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Leadership: Three Key Employee-Centered Elements With Case Studies

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Prologue: Connection

Bill Clinton is highlighted in this chapter on “Connection” as a person who understands and has mastered the ability to connect. As a formal or informal leader in your unit, you have constant opportunity to create strong connections that directly affect the team’s spirit, cohesiveness, quality, and success.

In the preceding chapter, “connection” represents the first of the three key employee-centered leadership elements. A “connection” is defined as “the intangible but undeniable emotional or intellectual ‘bond’ between people.”

I prefer the word “bond” when defining “connection” because it implies considerable overlap and depth—a professional intimacy. Nevertheless, many dictionaries describe the connection as a “link,” which creates a useful pictorial metaphor—the linked chain. The strength of the links determines the strength of the chain. The strength of the personal and professional connections determines the strength of the work unit, whether that work unit is in a community pharmacy, a hospital pharmacy, a satellite pharmacy, a research facility, or a school of pharmacy.

In almost any pharmacy setting, each staff member has the ability to create a pair of links. A front-line leader, with formal responsibility and authority, must connect with his/her staff. He/she must also connect with his/her boss, often, a regional manager, an assistant director, or director of pharmacy. A pharmacist or technician, who assumes informal responsibility and authority, must connect with his/her colleagues (first link) and the front-line leader (second link).

The third link is the link between the leader’s employees or colleagues **and** the boss, similar to a parent’s link between a child and a grandparent. However, in personal life, the child and grandparent often establish their own connection, whereas, in organizational life, the link is much more dependent on the integrity of the intermediate link.

Serving as the intermediate link between the two adjacent links, the front-line leader plays a vital role in ensuring that the employees and colleagues understand the larger organization’s vision, mission, goals, and challenges and that

the boss understands the accomplishments, needs, anxieties, stresses, goals, and challenges of the staff. If this happens, the chain strengthens, and multiple levels of hierarchy begin to act as one.

During my tenure as Director of Pharmacy the University of Maryland Medical Center, I wrote a daily newsletter—the “Positive Quote + (plus).” The purpose of the “Positive Quote +” was three-fold: to connect, to inform, and to inspire. The “Positive Quote +” commenced with a motivational or inspiration quotation, preferably one that pertained to recent, present, or future departmental activities or challenges.

Only a few quotations were repeated. For the quotation to be repeated, its message had to be universal and profound. It had to resonate deeply with the staff. One example is Woodrow Wilson’s quotation that addresses a professional’s purpose: “You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand.”

Each morning’s quote was followed by personnel-related and department-related announcements; therefore, all staff members were informed of any activity that affected the entire department or a significant portion of the department. Examples include:

- A list of select absentee personnel, such as the buyer or the departmental scheduler, to alleviate the frustration of searching for an absentee co-worker;
- A review of expectations and timelines for personnel-related activities, such as completing training modules or getting vaccinated;
- Summaries of challenges and how the department planned to tackle them;
- Reminders of meetings and educational activities, including journal clubs;
- A list of that day’s guests, including surveyors, inspectors, or visitors; and
- Computer updates, including the ever-appreciated daylight savings time reminders.

Each morning, shortly after I sent the “Positive Quote +,” I received responses. Some staff members shared the significance of the quotation to their personal or professional lives. One common opening would be, “Marc, this morning’s quotation is relevant to me. I feel that it was directed to me. Just yesterday, my wife and I . . .” Some staff members would forward a question or comment regarding one of the announcements. Some would forward suggestions.

The “Positive Quote +” served as a deceptively potent link between me and each staff member—a personal link using an impersonal medium. The “Positive Quote +” also linked staff members to each other because all became aware of the same information at about the same time; in other words, an informational lasso was cast that encircled every member of the department. Also, local connections were made because pairs or groups often discussed the quotations or the material.

The four enabling connection behaviors discussed in the chapter, relating to Bill Clinton, include 1. “He remembered your name.” 2. “He called you by name.” 3. “He made deep eye contact with you.” 4. “Listening.” and 5. “Caring.”

