

# 100 WAYS TO CONNECT

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100 Ways to Connect is a supplement to *Connection Culture: The Competitive Advantage of Shared Identity, Empathy, and Understanding at Work*. This practical tool includes material presented in chapter 5 and expands on it. In the pages that follow you'll find 100 actions you can take to create and maintain a connection culture. But first, let's review a few essential practices.

## LEADERSHIP TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

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For all organizations the first step to implementing a connection culture is changing the mindset of the leaders. In order to gain their support, leaders must understand what a connection culture is, why it's important, and how they can create and sustain it. They'll need to learn the connection culture terminology, such as committed members and servant leaders, and the important frameworks that help develop mental models and guide behavior, such as the connection culture model and the Character > Connection > Thrive Chain (see chapter 2 of *Connection Culture*). Presenting leaders with applicable research studies is another way to support a rational argument.

Creating a successful connection culture depends on whether or not practices that connect, including attitudes, language, and behavior, are acted upon by each individual. The practices must be taught and encouraged to help inspire people to begin thinking of themselves as committed members and servant leaders.

## EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND CONNECTION SURVEYS

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Most leaders are mistaken in their assessment of the engagement and connection of people they lead. It's not unusual for organizations to have a mix of subcultures—surveys can help pinpoint where connection cultures, cultures of control, and cultures of indifference are found within an organization. Conducting employee engagement and connection surveys on an annual basis provides a systematic way to assess connection.

These surveys also hold leaders accountable. They recognize those who are good at creating connection cultures and provide an important early warning system to help identify leaders and units that have drifted. Leaders with strengths in connection can become peer mentors to those who are struggling. The vast majority of managers who

don't connect with the people they are responsible for leading do so because they don't see a clear link between connection and superior performance results. By integrating employee engagement and connection survey data with operational and financial metrics, these leaders can see connection's impact on the bottom line. This gets their attention and encourages them to improve employee engagement and connection.

It is far easier to become intentional about creating a connection culture when the importance of connection is understood and leaders are aware of disconnected subcultures within the organization.

## IDENTIFYING OPTIMAL WAYS TO CONNECT

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As you read through the following ways to connect:

Mark the traits that are important for achieving a connection culture.

- Circle any items you marked that need to be strengthened.
- Identify individuals in your organization who could help you close those gaps.
- Prioritize the list of actions that you identified.

Focus first on your top three actions, reaching out to the individuals you identified to see if they can help you close those gaps. Then work your way down the priority list to continue increasing connection in your culture. Watch what happens to your organizational culture over time. With each effort you and your team make, you gain momentum toward a fully connected culture.

## VISION: INSPIRING IDENTITY THAT PRODUCES SHARED IDENTITY

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*When everyone in the organization is motivated by the mission, united by the values, and proud of the reputation.*

### 1. DEVELOP A CLEAR CAUSE THAT IS GREATER THAN SELF

A shared cause connects people to one another by bringing greater beauty, goodness, and truth to the world, and, by doing so, serves others. Connecting to a vision of serving others and making a difference (also referred to as pro-social) boosts employee productivity and protects people from burnout. In addition, people who experience a sense of well-being from meaningful work exhibit gene-expression profiles that are associated with a lower risk of cancer, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease (Fredrickson et al. 2013).

## 2. CREATE AND USE VISION PHRASES

Create brief, memorable, aspirational phrases that express your vision (otherwise known as your inspiring identity). Here are a few examples:

- We only do what's right for you—Tata Capital
- Amazing things are happening here—New York–Presbyterian Hospital
- Making cancer history—MD Anderson Cancer Center
- To provide the most useful and ethical financial products in the world—Charles Schwab
- Organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful—Google

## 3. CASCADE YOUR VISION

Frances Hesselbein's remarkable turnaround of the Girl Scouts of the USA was due in part to the inclusive annual planning process she implemented. She communicated the vision, mission, and annual objectives, and then explained why each was selected. She then solicited feedback about what was right, wrong, and missing from the vision and annual objectives. Her leadership team considered the feedback, made adjustments, and communicated the final plan. You should do the same. At one or two points during each year, repeat the process, factoring in how well your plans are working and what adjustments are necessary. An inclusive process to establish annual objectives and action plans engages people and helps them align their behavior with the plan.

## 4. REPLENISH YOUR VISION

Vision leaks, so look for ways to keep it in front of the people you lead. Take employees out to visit customers, or bring customers in to talk with employees about how they use and benefit from the products and services. Circulate any articles or press releases about your organization that reinforce the mission, values, and reputation.

## 5. REFLECT UPON YOUR VALUES

Take time to reflect on the values and character strengths you believe in and want to promote in your organization. Start by reflecting on your experiences, including those at and away from work, and write down any lessons you've learned from them. Then use the 24 character strengths in the appendix of *Connection Culture* to reflect on what strengths are most important to you and your organization's ability to achieve its mission. For inspiration, read Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz's excellent book *Pour Your Heart Into It*, or about the Montpelier Command

Philosophy in *Fired Up or Burned Out*. Write your core values in a manner similar to the Montpelier Command Philosophy—name the value and explain what it means and why you believe it’s important. Ask trusted friends to read your values and provide feedback. Once your draft is in good shape, share it with your direct reports and ask them to provide feedback. Consider the feedback, make any changes you believe improve it, and then circulate the revised version to your direct reports. Have them go through the feedback process with their direct reports. Continue this process until everyone on the team has had an opportunity to voice their opinions and ideas. This process creates commitment and alignment with core values.

