



“We don’t accomplish anything in this world alone ... and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one’s life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another that creates something.” - Sandra Day O’Connor

I am a believer in the power of human connection. For the last twenty-five years I have built a profession and my own business around that power. Truly connecting with people has introduced me to fascinating people who constantly teach me new things. The power of connection has allowed me to grow my consulting services primarily through referrals for over twenty years.

We know that research confirms that the human connection is fundamental to our well-being. It promotes physical health. It is good for our spirits and essential for family health. It is also crucial to the web of business relationships. A true story (one of many in my experience) makes the case. During my treatment for cancer in 2008, I had to travel for work to Austin, Texas. It would be an understatement to say that I did not want to go! My joints ached from the chemo cocktail being administered and I was stuck in self-pity. I arrived at my SW Airlines gate before the sun was up in a grouchy, grumpy mood. Sitting next to me on the window seat was a woman who greeted me warmly. As she engaged me, I slowly relaxed and lightened up. We quickly discovered that we had shared similar health challenges. My spirits lightened. A new energy was present, at least in our row. We had discovered we were not alone. We were connected. As I walked off the plane in a much different mood than I had arrived with, I noticed a lovely woman talking on her cell phone. She was elegantly dressed and had a pleasant countenance. I smiled. She smiled back as she finished her phone call. No words were exchanged – but a connection began. Guess who was seated next to me on the flight to Austin? This very woman! Stacey, we’ll call her, and I began to have dialogue. She talked freely about career frustrations and her desire for change. She shared that she was looking for an executive coach. Then she asked about my profession. We both laughed out loud as she discovered that executive coaching was one of the services my firm offered. Two weeks later, she became a client and a friendship developed as a result of our work together.

Today we are often “hyper connected strangers” in spite of the World Wide Web and the plethora of social networking tools. Many people report that they feel strangely disconnected. We know about others as we share vast quantities of information (including what someone ate for breakfast on their daily blog or “tweetings” on their current whereabouts). But we can live under the same roof, across the street or across the hall or the cube for years and not know anything about the true condition of another person’s heart or soul. I think we’ve mistaken tools that help us share information for authentic connectedness. So what’s to be done? Here are three

practical principles that help me as well as four questions to ponder for the month of May:

Be authentic. Judy Garland once said, “I’d rather be a first class version of myself than a second class version of someone else.” Our culture conspires to squeeze individuals into a one-size fits all box. We quickly find ourselves in the dance of trying to be someone or something we’re not. People pick up cues immediately when we aren’t really being our truest selves and this inhibits a true connection. A simple example was I as a young professional. I love color, beauty and being a woman. But, early in my career I conformed in the late 70’s with a dress-for-success style, chopping off my hair, wearing little makeup and (horrors!) adopting the floppy tie thing with a uniformed and masculine style suit. It was awkward and totally inconsistent with my true personality. I dress professionally now for the work I do, but I also dress in a way that expresses my love of style, femininity and color. As a result, I am more comfortable and more aligned within myself, which greatly enables true connection.

Be of service first. It is human nature to enter into a conversation with our own needs top of mind. This creates a very self-oriented, transactional context. Instead, try approaching new people and potential relationships as an opportunity to be of service. Shift your questions, approach and even non-verbal behavior from “getting to giving.” The difference is beyond powerful. It creates a positive dynamic where the other person, due to the law of reciprocity, sincerely wants to know about you. Sharing and deeper dialogue is much more likely to occur.

Be curious. When you enter into a conversation with a curious mind and heart, it engages people. This does not mean to barrage people with endless questioning (my teenagers have taught me that this is interrogation!) Being curious about others puts the focus in the right place – on them and on learning. Possibilities increase for a much higher quality interaction. This mindset makes a huge difference for me, and has resulted in finding new clients and making friendships in a grocery store line, at a baby shower or a business event.

Ideas for Insight and Action

1 - What factors could be causing you to be unaware of opportunities to connect? What could you do to increase your attentiveness this week?

2 - Make up an experiment of your own that “pushes” you towards people without being “pushy”. (“Pushy” is something most of us fear.) What “game” could you play that would be instructive for you and a contribution to others?

3 - If you struggle to initiate conversations, have a quick list of conversation starters. Have some quick ideas to get a connection and conversation rolling. It soon will become habit. Really.

- What is your greatest joy right now?
- What keeps you awake at night?
- What problem, if you could solve it, would “change the game” for you?
- If all your responsibilities cancelled and you had a day to do whatever you wanted – what would you do?
- What hopes have been realized in your life?
- What hopes have yet to be realized in your life?

4 - When you listen to others, listen for needs that may not be expressed directly. That’s a surefire method to connect. The world is “over talked and under listened to.” Listening deeply will distinguish you and cause you to learn more than you might imagine!



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