The “Positive Quote +” example above demonstrates that not all connection situations, especially in our electronic age, enable the use of all four behaviors. The time and effort invested daily in the “Positive Quote +” symbolizes the “caring” behavior. Additionally, pro-actively addressing staff questions or suggestions via the “Positive Quote +” or answering e-mails subsequent to distribution demonstrates to ability to “listen” and respond.

Chapter 2: Connection

*communication • coordination • coaching • consideration
commitment • collaboration • confrontation • cohesiveness*

Connection combats anonymity and irrelevance.

In 1992, an obscure governor from a poor and sparsely populated state navigated the Democratic Party’s primaries successfully and was on a trajectory to the presidency. Few citizens and political experts predicted this, except Governor Clinton himself and perhaps, Hillary, his wife.

It appears that Bill Clinton was “driving change” by following the change triad:

- Creating a vision (to be president)
- Having confidence in the vision and in himself to execute the vision
- Acting on that vision

On a fall evening in 1992, Clinton stood on the stage at the University of Richmond in Virginia at the second of three debates with his prime contenders: President George H.W. Bush and businessman Ross Perot.

In one widely publicized exchange, Clinton so outmaneuvered his opponents, especially President Bush, that in the span of several minutes, he catapulted himself into a position to win the election. He did this by connecting with a young lady who had asked a provocative question. While doing so, he was simultaneously connecting with millions of Americans, who then viewed him in an entirely different light. This obscure governor from Arkansas, a state whose commonly known favorite sons included only Brooks Robinson, Johnny Cash, and Glen Campbell, transformed his image from an ambitious, little known, long-winded upstart into an intelligent, charismatic, credible presidential hopeful.

The exchange began with the young lady asking the candidates how the national debt affected them personally. First, President Bush responded. Before answering, he glanced at his watch—an ill-fated move frequently cited as a memorable presidential-debate moment.ⁱ No one but Bush knew his intent, but many interpreted the gesture as a display of boredom or eagerness for the evening to end. Once Bush began speaking, he struggled to understand the question, appeared impatient and uninterested, and according to Alex Markels, “showed himself to be out of touch with ordinary Americans.”ⁱⁱ

Then, it was Clinton’s turn. He briskly walked toward the young lady, closing the physical and psychological distance. After making eye contact, he engaged her instantly by stating, “Tell me how it’s affected you. Do you know people who have lost their jobs, lost their homes?” He alertly truncated her response without appearing rude but not allowing her to consume his precious time. Clinton displayed his confidence and humility by unashamedly admitting that he was the

governor of a small state. He displayed sensitivity by stating emphatically, “In my state, when people lose their jobs, there is a good chance I know them by their names.” He displayed his intelligence and knowledge by demonstrating a razor-sharp understanding of the issues. He displayed his uncanny ability to communicate through his measured and cadenced responses. Clinton did all this in the span of ninety seconds.

When Clinton leapt to his feet, he focused on the young lady and on her alone. He acted as if no one else were in the room and that the cameras were not rolling. This approach encapsulated the two within an invisible tube and connected them with an invisible laser beam. But the room was packed, the cameras were rolling, and America was watching. Only Clinton knows if his approach was a conscious, at-the-moment decision or an automatic, subconscious approach based on years of refining his connection skills, knowing exactly what to do under what set of circumstances. The approach that night was probably the latter. After all, “practice makes perfect,” and Clinton’s approach was perfect.

Now view: www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ffbFvKIWqE

Sean Stephenson, one of Clinton’s aides during his presidency, recognized and dissected Clinton’s ability to connect. “Love him or loathe him, you can’t deny that Bill Clinton is a masterful connection artist. I’ve seen him in action many times, and he’s a wonder to behold. How does he do it? These were the techniques I saw him use most often:

1. He told a story.
2. He made physical contact.
3. He remembered your name.
4. He called you by name.
5. He made deep eye contact with you.
6. He used his facial expressions to convey his emotional state.
7. He calibrated his vocal inflections and volume based on the amount of rapport he had established.
8. He asked for your opinion.
9. He chose his words wisely.
10. He praised you publicly any chance he got.”ⁱⁱⁱ

What Is a Connection?