## 6. STAY ALIGNED WITH YOUR VALUES

Take your direct reports through the final core values you decide upon. Discuss and identify which values are most important to your team’s success, which values your team is strong in, which values it needs to develop, and what can be done to develop those values and live them out. Follow up with a written summary of action items, responsibilities, and due dates. Then meet periodically to review and revise the action plan, and ask your direct reports to do the same with their direct reports.

## 7. DISPLAY YOUR VALUES

FCB New Zealand, the award-winning advertising and communications agency, displays its values such as “Be Restless,” “Do Different,” and “Better Together” on colorful wall displays and coffee mugs. Each Ritz-Carlton employee receives a wallet-sized card with the organization’s core values (called Ritz Basics) printed on the front and back. Teams meet briefly every day to review one of the 20 Ritz Basics, and each week the company highlights an employee who lived out a value.

## 8. SET YOUR TOP FIVE ANNUAL PRIORITIES

Both individually and as a team, set no more than five challenging but achievable annual priorities. If you go beyond five, it will diminish your focus and effective execution by overwhelming those responsible for implementation. Take time to review your weekly plans to make sure they are aligned with your top five priorities.

## 9. PROVIDE AUTONOMY IN GOAL SETTING

As much as possible, let your direct reports establish their own top five annual priorities. Talk through the team’s top five priorities with each employee to find shared priorities that advance the organization’s and individual

employee's interests. It may not be possible to find a perfect set of priorities for each person, but if you make an effort to find the best possible set, you will be rewarded by having team members who execute their tasks with greater energy and enthusiasm.

## 10. HOLD CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT MEETINGS

Hold “continuous improvement” team meetings three to four times a year to identify innovative ways to improve and achieve your mission. These meetings could be focused on ways to increase revenue, reduce costs, improve quality, or improve efficiency. List the ideas, prioritize them, select a manageable set to focus on, assign responsibilities, and track their completion. Make this information available to the entire group to get people thinking proactively about how to improve.

## 11. DISCUSS A STORY A WEEK

Each week tell your team about an inspiring leader who created a connection culture, and discuss how you can employ the practices in each example in your workplace.

## 12. CELEBRATE TEAM SUCCESSES

When your team accomplishes a major goal, celebrate with a party, meal, or outing. Ask people for suggestions about how to celebrate, and if you can afford it, invite them to bring a significant other to join in.

## 13. CREATE A BLOG OR BOOK TO CELEBRATE YOUR CULTURE

Create a blog or intranet site where colleagues can post positive examples of people who live out the values of the organization. This provides employee recognition, encourages everyone to bring the values to life, and spreads positive examples and practices. You can also compile the stories in a book, such as Zappos's yearly *Culture Book* or Beryl Companies' *Smile Guide: Employee Perspectives on Culture, Loyalty, and Profit*.

## VALUE: HUMAN VALUE THAT PRODUCES SHARED EMPATHY

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*When everyone in the organization understands the needs of people, appreciates their positive unique contributions, and helps them achieve their potential.*

## 14. KNOW THEIR STORIES

Take time to get to know the people you work with, especially your direct reports. Have coffee or a meal with them. Ask questions to learn about their lives and what's important to them: "What are you passionate about?" "What are your interests outside of work?" "Where did you grow up?" "What do you like to do during your free time?" "Which leaders have inspired you and why?"

These questions typically open the door for you to ask follow-up questions, and will give you insights into how the people you work with are wired, including what they value at work and in their lives. Psychologist James Pennebaker has found that when you get people to talk, they feel more connected to you, like you more, and believe they learn more from you (Pennebaker 1997).

## 15. HELP PEOPLE GET INTO THE RIGHT ROLE

Help your direct reports get into a role that fits their interests and strengths, and provides the right degree of challenge. If you can't get them a role that is a perfect fit, try to give them responsibilities or projects that fit well with their wiring.

## 16. BE PRESENT IN CONVERSATIONS

It has been said that attention is oxygen for relationships. When meeting with people, get in the habit of being present by staying focused on them and giving them your full attention. Show that you are engaged and interested by asking questions and then asking follow-up questions to clarify. Listen carefully, observing facial expressions and body cues. Don't break the connection by checking your phone, looking at your watch or around the room, or letting your mind wander.

## 17. DEVELOP THE HABIT OF EMPHASIZING POSITIVES

Psychologist John Gottman (1994) first observed that marriages were less likely to survive when the positive/negative ratio of interactions dipped below 5-to-1 (or five positive interactions to every negative interaction). This positivity ratio also applies in the workplace (Frederickson 2009). People need affirmation and recognition, so get in the habit of looking for ways to affirm and serve others. Do this by looking for task strengths and character strengths, which reflect the excellence of someone's work and the way someone goes about her work, respectively.

For example, you might affirm a colleague by saying “Nancy, that was an outstanding website you created. The navigation design was easy to use, the writing was easy to understand, and the color scheme was beautiful.” You might affirm her character strengths by saying, “Nancy, I appreciate the way you persevered to make our new website happen. You showed wisdom and humility in seeking the ideas of others and applying the best ideas to the design of our new website. Very nicely done.”

## 18. PERSONALIZE YOUR GREETING

When meeting someone for the first time, a simple practice to help you remember the person’s first name is to use it three times early in the conversation.

