

## Connection Cultures

*Great leaders create strong bonds.*



by Michael Stallard and Jason Pankau

ONE POWERFUL SOURCE OF COMPETITIVE advantage exists when people share a *feeling* of connection to the organization and colleagues in a *connection culture*. It creates an emotional bond among members that leads to greater trust and cooperation, and a palpable sense of energy that boosts the organization and its members to play at the top of their games.

Great leaders create connection cultures. Queen Elizabeth, George Washington, John Wooden, and Ann Mulcahy, among many others, created connection cultures. Relational connections are powerful. Connection affects us in positive way: improves our health, boosts our creativity and problem-solving ability, and connection (social capital) increases the feeling of satisfaction in life for individuals and boosts the economic productivity of nations. Emotional connection is four times more effective at boosting employee engagement than rational factors—and it results in higher productivity, profitability, shareholder returns, customer satisfaction, and employee retention.

### Three Elements

Leaders create a connection culture by increasing three elements:

**1. Inspiring identity.** This exists in a culture when everyone is motivated by the mission, united by the values, and proud of its reputation. During World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt traveled to Seattle, Washington to meet with 18,000 aircraft workers at Boeing. He brought with him a young pilot who had escaped death thanks to the resilience of his bullet-riddled B-17, a plane built at that plant. Seeing and hearing that pilot thank them for saving his life connected them to each other and their cause and transformed them into freedom fighters. That's the

power of an Inspiring Identity.

**2. Human Value.** This exists in a culture when everyone understands the basic psychological needs of people, appreciates their positive unique contributions, and helps them achieve their potential. Allan Loren, who led a turnaround of Dun and Bradstreet, showed people he valued them in many ways. To protect their time, he scheduled no meetings on Mondays or Fridays if it required people to travel over the weekend. Loren matched everyone with mentors who gave them feedback about how they were doing relative to their growth goals. Over his four-year tenure, Dun and Bradstreet experienced annual double-digit earnings growth and its value increased 300 percent.

**3. Knowledge flow.** This exists when everyone seeks the ideas of others, shares their ideas and opinions honestly, and safeguards relational connections. A.G. Lafley, CEO of Procter & Gamble, uses *Knowledge Flow* to boost performance. When he took over the reins, P&G was performing poorly, and morale was low. Lafley surveyed employees to get their ideas, and

implemented many of them. The results have been stunning. In his first 12 months, Lafley led an effort that resulted in a nearly three-fold increase in employees who approve of P&G's direction.

Here's a formula for a Connection Culture: *Vision + Value + Voice = Connection*. Connection transforms a dog-eat-dog culture into a sled dog team.

Great leaders see the value of connection and foster a sense of community. The biotech company Genentech brings in cancer patients to meet its employees. Southwest Airlines improves its performance at the gate when it maintains a 10-to-1 frontline employee-to-supervisor ratio because supervisors can connect with and coach their people. Goldman Sachs makes its leadership training available to the promising leaders of its client companies to connect with them. Ed Catmull, head of Pixar Animation studios, created Pixar University to increase connection. It's crest bears the Latin phrase *Alienus Non Dieutius* (alone no longer). Creating connection cultures yields benefits. LE

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**ACTION:** Create a connection culture.