A *connection* is the intangible but undeniable emotional or intellectual bond between people. Rick Pitino uses a metaphorical physical image, stating, “As a leader, what you’re trying to do is *build bridges*.”^{iv}

Certain enabling behaviors promote connection (or bridge building), which enhances other human-based behaviors such as communication, collaboration, respect, understanding, commitment, loyalty, and creativity. These, in turn, augment interpersonal relationships, creating an environment more conducive to driving change. John Maxwell links “connecting” with driving change: “*Connecting* is having the ability to identify with and relate to people in such a way that it increases your influence with them.”^v And influence drives change.

Four of these enabling behaviors will be discussed: Two come right from Clinton’s playbook as described by Sean Stephenson.^{vi}

1. “He remembered your name.”

“He called you by name.” Our names are highly personal. They are central parts of our identities. Some claim that our names are the most important words to us.^{vii} Former Connecticut senator Chris Dodd claims that everybody’s two favorite words are their first and last names.^{viii}

Remembering a name and calling someone by name are powerful displays of respect. The implication is you are important. You have enough value, integrity, and importance for me to remember your name. There is a jolt of pleasure for the recipient that touches the ego. The opposite of respect is disrespect, disregard, and contempt, so the omission of a name imparts a negative set of messages, often unintentionally.

Names are equalizers. The simple exchange, “Good morning, Sally.” “Good morning, David,” is powerful. Because names rarely have connotations, the two players are equal, regardless of positions or statuses, wealth, or education. The exchange is egalitarian. The uninformed observer does not know who the boss is and who the employee is, who is rich and who is poor, who is educated and who is not.

Greeting a person with his/her name opens doors to connecting at more personal and intimate levels as witnessed in the following anecdote: Greeting by name is “one way that the Old Corner Grocers used to keep their customers: ‘Hello, Mrs. Pierce. How is your daughter doing, now that she’s

home from school?' The grocer is aiming at keeping Mrs. Pierce coming back to him for a lifetime."^{ix}

Remembering and calling someone by name can be learned. This ability is not innate. Although the practice may not imbue charisma, it enhances likeability and appeal. Literature contains methods and mnemonics for remembering names—two are cited—face association and repetition.^x

2. "He made deep eye contact with you."

Eye contact has two definitions. One definition merely describes the connection when two people link eyesight. So, in its basic, most straightforward sense, eye contact is a noncontact, pseudo-physical connection. Similar to remembering and calling someone by his/her name, eye contact sends a powerful affirmation message to the partner.^{xi}

And again, any act that affirms connects. Eyes answer the critical ego-affirming questions for each participant: Is he/she paying attention to what I'm saying? Does this person find me attractive? Does this person like me?"^{xii}

The second definition recognizes the psychological and emotional messages and feelings that are conveyed via the eyes and their movements. *Eye contact*: "A meeting of the eyes between two people that expresses meaningful nonverbal communication."^{xiii} Eye contact can express love, anger, approval, calmness, fear, anticipation, confusion, courage, faith, sincerity, doubt, and more. Also, according to Ramon Aldag and Buck Joseph, "Eye contact regulates conversations. Open-eye contact suggests understanding, interest, and inclusion. Seeking eye contact communicates one's desire to converse; avoiding eye contact conveys the opposite."^{xiv}

Eye contact is probably the most intimate nonverbal, non-touching body sign between human beings. It is at the cusp of professionalism and sensuality, depending upon the situation and the intent. A traditional proverb states that the eyes are the window to the soul, implying an instantaneous, deep insight into the essence of the partner and his/her emotions.