## 19. ACKNOWLEDGE PEOPLE IN MEETINGS

When you enter a room, and it’s appropriate given the context and number of people present, take time to greet or non-verbally acknowledge each individual present, even when you are familiar with people. Not personally acknowledging them, either at the start or close of the meeting runs the risk of giving them the impression that you’re indifferent.

## 20. SEEK THE UNIQUE

When meeting people for the first time, ask questions to identify something unique about them. Doing this will make you more likely to remember the person. Elizabeth Dole, the former president of the Red Cross, did this and frequently brought up in conversation what was unique about a person the next time she saw her.

## 21. FEEL OTHERS’ EMOTIONS

Mutual empathy is a powerful connector that is made possible by mirror neurons in our brains, which act like an emotional Wi-Fi system (Goleman 2006). When we feel the emotions of others, it makes them feel connected to us. When we feel their positive emotion, it enhances the positive emotion they feel. When we feel their pain, it diminishes the pain they feel. If someone expresses emotion, it’s OK, and natural, for you to feel it too.

## 22. RECOGNIZE VARYING CONNECTION NEEDS

People have different predispositions when it comes to their sensitivities to feeling connection or its absence. People also respond differently to actions in terms of whether or not it makes them feel connected. Learn about people

and tailor your behaviors to connect based on what you've learned about them. Recognize that it may take time before you get it right.

### **23. SAY YOU'RE SORRY**

When you make a mistake, say you're sorry. This important step will help rebuild connection.

### **24. PROVIDE FEEDBACK IN A CONSTRUCTIVE WAY**

When providing feedback to help someone improve, communicate it in private whenever possible, be respectful in your tone of voice and volume, and begin with three positive things you like about his work or character. After sharing the three positives, say, "I believe you would be even better if . . . [insert what you want him to do or stop doing]." Kindness matters and the approach you take will affect how the person receives the feedback.

### **25. SUPPORT YOUR TEAM**

Periodically ask your direct reports what you can do to help them do their best work. Choose an action or actions they suggest and then follow up. Look for obstacles that you can help remove.

### **26. ASK, DON'T ORDER**

Asking creates partnership and maintains connection, whereas ordering reinforces hierarchy and breaks connection. By taking this approach, you will find that people are far more likely to trust you when you do need to issue orders in emergency situations.

### **27. COMMUNICATE PROMPTLY**

Return emails, text messages, and phone calls within 24 hours. Doing so demonstrates respect, creates a rapport, and advances the conversation in a timely way.

### **28. TREAT PEOPLE AS PARTNERS**

Treat people as equals. Speaking down to someone or intentionally ignoring him is a barrier to connection.

### **29. CONNECT WITH YOUR BODY LANGUAGE**

When interacting with others, make sure your body language is connecting with them by being still, maintaining eye contact while looking away at times so as not to look too intense, relaxing your facial muscles, uncrossing your



arms, and leaning slightly forward. Agreeing with others is connecting, but it has to be genuine agreement—so when you agree, indicate your agreement with a positive head nod, occasionally using words such as “yes,” “I agree,” or “absolutely.”

### **30. NEGOTIATE WITH A MINDSET TO SOLVE PROBLEMS RATHER THAN TO WIN**

You can build connections with people during negotiations if you adopt and maintain the right mindset. Thinking of the people you are negotiating with as competitors leads to disconnection and distrust. Instead, think of them as holding knowledge that you need in order to identify a win-win solution. Negotiating requires probing, patience, and perseverance to understand other people’s objectives, perceptions, and sensitivities.

### **31. PROACTIVELY HELP OTHERS**

Seize opportunities to help others. Send your colleagues any information you come across that affirms the vision, that may help them do their jobs better, that relates to a topic they are interested in, or that may help them in some way outside work.

### **32. PROVIDE AUTONOMY IN EXECUTION**

Monitor progress and be available to help your direct reports, but refrain from micromanaging unless they ask for specific help. Favor guidelines rather than rules and controls, and let people know that you are available if they have questions or would like you to be a sounding board. This meets the human need for autonomy and allows people to experience personal growth.

### **33. PLAN SOCIAL TIME**

Schedule regular social time for people to connect. Genentech has a weekly Friday afternoon social time where they serve drinks and snacks. I know a manager who orders pizza and salad for his team every other Friday. You could organize an ice cream social to bring your team together for conversation. Consider helping serve those in attendance, and, once everyone is served, make your way around to say hello to everyone. Avoid talking about work. Instead ask people about their interests or if they have any exciting plans coming up.

### **34. HELP COLLEAGUES IN NEED**

When you reach out to show you care, or help people during a time of need, you're connecting with them. The Beryl Companies has "Beryl Cares" to monitor the needs of employees and coordinate a response. If you learn about a colleague who is sick, or has a serious illness or death in the family, offer your support.

### **35. CREATE A CONNECTION CAFE**

Put cards with the names of participating team members in a hat and have everyone draw a card. The individuals then have lunch or coffee with the person on their card. This helps employees get to know one another outside the office environment, which can further help foster connection.

### **36. GREET PEOPLE FIRST THING IN THE MORNING**

When you first arrive at work, take the time to say hello to the people with whom you come in contact. One friend of mine said that as a young retail store manager, his district manager told him that some of the store employees complained about not receiving a personal greeting in the morning. The young manager didn't intend to be rude; he was simply focused on the day's tasks as soon as he walked in the door. But to his employees, it was important that he take the time to show that he valued them through this simple gesture. He began intentionally greeting each employee every morning and his employees' perception of him improved.

