



Harnessing the Power of Human Connection at Work
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There has never been a more important time to bring about the power of human connection. Since we spend the bulk of our days at work, this may be the best environment in which to create this deeper connection.

What is 'human connection' and why is it so important, especially now? Human connection is an energy exchange between people who are simply paying attention to one another. Relationships give us a sense of belonging in a group, a sense of identity in being a significant part of this group, an almost therapeutic-support system.

What happens when we don't have this human connection, when we feel isolated, criticized, not valued as a part of the group. In his book, *Social: Why our brains are wired to connect*, Matthew Lieberman explains: "When we experience social pain — a snub, a cruel word — the feeling is as real as physical pain. Our need to connect is as fundamental as our need for food and water. Data suggests that we are profoundly shaped by our social environment and that we suffer greatly when our social bonds are threatened or severed."

Why is it important to feel that sense of human connection now, and primarily in our workplace? Our world has become volatile—political climate, natural disasters, coronavirus, a precarious stock market, or a beloved sports hero suddenly dying affects people worldwide.

We need each other and are needed by others to feel connected. Is it only up to your leader to create an atmosphere of human connection in your place of work? I think not. Though leaders set the pace for your organization, each of you has an important role in creating this positive ambiance.

What if you prefer to work independently, completely happy not to have any connection with coworkers? Working independently has its perks in that you get to do things your way and on your schedule. Yet, if all employees isolate themselves, they'll miss out on valuable camaraderie, input from their co-workers and the sense accomplishment attained through working toward common goals. Working together can increase productivity, and overall job satisfaction. Happy workers tend to be better workers.

"In Eastern cultures, it is generally accepted that only by being sensitive to what others are thinking and doing can we successfully harmonize with one another so that we may achieve more together than we can as individuals." Matthew D. Lieberman

If you want to make a positive difference at work, consider my Top '7' Tips for creating a deeper sense of human connection.

- 1) Collaborative success visioning meetings. Especially if you all work independently, come together periodically to share your company's overall goals and how each person contributes to this success. Specifically, share your job's function and your current focus or project. Pay attention to others, ask questions, learn more about who your coworkers

are, not just about what they do. What are they passionate about? Express how others work is integral to yours and vice versa.

- 2) Follow up on this meeting. Now that you know more about each of your fellow worker's role, you're in a better position to follow up with ideas, feedback, asking for feedback or help or advice. Brainstorming new ideas is an excellent way to connect, to envision something greater than you can on your own.
- 3) Lead meetings that value people's time. Let your people know their time is valuable. Be diligent about not allowing interruptions, late arrivals or cell phones in team meetings. Make sure important agenda items are discussed. Limit update reports to two minutes. Don't allow one person to dominate the conversation. Ask for the opinion of the individual who sits quietly, yet you know has valuable input. Set specific action items with timelines to be followed up upon. End each meeting with clear direction for and acknowledgment of your team.
- 4) Spend one-to-one time outside of work. I've found that when workers who dislike each other (putting it mildly) share a beverage, walk or lunch outside of work they find a connection not otherwise available to them the workplace. If you do this, avoid discussing anything negative, especially about work. Ask about sports, hometowns, how they landed in this profession, with this company, past jobs, family, kids, etc. Again, avoid anything negative that will take you both to a downward spiral. People will remember how you made them feel, not what you said. You don't want them to leave with a sense of negativity.
- 5) Daily in-person conversations. Set a goal to have at least one face-to-face conversation each day. Superficial pleasantries or simply sitting next to your coworker doesn't count. Conversations are most impactful when they stimulate your understanding of the other person or the world. This requires that you put aside everything else, pay attention and make yourself available for an exchange. This can happen in a matter of minutes.
- 6) Make it personal. Invite your group to your home to watch a sports game, share a meal, have a pizza night. Again, avoid any negative conversation—work and politics are good topics to avoid.
- 7) Show up in-person outside of work. Attend events that are important to your teammates. When you're there, be there, not on your phone. Both you and they will feel this sense of mutual connection that cannot be replaced with a text, email or social media photo.

Wherever you are on the chain of command in your business, challenge yourself to be the one to make the difference. I urge you to take the importance of human connection, of connecting on an emotional level with your fellow workers to heart.

Connecting with others is contagious. Even the most seemingly confident person in your office has their moments. They need to feel connected, and so do you. Start today. Be the difference, stay with it. Connection may not happen overnight, but with your dedicated efforts it will happen. Enjoy the benefits of lifting your workplace up to a higher level of connection, productivity and success.

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