

It's All About Connection

By David Irvine, Best-Selling Author and Leader's Navigator

Life depends on connections, and the quality of your life depends on the quality of your connections. Every system depends on connections. Circulatory systems, nervous systems, organizational systems, ecosystems, family systems. You name it - it's about connection. Connection is to relationship what breathing is to life. If you can't make a connection, not much else matters.

While we all, at some level, understand the importance of connection in our lives, what exactly does it mean to be connected? Like beauty, it's hard to describe, but you know when it's there. There's a difference between being in contact and being connected. Today, with all of our high tech tools such as email, text messaging, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, we are certainly in better contact electronically, but are we better connected? With all this capacity to be *in* contact are we actually *making* contact? In this high tech, so-called "connected" world, do we feel more loved; more supported; or more at peace with ourselves and others? Do we live with a stronger sense of community? You can't fully connect without looking a person in the eyes, hearing their voice, reaching their hearts, and knowing them as unique people with needs, values, and dreams. Emails are a great tool to pass along information, but they are a lousy way to connect at an emotional level.

Connections have a life of their own. You can actually stifle connections like you can a living organism, or you can breathe life into them. Here are some conditions for connections to thrive:

1. **Focus: Identify the ten most important relationships in your life and make a commitment to be connected to them.** Don't confuse peripheral relationships with significant relationships. Think about who will be with you on your death bed.
2. **Acceptance: Your goal is understanding, not necessarily agreement.** Connection isn't the same as agreement. You can agree without connecting, just as you can connect without agreement.
3. **Accountability: Take accountability for your own emotions, reactions, and needs – in all your relationships.** See all blame as a waste of time. Ownership breeds openness.
4. **Disconnection: Turn off your Blackberries and iPhones!** Disconnect to connect. Create time and space to be together without interruptions. I find it interesting that in our society, the value of pets - who cannot use technology yet are completely present –is increasing along with the value we place on technology.
5. **Rituals: Regularly scheduled dates, breakfasts, teas, and uninterrupted, unstructured time to hang out and just be with the significant people in your life all allow connections to grow.** Don't worry about making it "quality" time. Sometimes it's quality; sometimes it isn't. Just be sure it is *time*.

6. **Vulnerability Rituals: Develop a habit of sharing your challenges, your fears, your dreams, or your insecurities – for just three minutes on a daily basis - with a significant relationship in your life.** Connections strengthen with vulnerability and sharing what's happening inside of you. Conversations are the path to connection. But remember, connection doesn't have to be big or dramatic. It simply has to be consistent.
7. **Presence: Listen carefully as you feel with people. What are their dreams? What matters to them?** Don't just *deal* with people. *Feel* with people! Before you can touch a person's heart, you have to know what's in it. The best present you can ever give another person is to be present in the present.
8. **Stopping: Slow down in order to focus on the people you meet.** Practice walking through crowds slowly. Whether clients, customers, or colleagues, take a few minutes to stop and listen. Everyone has needs, values, and dreams, and people generally like to talk about themselves. Focus on being interested rather than being interesting.
9. **Tuning in. Listen for messages that people send without talking.** Words aren't the only way to connect. We communicate with our eyes, our body language, our unspoken messages. Practice tuning in by spending time in nature or with animals. But again, you have to slow down to tune in.
10. **Authenticity: Make time to slow down and reflect and connect with the voice inside of you.** You can't connect fully unless you have a good sense of self-worth that comes from being true to yourself. As you live in accord with your values, your self-respect grows, and connections with others strengthens. Connection with others begins with a connection to yourself.

The other day a flight attendant asked me if I was connecting. Good question to ask yourself every so often. "Are you connecting?"

© 2011 by David Irvine. Permission to reprint and circulate is granted.

David Irvine is sought after internationally as a speaker, author, and mentor. His work has contributed to the building of accountable, vital, and engaged organizations across North America. David is the best selling author of five books. These are available in bookstores or can be ordered at www.davidirvine.com

For information on how David can bring value to your organization, contact david@davidirvine.com or call 1-866-621-7008 (toll free).