### **37. LEARN AND APPLY THE FIVE LANGUAGES OF APPRECIATION**

Ask your direct reports about memorable times when they received recognition at work. Find out what their primary and secondary languages of appreciation are. The five languages of appreciation in the workplace are: words of affirmation, quality time, acts of service, gifts, and physical touch. Note that physical touch is not a primary language of appreciation in the workplace, and should generally be avoided. To learn more, read Gary Chapman and Paul White's *The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace*.

### **38. CONNECT OUTSIDE WORK**

Individuals need different levels of connection. Some people require a much greater quantity and quality than others in order to feel supported and included. If you need much more connection than most people, it may be unreasonable to expect that your need for connection will be fully met in the workplace. In such cases, it may be

wise to seek ways to meet your need for connection out of work. Consider becoming involved in community groups and developing a group of friends with whom you can regularly interact.

### **39. EXPECT THE BEST OF PEOPLE**

Frances Hesselbein, who led the turnaround of the Girl Scouts, always expects the best in others. This kind of mindset or attitude helps you to connect with people.

### **40. INTRODUCE PEOPLE WITH AFFIRMING STATEMENTS**

When you make introductions, get in the habit of making a positive comment about the person. Just make sure that the comment is genuine. As they say in the South, “it can’t be Saccharine . . . it has to be real sugar.” For example, you might introduce Tom by saying “I’d like you to meet Tom. He’s an outstanding engineer.” or “He’s one of the smartest people I know.” or “He’s an avid runner.”

### **41. WALK THE HALLS**

Howard Behar, former president of Starbucks North America and later Starbucks International, tells leaders to walk the halls. This idea is similar to management by wandering around, or MBWA, a term coined by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman in their book *In Search of Excellence*. It is all about getting out of your office, getting to know the people you are responsible for leading, and listening to them.

### **42. INTERRUPT RESPECTFULLY**

When you interrupt people while they are otherwise engaged, show that you respect their time by saying, “Sorry to interrupt you. Is this a good time to talk?” Another way to respect other people’s time is not to linger. If they are not very responsive, it may be a sign that they are busy and eager to get back to work. Be sensitive to their responsiveness or lack thereof. Many people will not explicitly tell you they are busy because they don’t want to hurt your feelings.

### **43. DON’T BE A DOMINATOR**

Dominating is disconnecting. When he was the head coach of the Chicago Bull’s basketball team, Phil Jackson told a young Michael Jordan that Jordan needed to pass the ball more to his teammates. Jackson explained that

everyone needs time in the spotlight to shine so that together the team would win. When Jordan changed his style of play, it helped the Chicago Bulls win six NBA championship titles during a period of eight years.

#### **44. BE SENSITIVE IN HOW YOU DESCRIBE COLLEAGUES**

Introducing someone by saying, “This is my employee” or “one of my people” is disconnecting. Refer to the person as a colleague instead.

#### **45. EXPRESS YOUR THANKS**

When someone does something for you, be sure to say “thank you.” This seems obvious, but you would be surprised by how many people neglect this common courtesy. If the person did something for you that required considerable effort on his part, send a handwritten thank you note. Several outstanding leaders I know send handwritten thank you notes on a regular basis. They understand that a handwritten note stands out in this age of electronic communications and conveys how much they value the recipient.

#### **46. CONNECT BEFORE CONTENT**

When interacting with others, Peter Block, author of *Community*, recommends connecting first then moving to the content of your conversation or meeting.

#### **47. WATCH YOUR TONE OF VOICE**

Recognize that people will instinctively react to the delivery of your message before they hear its content. They may “put up a wall” and become defensive or feel threatened.

#### **VOICE: KNOWLEDGE FLOW THAT PRODUCES SHARED UNDERSTANDING**

When everyone in the organization seeks the ideas of others, shares their ideas and opinions honestly, and safeguards relational connections.

#### **48. LISTEN ACTIVELY**

Jane Dutton, professor of business administration and psychology at the University of Michigan, recommends several ways to listen actively. First, paraphrase by expressing what you heard in your own words. For example you might say, “Let me make sure I’m hearing you correctly. You are saying . . .” Second, summarize what you heard.

For example, “Let me summarize your points to see if I fully understand. I hear you saying . . . ” Third, clarify by asking questions. For example, “Tell me if I’m hearing you correctly. I think you are saying . . . ”

#### **49. LET PEOPLE FINISH SPEAKING BEFORE YOU BEGIN**

Make sure there is a pause in the conversation before you begin speaking, to ensure that you don’t cut someone off from what they were trying to say.

#### **50. TAILOR YOUR MESSAGE**

Whenever possible, deliver your message in the preferred style of the listener: bullet points or paragraph. “Bullet point” people favorably respond to a style that is brief, to the point, and supported by hard evidence. They become impatient when made to wait for the bottom line. People who prefer “paragraphs” are more open to hearing soft evidence that infers a certain result, or anecdotes, examples, or explanations that help them understand.

#### **51. TELL ME STORIES**

Have you ever asked people how their day went only to hear the standard reply, “fine”? If you really want to connect, try saying, “I would really like to know how your day went, so tell me stories.” This practice also works well with children, spouses, and friends.

#### **52. SHARE YOUR STORIES, BE OPEN TO CONNECT, AND BUILD TRUST**

The deepest connections are formed when you are open to communicate who you really are, what you really believe, and your struggles in life. Consider sharing what you’ve learned from past mistakes if it will help another person (and it’s appropriate). This openness communicates humility and promotes connection and trust. If you are uncertain about when it is appropriate to be open in a particular context, seek the advice of trusted friends.

