



The Truth About Connection

Why Relationships Drive Everything That Matters

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Sustainable performance is built through intentional connection - where leaders create understanding, respect, and trust that allow individuals and teams to consistently operate at their highest level.

The Truth About Connection: Why Relationships Drive Everything That Matters

"Leadership is not about being in charge. It is about taking care of those in your charge."
- Simon Sinek

The Foundation That Leaders Often Overlook

There is a moment most leaders eventually encounter, though it rarely arrives with an announcement.

It tends to show up subtly at first. A conversation that doesn't quite land the way it should. A decision that takes longer than expected, not because of complexity, but because of hesitation. A team that appears cohesive on the surface, yet struggles to move with consistency when it matters most.

Individually, these moments are easy to dismiss. They feel like part of the normal

friction that exists in any organization. But over time, they begin to accumulate. And when they do, something deeper starts to surface.

The realization is rarely immediate, but when it comes, it tends to shift how leaders see everything else.

Because what's missing is not always strategy.

It's not always capability.

More often than not, it's connection.

And not connection in the superficial sense—shared space, shared goals, or even shared language—but something far more foundational. A level of understanding, respect, and trust that allows people to operate with clarity and confidence in one another.

This is the part of leadership that is rarely measured directly, yet influences almost every outcome.

The Principle That Seems Simple - But Isn't

There is a phrase that has been repeated for decades, often in the context of sales or relationship-building, but its implications go far beyond either.

"People do business with people they

know, like, and trust.” – Dale Carnegie

The simplicity of that statement is what makes it easy to overlook.

Because while it sounds intuitive, very few organizations intentionally build around it.

Instead, it’s often treated as something that “should happen” over time, or something that naturally develops as people work together. But when left to chance, connection tends to mirror the inconsistency of the environment it exists within.

Some relationships become strong. Others remain transactional. And over time, that imbalance begins to shape how the organization operates.

The reality is that “know, like, and trust” is not a sequence that happens passively.

It is a progression that must be created.

“To earn trust, one must extend trust.”
– Stephen Covey

What It Actually Means to Know Someone

In professional environments, the idea of “knowing” someone is often reduced to familiarity.

Knowing their role. Their responsibilities. Their experience. Their performance metrics.

But that version of knowing is limited.

It creates awareness, but not understanding.

To truly know someone in a way that impacts how you lead them requires something deeper. It requires insight into

how they think, what they value, and how they interpret the world around them.

It means understanding what motivates them—not just what they are asked to do, but why they choose to engage at the level they do. It means recognizing how they respond under pressure, how they process feedback, and how they define success for themselves.

This kind of understanding does not emerge from structured updates or performance reviews.

It emerges from conversation.

From moments where the focus shifts away from output and toward perspective. From questions that are not designed to evaluate, but to explore. From a willingness to listen without immediately translating what is heard into action or judgment.

And when that kind of knowing exists, something subtle begins to change.

Conversations become more efficient, not because they are shorter, but because they are clearer. Feedback becomes more effective, not because it is delivered more forcefully, but because it is received with greater context.

People begin to operate with a sense of being understood.

And that understanding becomes the foundation for everything that follows.

The Misunderstood Nature of Being “Liked”

For many leaders, the idea of being liked carries a certain discomfort.

It can feel like a compromise. A tradeoff between maintaining standards and maintaining relationships. A risk of becoming too accommodating, too

agreeable, or too focused on how others feel.

"The quality of your life is the quality of your relationships."
– Tony Robbins

But this interpretation misses something important.

Being liked is not about agreement.

It is about experience.

It is about how people feel in your presence.

Do they feel heard? Do they feel respected? Do they feel challenged in a way that helps them think more clearly, or in a way that creates defensiveness?

These distinctions matter more than most leaders realize.

Because people do not disengage from organizations overnight. They disengage gradually, often in response to repeated experiences where they feel dismissed, misunderstood, or undervalued.

They may continue to perform at an acceptable level, but something shifts in how they show up. The willingness to contribute beyond what is required begins to fade. The energy that once fueled their work becomes more guarded.

On the other hand, when individuals consistently experience interactions that are respectful, thoughtful, and grounded in genuine interest, something else emerges.

They become more open.

More willing to share ideas that are not fully formed.

More willing to take ownership of outcomes that extend beyond their immediate responsibilities.

More willing to engage in the kind of dialogue that actually moves things forward.

This is not about creating comfort at the expense of accountability.

It is about creating an environment where accountability can exist without resistance.

And that environment is built through how people experience working with you.

"Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless."
– Mother Teresa

The Behaviors That Quietly Shape Everything

Connection is often described as an outcome, but in practice, it is the result of consistent behavior.

It is built in the way leaders listen—not just hearing words, but seeking to understand what is behind them. It is reinforced through empathy, through the ability to consider perspectives without immediately evaluating them against one's own.

It is strengthened through respect, not as a stated value, but as a lived one. In how leaders acknowledge contributions. In how they respond to disagreement. In how they engage with individuals regardless of title or role.

There are other behaviors that play a role as well—humility, intention, consistency—but what they all share is a common thread.

They signal to others what it feels like to work with you.

And those signals, repeated over time, shape the culture far more than any formal initiative ever could.

Because culture is not what is declared.

It is what is experienced.

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."
– George Bernard Shaw

Trust Is Built Before It Is Needed

If knowing creates understanding and liking creates positive experience, then trust is what allows relationships to hold under pressure.

And trust is rarely built in the moments where it is most needed.

It is built beforehand.

In the commitments that are honored without reminder. In the boundaries that are respected without negotiation. In the presence that is offered without distraction.

It is reinforced when leaders take responsibility, especially when it would be easier to deflect. When they acknowledge mistakes without defensiveness. When they provide clarity in moments of uncertainty rather than avoiding them.

These actions may seem small in isolation.

But collectively, they form a pattern.

And that pattern determines whether people believe they can rely on you.

Trust changes how teams operate.

It reduces the need for constant oversight because expectations are understood. It increases the speed of decision-making because alignment exists. It creates space for honest conversations that would otherwise be avoided.

Without trust, even the best strategy encounters resistance.

With trust, alignment becomes possible in ways that feel almost effortless.

Why Connection Drives Performance More Than Process

In many organizations, there is a tendency to separate connection from performance.

Connection is seen as cultural.

Performance is seen as operational.

But in reality, they are deeply intertwined.

When individuals feel understood, they communicate more clearly. When they feel respected, they collaborate more effectively. When they trust their leaders, they take ownership in a way that does not require constant reinforcement.

These are not soft outcomes.

They are operational advantages.

They reduce friction in decision-making. They increase consistency in execution. They create an environment where progress is not dependent on oversight, but on shared commitment.

Over time, this compounds.

Teams that operate with a strong connection do not just perform better in isolated moments. They sustain performance. They adapt more quickly. They navigate complexity with greater confidence.

And importantly, they do it together.

"You can't lead people you don't understand."
– Dave Ulrich

Leadership Responsibility in Creating Connection

Connection is not something that happens naturally in organizations.

It is something that is created.

And sustained.

Through leadership.

Leaders define how people interact, often without realizing it. They set the tone for what is acceptable. They model the behaviors that others follow, intentionally or not.

When leaders prioritize connection—through how they listen, how they engage, and how they respond—it becomes embedded in the culture.

When they neglect it, the opposite occurs.

Relationships become more transactional. Communication becomes more guarded. Trust becomes conditional.

The impact may not be immediate.

But it is always present.

Because every interaction either strengthens or weakens the connection between people.

And over time, those interactions determine what the organization is capable of achieving.

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