Eye contact plays a vital but seldom-mentioned role in sports. On the field or court, it is a key way team players connect: the quarterback and the receiver, the shortstop and the first baseman, two volleyball players setting up a play. Eye contact

speaks volumes: *Are you there? Are you ready? Can I count on you?* Author Zach Weismann's succinct quote mentions both eye contact and articulating his teammate's name: "We made eye contact. And I yelled to him. I yelled his name. I wanted the ball."^{xv}

The street peddler combing the intersection for contributions relies solely on eye contact to make his plea and on the driver's eyes to gauge the answer. The breastfeeding baby gazes directly into the mother's eyes, and they bond. The emotions exchanged during a slow dance ride back-and-forth on eye contact. Note that some cultures interpret eye contact differently from what is presented.

3. Listening

The topic of listening, similar to leadership, is complex and varied with the accompanying research, seminars, books, and Web sites. One Web site lists more than twenty-five types of listening, including active, casual, critical, false, judgmental, and therapeutic.^{xvi}

The link between listening and connecting is related to respect and understanding. Regarding respect, listening conveys the same respect messages for the partner as eye contact. Regarding understanding, the connecting power of listening is summarized in Stephen Covey's habit 5: "Seek first to understand, then to be understood."^{xvii} Wikipedia's summary captures the essence: Habit 5 uses "empathetic listening to be genuinely influenced by a person, which compels him/her to reciprocate the listening and take an open mind to being influenced by you. This creates an atmosphere of caring, respect, and positive problem solving."^{xviii}

The first step to better listening, although a bit harsh and condescending and certainly not as sophisticated as Covey's advice, is to stop talking. Listening and talking simultaneously is a multitasking challenge that few can accomplish.

Linda Eve Diamond's "10 Rules of Listening"^{xix} is a constructive review, especially rule #6, which stresses "focus." She advises:

- **Give nonverbal clues.** Nod, lean toward the speaker, take on the general demeanor of someone who is interested.
- **Encourage the speaker to go on.** Especially over the phone, hearing no response feels like no one is listening.
- **Don't be a verbal trespasser.** A verbal trespasser is one who interrupts or finishes the speaker's sentences.
- **Ask open questions.** Open questions encourage the speaker. They elicit a more detailed response than closed questions. *What* and *why* are usually helpful starts to open questions.

Diamond reminds us to perform a “perception check.” She states, “Summarizing is often helpful, especially if you have had a misunderstanding, are unsure of expectations, or have just reached an agreement. Ensure that everyone is coming away with the same idea.”^{xx}

Diamond's rule #6 also contains a directive to “maintain eye contact,” and rule #8 is, “Remember names.”^{xxi}

Finally, mastering the art of listening provides the opportunity to distinguish oneself from the masses. Francine Prose, author of *Reading Like a Writer: A Guide for People Who Love Books and for Those Who Want to Write Them*, states, “In life, it's rare that we truly are able to listen and find someone who will listen to us.”^{xxii} Who would not want to be that rare person?

4. Caring

A dictionary definition of caring is, “Feeling and exhibiting concern and empathy for others.” Similar to involvement, caring has a dual imperative. First is the ethical imperative. It is the right thing to do. Second, it promotes connection and all the downstream benefits. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Trust men, and they will be true to you; treat them greatly, and they will show themselves great.”^{xxiii}

Each leader must develop and refine his/her caring style. One astonishing set of caring guideposts is presented in www.goodcharacter.com and promoted in a video, *The Six Pillars of Character*, featuring the Popcorn Park Puppets.^{xxiv} Although the set of guideposts is presented as a teaching guide

on “Caring/Compassion” for grades Kindergarten through five, each of the guideposts also applies to the professional environment.

How to Be a Caring Person

- Treat people with kindness and generosity.
- Help people in need.
- Be sensitive to people's feelings.
- Never be mean or hurtful.
- Think about how your actions will affect others.
- Always remember, we become caring people by doing caring things!

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Guidepost six: “We become caring people by doing caring things!” emphasizes the importance of a familiar theme, the “propensity to act.” Similar to the change triad, in which steps one and two (vision and confidence) are useless without the action step three, in the caring twosome of feeling and exhibiting, feeling accomplishes little without exhibiting.