#### **53. PROVIDE CLARITY ON CRITICAL ACTIONS**

Make sure your direct reports know what you are counting on them to do and when it needs to be completed. Any lack of clarity, especially on critical actions, undermines connection. When it comes to critical actions, it’s best to put requests in writing. For the most complex tasks, ask your reports to create checklists that define what will be done, when it will be done, and who will do it. (I refer to these as W3s.) Checklists are shown to result in greater reliability in execution. To learn more about checklists, read Atul Gawande’s excellent book *The Checklist Manifesto*.

## 54. REFLECT BEFORE OFFERING IMPROVEMENTS

Author and executive coach Marshall Goldsmith recommends that when someone presents an idea, suggestion, opinion, or plan, you should take time to reflect before offering a suggestion to improve it. Many people are in the habit of quickly adding their better idea by saying “but” or “however.” Habitually doing this undermines connection, commitment, and engagement. People implement their own ideas with greater enthusiasm and energy, so consider whether your enhancement really matters before offering it.

## 55. HOLD IN-PERSON MEETINGS AND REGULARLY CHECK IN

Strong relationships are maintained by staying in touch. British prime minister Winston Churchill understood this. Historians have found more than 1,700 letters, notes, and telegrams that Churchill wrote to his wife so that they would remain connected. Take a page from Churchill’s playbook. Stay connected with your direct reports by meeting weekly with them in person, if at all possible. If you cannot meet weekly, use check-ins—phone calls, emails, and text messages—to help you stay connected. Regularly call or Skype with people who work remotely. People should believe that you are on their team and want to help them achieve their potential. In addition to work issues, ask about how they are doing personally. There is much truth to the old saying that “people don’t care what you know until they know you care.”

## 56. KEEP PEOPLE INFORMED

Keep your team in the loop on issues they need to know about. Whenever possible, include individuals who express interest in an issue.

## 57. SAFEGUARD RELATIONAL CONNECTIONS

Don’t attack people who disagree with you. If you disagree with someone, say so, but do it in a respectful manner. You might even begin your response with “I may be wrong, but is it possible that . . .?” or “It’s just one person’s opinion, but I believe that . . .” If you offend or hurt someone’s feelings, apologize. If people apologize to you, give them the benefit of the doubt and forgive them.

## 58. LEAD WITH VISION IN GROUP KNOWLEDGE FLOW SESSIONS

A knowledge flow session is a practice that promotes connection through open communication—listening to others’ opinions and ideas then considering them before making decisions. Begin a knowledge flow session by sharing your vision—your thoughts about what actions need to be done, by whom, and when each action needs to be completed.

## 59. SEEK IDEAS AND OPINIONS IN GROUP KNOWLEDGE FLOW SESSIONS

After leading with vision in a knowledge flow session, say something like, “I don’t have a monopoly on good ideas and we will be our best only when we all share our opinions and ideas.” Encourage dialogue by asking participants to tell you what’s right, what’s wrong, and what’s missing from your thinking. Everyone’s opinions and ideas should be considered, so make sure to ask people who are quiet to share what they think. Listen and consider the ideas put forth and implement good ideas, giving credit where it’s due. This practice reflects the character strengths of integrity, humility, curiosity, and open-mindedness.

## 60. HOLD ONE-TO-ONE KNOWLEDGE FLOW SESSIONS

You can also hold one-to-one knowledge flow sessions. Begin by making a list of the people you interact with in your daily routine. When meeting with individuals, share your vision for what relevant actions need to be taken in your work, who you see as responsible for each action, and when it needs to be completed. Ask them to tell you what’s right, what’s wrong, and what’s missing from your thinking, and consider their ideas and opinions to learn from them and show you value them.

## 61. FOLLOW UP IN WRITING

After a group or individual knowledge flow session, follow up in writing to summarize what you heard, what actions are necessary, who is responsible for each action, and when each action should be completed.

## 62. HOLD KNOWLEDGE FLOW SESSIONS FREQUENTLY

Team knowledge flow sessions should occur regularly to keep the team aligned and accountable. (One organization I know calls their weekly operational knowledge flow session the Sweat the Details meeting.) Major initiatives and annual plans should be communicated in knowledge flow sessions that are small enough for conversations to occur. As plans change, consider holding knowledge flow sessions to keep everyone in the loop. When new employees arrive, hold a knowledge flow session to discuss your organization’s history, mission, values, and broad strategy.

## 63. EMBRACE CONSTRUCTIVE FRICTION

People have differences of opinion. Leaders should remember (and remind everyone else) that constructive friction is beneficial. With this understanding, holding and voicing opposing views shouldn’t turn into combat. The key to

maintaining healthy constructive friction is to make sure you are trying to “get it right” to promote task excellence, rather than “be right” for purpose of personal pride. Furthermore, civility should be encouraged, especially as individuals work through their differences.

#### **64. BEGIN MEETINGS ON A POSITIVE NOTE**

To boost energy and innovation, begin meetings with positive comments. Be the person who starts the meeting from an encouraging outlook.

#### **65. START A BOOK CLUB**

Periodically select a business book for your direct reports or team members to read together. Set aside a time to get together to identify themes and ideas from the book that you could implement. Visit [www.ConnectionCulture.com](http://www.ConnectionCulture.com) for book recommendations.

