection to be fully productive and happy. Quantity and quality of human connections are one of the best predictors of human happiness and health. Happy and healthy people are more productive at work and better leaders of the business and others.
- We all intuitively know that small moments can make a big difference. When our teams and our colleagues believe that we care about them as human beings on a day to day basis, they will be more likely to go the extra mile for us or go to war with us when the chips are down.

Moments of real human connection matter. It matters to the person reaching out to connect, as well as to the person receiving the invitation to engage at a human level for a few seconds amidst a busy programme. It takes our web of communication at work from black and white to Technicolor, from merely coping with what we need to do, to growing, learning and enjoying.

If you think about the best leaders, managers, sales people and team members that you have worked with, you will probably find that in most cases they have that ability to make you feel that they see you as a human being. In fact, when people talk about their best coaches, mentors and inspiring leaders, they often refer to the sense that this person believed in them even more than they believed in themselves. This person saw more of them -potential, hidden abilities – than was obvious on the surface, more than what they themselves were aware of.

So what would happen if from today you could slow down time a little bit in your engagement with others to pause for a moment and really see the human being that you are dealing with, before rushing to conclude the transaction? To make it very practical, what if you could pause for a moment before engaging on the task, take a few seconds to see the human that you are dealing with, and connect briefly. This can be through eye contact, a smile or an informal exchange.

Bringing moments of connection into daily communication and interaction take choice and courage. It does not necessarily happen spontaneously, especially when we are under pressure. Speed, distraction, and narrow focus are the enemies of nearly everything that matters most in our lives. Creating long-term value - for ourselves and for others - requires moving beyond mere transactions to authentic connection between human beings. That is leadership in action.

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