Recognizing the importance of what we say and what we do, the ultimate import is how the verbal and tangible affect how people feel. Maya Angelou elegantly states, “I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”^{xxv}

Some Final Thoughts

Revisiting Patrick Lencioni's three signs of a miserable job, connection combats anonymity and irrelevance.^{xxvi} If my boss or colleague knows my name, recalls my name, provides eye contact, listens to me, even touches me when appropriate, and commits acts of caring and concern, then I am not anonymous, and I am not irrelevant.

Notes

- ⁱ Newton M. Minow, Craig L. LaMay, and Vartan Gregorian, *Inside the Presidential Debates: Their Improbably Past and Promising Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). Excerpt: “Memorable Moments from Presidential Debates.” <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/530413.html>.
- ⁱⁱ Alex Markels, “George H. W. Bush Checks His Watch During Debate with Bill Clinton and Ross Perot,” *U. S. News and World Report* (2008, Jan. 17). <http://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2008/01/17/a-damaging-impatience>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Sean Stephenson, *Get Off Your “But”: How to End Self-Sabotage and Stand Up for Yourself* (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 2009). Excerpt: “10 Things I Learned about Connection from President Bill Clinton” in <http://www.philgerbyshak.com/connection-from-president-bill-clinton>.
- ^{iv} Rick Pitino, *Lead to Succeed: 10 Traits of Great Leadership in Business and Life* (New York; Broadway Books, 2001).
- ^v John C. Maxwell, *The 5 Levels of Leadership: Proven Steps to Maximize Your Potential* (New York: Center Street, 2011).
- ^{vi} Stephenson, *Get Off Your “But.”*
- ^{vii} B. Bennett, *Year to Success*, “Remembering and Using People’s Names.” <http://www.yeartosuccess.com/YearToSuccess-sample.pdf>.
- ^{viii} Jim Calhoun, *A Passion to Lead: Seven Leadership Secrets for Success in Business, Spots, and Life* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2008).
- ^{ix} A. M. Hughes, “The Importance of Recognition,” (Oct. 19, 2011). <http://www.dbmarketing.com/articles/Art191.htm>.
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- ^{xi} *AudioEnglish.net*. “Eye Contact.” Definition. http://www.audioenglish.net/dictionary/eye_contact.htm.
- ^{xii} V. Kotelnikov, “Connecting with People.” http://www.1000ventures.com/business_guide/crosscuttings/people_connecting.html.
- ^{xiii} *AudioEnglish.net*, “Eye Contact.”
- ^{xiv} Ramon Aldag and Buck Joseph, *Leadership and Vision: 25 Keys to Motivation* (New York: Lebhar–Friedman Books, 2000).
- ^{xv} Zach Weismann, *Thinkexist*, “Zach Weismann Quotes,” <http://thinkexist.com/quotation/we-made-eye-contact-and-i-yelled-to-him-i-yelled/1027070.html>.
- ^{xvi} *Changing Minds: Many Types of Listening*, http://changingminds.org/techniques/listening/all_types_listening_hm.
- ^{xvii} Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, rev. ed. (New York: Free Press, 2004).
- ^{xviii} *Wikipedia*, “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Seven_Habits_of_Highly_Effective_People.
- ^{xix} Linda Eve Diamond, *1000 Advices*, “10 Rules of Listening.” http://www.1000advices.com/guru/listening_10rules_led.html.
- ^{xx} *Ibid.*
- ^{xxi} *Ibid.*
- ^{xxii} Francine Prose, *Reading Like a Writer: A Guide for People Who Love Books and for Those Who Want to Write Them* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007).
- ^{xxiii} Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Brainy Quotes*, “Trust Quotations,” <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/trust.html>.
- ^{xxiv} *Good Character.com*, “The Six Pillars of Character,” “How to Be a Caring Person,” <http://www.goodcharacter.com/pp/caring.html>.
- ^{xxv} Maya Angelou in K. Browne, *101 Ways to Say Thank You* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 2008).
- ^{xxvi} Patrick Lencioni, *The Three Signs of a Miserable Job: A Fable for Managers (and Their Employees)* (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 2007).