#### **66. HOLD SKIP LEVEL MEETINGS**

In a skip level meeting you meet with a direct report and his direct reports. Share what’s on your mind then encourage attendees to ask questions and share their ideas and opinions about how to improve the business.

#### **67. RECONNECT YOUR TEAM**

On a monthly basis, start the team meeting off by asking your direct reports to share something on their mind. It can be anything, such as something they did outside work that team members might be interested in or something that’s going on at work that they want the team to know about. Give each person five minutes to share.

#### **68. MAKE TIME FOR Q&A**

If you directly or indirectly lead a large number of people, set aside time for them to ask questions. You can have people anonymously submit questions ahead of time or just ask them during the meeting. Howard Behar, former president of Starbucks North America and Starbucks International, called the sessions he held “Open Forums.” Jim Goodnight, CEO of SAS Institute, holds “Java with Jim” sessions. Vineet Nayar, CEO of HCL, has employees email him questions, which he answers on his blog. The founders of Google answer questions at each Friday’s TGIF meeting.



## 69. BEGIN STOP-START-CONTINUE MEETINGS

Periodically hold a stop-start-continue meeting to review your team's activities. Identify any activities your team should start that they are not presently doing, current activities they should stop doing, and activities they should continue doing.

## 70. CONDUCT POST-EVENT EVALUATION KNOWLEDGE FLOW SESSIONS

Post-event evaluation sessions give people an opportunity to identify what went right, what went wrong, and what was missing. This practice gives people a voice and helps make continuous improvements. If it is a recurring event, such as the Annual Meeting or a yearly conference, having this feedback in writing will be a valuable resource as the planning begins for the next event.

## COMMITTED MEMBERS

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*People in the organization who are committed to task excellence, promoting the connection culture, and living out character strengths and virtues.*

## 71. BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT ACHIEVING TASK AND RELATIONSHIP EXCELLENCE

Never forget that excellence, progress, and positive results connect people, and the lack thereof is disconnecting. Most leaders focus on task excellence alone, and there are also leaders who are strong relationally but neglect task excellence. Everyone in an organization needs to intentionally develop both task excellence and relationship excellence. These qualities are essential to achieving sustainable superior performance.

## 72. DEVELOP BOTH SOCIAL AND RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Recognize the difference between social skills and relationship skills. Many individuals develop social skills, which make them excellent networkers who impress and connect with others in casual interactions. These skills facilitate their success by building a network of acquaintances. However, in addition to social skills, it is essential to develop relationship skills, which lead to deeper connections with a few people who “have your back” and with whom you process life. Consider the skills you use in meeting someone for the first time versus nurturing your relationship with a best friend. Relationship skills—regularly spending time with an individual, being open to sharing your struggles,

sharing his joy and pain, being there in times of need, and so on—help develop the deeper connections that are necessary for individual wellness and well-being to thrive in life and achieve sustainable superior performance.

### **73. DEVELOP AN ATTITUDE OF COMMITMENT, COURAGE, AND PERSEVERANCE**

To develop the strength of character that intentional connectors have requires commitment, courage, and perseverance. Commitment is required to develop the habit of connecting. Courage is required because some people will reject your efforts to connect, whether due to circumstance or personality. When our efforts to connect are spurned, the part of the brain that feels physical pain becomes active and triggers what neuroscientists have termed social pain. This pain causes people to become more anxious, more stressed, less social, less energetic, less rational, and less able to practice self-control. Understanding this natural response will help prepare you to recognize it in yourself or in others. Finally, perseverance is required to reach the point where connecting becomes part of your character.

### **74. TAKE TIME FOR TEAM ACTIVITIES**

Consider activities you can do together as a team. Doing team activities away from work will help people truly focus on one another. When that activity is fun, it encourages people to like one another and leads to more cooperation. Zappos, for example, gives its managers a budget for team-building activities.

Another option is to serve together. One of the most powerful and least appreciated ways to connect a team is to have them select a non-profit organization in their community and spend a day working together on a service project. Organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, YMCA, YWCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, Goodwill, and homeless shelters always have needs that your team can help fill. It may be doing clean-up work, painting, preparing and serving meals, or interacting with the people the organizations serve. Serving together is powerful because participants experience what psychologists call the “helpers high,” a positive emotion that makes them feel good and facilitates connection. To maximize your time serving, prep your team to “connect then serve.” In other words, take the time to connect with the people you are serving by introducing yourself, asking their first name and using it, and asking questions about their lives. After you connect, then you can go about the task of serving.

### **75. STRENGTHEN PERSONAL CONNECTION SKILLS THROUGH VOLUNTEERING**

People are positive and grateful when you volunteer to help at a community service organization. These are safe places to practice and develop the skills to connect without feeling anxious about how potential failures might sabotage your career. Psychologist Barbara Fredrickson found that the more time people spend connecting with others, the better they become at connection.

## 76. REACH OUT TO THE DISCONNECTED

People who are disconnected need our help. Throw them a lifeline by taking action to connect with them. You could encourage them with a smile, a kind word, an offer to buy them a cup of coffee, or by holding open a door for them. There are hundreds of ways to connect and small things can make a big difference over time. People who become disconnected and feel left out suffer—disconnection is not only unproductive, it could be dangerous if the isolated individual becomes angry and decides to retaliate. This is why we need to show mercy and reach out to help the disconnected reconnect.

## 77. PRACTICE STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

Chronic stress will turn you into an unintentional disconnecter. When you start feeling stressed out, take action to manage the stress.

- Meet with a friend, mentor, or counselor and talk about what's causing you stress. Then identify actions to reduce the effects of the stressor(s) in your life.
- Regularly take a break for lunch with a friend who energizes you.
- Keep your office organized to avoid feeling overwhelmed by clutter.
- Avoid multitasking. Instead try to focus on one task at a time.
- Exercise to reset the nervous system.
- Get sufficient sleep and stay hydrated.
- Meditate and pray.
- Take at least one work-free day each week. Engage in meals and activities with family and friends, or read books or other materials that are not work-related. The aim is to do things that are “life giving” and not draining.
- Find neutral or healthy behaviors to replace negative ones. For example, if you are reaching for sugar or refined carbohydrates to get an energy boost, replace them with fruit or vegetables that will not trigger a sugar-high and subsequent crash.

## 78. CREATE A “GETTING CONNECTED IN OUR GROUP” GUIDE

It helps to facilitate connection when you provide your group with a directory of members that includes names, photos, contact information, and other information that identifies responsibilities, strengths, expertise, and interests outside work.

## 79. CONNECT OVER LUNCH

In many workplace cultures, taking lunch away from your desk may brand you as a slacker. However, taking time to connect with people who energize you is a great way to boost your personal productivity by refreshing and re-energizing your brain.

## 80. BE A CONNECTION CATALYST

Research has shown that the emotions of individuals and groups can spiral up or down. Take the initiative to enhance the emotions of others by being optimistic and upbeat. By intentionally making connections with others, you can become a catalyst to positive emotions.

## 81. PRACTICE FIVE-MINUTE FAVORS

In his excellent book *Give and Take*, Wharton professor Adam Grant advocates the practice of five-minute favors—you should be willing to help anyone if it takes only five minutes. Grant argues that helping others connects them to us and helps develop a supportive network.

## 82. RECRUIT FRIENDS

According to Gallup research, 30 percent of employees have a best friend at work and these employees are seven times as likely to be engaged, are better at engaging customers, produce higher quality work, and have higher levels of well-being. People who don't have a best friend at work only have a one-in-12 chance of feeling connected and being engaged (Rath and Harter 2010). If you have friends who have the competence to fill roles in your organization, recruit them.

## 83. CREATE A CULTURE OFFICE TO PROMOTE CONNECTION

Research has shown that connection begins to break down when the number of individuals in a group exceeds 150 (Dunbar 1992). In larger organizations, establishing a culture office or center to promote connection across interdependent groups (such as groups within an organization that are dependent on each other to perform well) is a best practice. Southwest Airlines has a culture services department with 31 full-time employees and a companywide culture committee with 160 active members.

## 84. DON'T GET CAUGHT IN THE KNOWING-DOING GAP

Many people know they need to exercise and eat right to be healthy, but they fail to do it. They are caught in the knowing-doing gap (a term coined by Stanford professors Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton). That can happen with connection too. Don't let it. Make sure you create a plan to take at least three actions and share that plan with someone who will encourage you and hold you accountable, such as a mentor or coach. If you take action, it will increase your level of understanding about connection.

## 85. PERSEVERE TO RECONNECT

Sometimes simply saying you're sorry isn't enough. Don't give up. Keep reaching out to reconnect and restore the relationship. Doing so is a sign of your good character (it can be said that you have the character strength of magnanimity).

## SERVANT LEADERS

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*Servant leaders are committed members who are empowered with the authority to coordinate task excellence, facilitate the connection culture, and model and mentor others in character strengths and virtues.*

## 86. ADOPT A SERVANT LEADERSHIP MINDSET

Here is a powerful truth: To serve is to connect. Servant leaders connect with the people they lead because they view themselves as serving the people to help them better serve the organization's mission. When Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz was struggling to make Starbucks successful as it expanded outside Seattle, he hired Howard Behar to be the president of Starbucks North America. Behar moved to Chicago, the first big city Starbucks expanded into, and went from store to store getting to know the employees and teaching them how to connect with one another and the customers. That was an inflection point in the company's history. After spectacular growth in North America, Behar became the first president of Starbucks International, leading the international expansion. To learn more, read Behar's book *It's Not About the Coffee*. Behar later went on to become the chairman of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership.

## 87. CONNECT, ENCOURAGE, AND COACH

Organizations with supervisors who connect with, encourage, and coach the people they lead often perform better than those who don't. It would be beneficial to provide mentor training to all supervisors.

## 88. GET A MENTOR OR COACH

Do you ever wonder why all world-class athletes have coaches? It's because no one becomes great at anything that requires skill without a coach or mentor. We all have blind spots—things we do that are disconnecting—and we need coaches and mentors to help us see them and then advise, encourage, and hold us accountable so that we grow to become intentional connectors.

## 89. CONNECT WITH THE CORE

Remember to make an effort to connect with people who have less power, control, and influence because they are the ones who do most of the work when it comes to executing the tasks of your organization. Research has shown that higher status employees pay less attention to those with lower status, but that they are unaware of doing so. Workers who are lower in an organization's hierarchy have less sense of control and suffer from greater stress, which contributes to ill health and higher mortality. One way to help people cope with stress is to connect with them and delegate greater control to them (Ferrie 2004).

## 90. HIRE FOR COMPETENCE AND CHARACTER

Most managers hire for competence, but are not as intentional about probing to understand a job applicant's character. Take time to identify your core values as a leader, then ask questions (such as the following) that explore those values as you interview the applicants.

- In your past jobs, what work environments and types of work brought out the best in you?
- In your past jobs, what work environments and types of work didn't you like?
- What prior work accomplishments are you most proud of?

Have the applicants provide specific examples and stories, and listen for insights into their character. Be sure to have multiple people on your team interview them and compare notes, reviewing each character strength to see if you can determine their presence or absence.

## 91. SECURE TOOLS AND TRAINING

Get people the tools and training they need to do their work well. If they don't have the appropriate tools and training, they will not produce favorable results. Being ill-equipped or frustrated affects employee engagement.

## 92. COMPENSATE FAIRLY

Establishing a well thought out compensation process and taking time to communicate it is important. If the individuals you are responsible for leading disagree with your compensation decisions seek them out and consider their opinions. This shows you value them and want to give them a voice. Considering their opinions may also better equip you to make these decisions and advocate on their behalf the next time they occur.

## 93. KNOW YOUR TEAM'S STRENGTHS AND VULNERABILITIES

Have your direct reports take tests that identify their individual temperaments and strengths (such as the Myers-Briggs Personality Type, Gallup StrengthsFinder, or VIA Survey). Maybe even have team members take several tests and share the results with their teammates. Assess the team to determine its collective strengths and vulnerabilities in light of the work members are responsible for completing. For the greatest impact, hire an outside facilitator to lead the assessment.

## 94. KNOW THEIR CAREER EXPERIENCES AND ASPIRATIONS

Ask your direct reports about their prior work experiences, and what they liked and didn't like about them. Find out what their career aspirations are. Write down what you learn and identify specific actions you can take to help them make progress toward those aspirations. These actions may include job assignments, coaching, mentoring, or training.

## 95. ARRANGE FOR PEER MENTORING

Make peer mentors available for any direct reports who want to improve in a specific area of competence or character, and select a mentor who is strong in the given area. One way to match mentors and mentees is to use a flash mentoring format that asks participants to commit to meeting once to see if both parties connect, and if the mentor believes he has the knowledge, expertise, and time available to meet the mentee's needs and expectations. If both parties agree to continue, they should set a finite number of additional meetings, rather than leave the term open-ended. Unless both mentor and mentee agree to the arrangement, there is no commitment to meet again (Derrick and Wooley 2009).

## 96. CREATE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

People are more engaged when they are striving and progressing toward goals. Work with your direct reports to create personal development plans. Help them make wise goals to advance their careers, and put disciplines in place to help them achieve these goals. Doing so will boost their effectiveness and connection to you.

## 97. MINIMIZE INTERNAL COMPETITION AMONG INDIVIDUALS WHO NEED TO COOPERATE

Competition can be healthy if it occurs between individuals (or groups) who don't need to cooperate to do their work well. For individuals who must cooperate in order to achieve excellent results, it's best to minimize competition in order to maximize connection. Avoid actions such as forced rankings, making performance metrics public, or holding contests if you want colleagues to mutually support and encourage each other.

## 98. IMPLEMENT INTEGRATED SERVANT LEADER DEVELOPMENT

Yale New Haven Health System (YNHHS) develops servant leaders using a combination of high-quality classroom instruction, coaching, mentoring, workplace application, and senior leadership involvement. YNHHS creates cohorts of high-potential directors and vice presidents from across its system of hospitals (for example, six nurses, three physicians, and six administrators) who complete the six-month program together. The program uses a 70-20-10 model, where 70 percent of the learning comes from workplace application and working in teams on system-wide projects that apply new skills, 20 percent comes from coaching and mentoring, and 10 percent comes from classroom instruction. It also includes an assessment of each participant's leadership competencies and character values. Results have been impressive: The program developed interpersonal, interdepartmental, and inter-system relationships (connections) across YNHHS hospitals. Out of a recent cohort of 15 participants, 10 (67 percent) were promoted, and all were given expanded responsibilities.

## 99. IMPLEMENT GROUP INTERVENTIONS

Mitchell Dickey, founder of The Inflection Point, likes to employ group interventions to address real business and organization opportunities and problems. Group interventions assemble a team of people across organizational departments to analyze a problem and recommend solutions for leaders to decide upon. They promote connection across departments by capitalizing on knowledge flow to address issues.



## 100. CONSIDER THE EFFECT OF PHYSICAL SPACE ON CONNECTION

When Ed Catmull, CEO of Pixar Animation, and Steve Jobs, Pixar's primary owner at the time, designed Pixar's new headquarters, they created a large centralized space that included the company's entrance and visitor reception area, meeting rooms, company cafeteria, employee mail slots, and restrooms. Their rationale was that a centralized space would facilitate connection. Research supports the idea that physical location and office space design affects connection. People who work in physical space near one another generally feel more connected, and physical spaces that are more open encourage that further. Consider how your organization's physical space and office design encourages or discourages connection, and what changes you can make to boost connection.

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For additional information and to learn new connection practices:

- Check out the rich assortment of articles, interviews, videos, and other resources on connection and connection culture at [www.ConnectionCulture.com](http://www.ConnectionCulture.com) and [www.MichaelLeeStallard.com](http://www.MichaelLeeStallard.com).
- Subscribe to the Connect to Thrive email newsletter. When you subscribe, you will receive a welcome email that includes a free pdf copy of *Fired Up or Burned Out: How to Reignite Your Team's Passion, Creativity and Productivity*, Michael's first book, which introduced the connection culture framework and includes a section that profiles 20 leaders throughout history who connected with the people they led.

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