

Influencing your team members in a positive way

By Alfonso Bucero

Connection is absolutely critical if you, as a project manager, want to influence your team members in a positive way. When you navigate for others, you come alongside them and travel their road for a while, helping them handle some of the obstacles and difficulties in their projects. But when you connect with them, you are asking them to come alongside you and travel your road for your and their mutual benefit.

When we think of connecting with people, we compare it to trains and what happens to them in a train yard. The cars sitting on the tracks in a train yard have a lot of things going for them. They have value because they're loaded with cargo; they have a destination; and they even have a route by which to get to that destination. But they don't have a way of getting anywhere on their own. To do anything of value, they have to hook up with a locomotive.

Have you ever been to a train yard and watched how unrelated and disconnected pieces of equipment come together to form a working train? It's quite a process. It all begins with the locomotive. First, it switches itself onto the same track as the car it's going to pick up. Then it moves to where the car is, backs up to it, makes contact with it, and connects. Once it's all hooked up, together they move toward their destination.

A similar thing must happen before you can get people to go with you on a project. You have to find out where they are, move toward them to make contact, and connect with them. If you can do that successfully, you can take them to new heights in your relationship and in their development. To connect with people you will need communication skills, a desire to help people grow and change, and a sense of personal mission or purpose. My best practices to connect with the people you influence are as follows

1. Do not take people for granted:

You can connect with your team members and lead them only if you value them. Weak project managers sometimes get so caught up in the vision of where they are going that they forget the people they are trying to lead. But you can't take people for granted for any length of time before your leadership begins to fall apart. And you won't be able to connect with them.

Valuing people is the first step in the connection process, but it has additional benefits. When you let people know that you don't take them for granted, they turn around and do the same for you. Remember that you can connect with people and lead them only if you value them.

2. Possess a make –a-difference mind-set

If you desire to accomplish something great and really want to see it happen, you need to possess a make-a-difference attitude. Anytime you don't believe you can make a difference, you won't. How do you cultivate a solid make-a-difference mind-set?

Every person on this earth, including you, has the potential to make a difference. But you can do it only if you believe in.

3. Initiate movement toward them

Lack of contact and communication is a problem that affects many people, not just project managers in organizations. I believe there are many reasons why people don't connect with one another more than they do. A primary reason, especially within organizations, is that many leaders believe that it is the follower's responsibility to initiate contact with them. But the opposite is true. To be effective, leaders must be initiators. If they don't go to their people, meet them where they are, and initiate the connection, then 80 percent of the time no connection will be made.

4. Look for common ground

Anytime you want to connect with other person, start where both of you agree. And that means finding common ground. If you have developed good listening skills you will probably be able to detect areas where you have common experience or views. Talk about hobbies, where you've lived, your work, sports, or children. What you discuss is not as important as your attitude. Be positive, and try to see things from other person's point of view. Being open and likeable is half the battle.

Sometimes, even when you find common ground, you can face obstacles in the communication process. If you detect that people you are trying to connect with are tentative about your approaching them, then try to meet them on emotional common ground. First, try to sense what they feel, and acknowledge and validate the feelings. If you have had similar feelings in the past, then share with them about how you have also felt the same way before. Finally share with them what you've found that has helped you work through the feelings.

5. Recognize and respect differences

We need to acknowledge that we're different. And that's one of the great joys of life, though we did not always see it that way. As you connect with others, recognize and respect their differences in motivation. Something else is needed: the sensitivity to understand what other people wants and the willingness to give it to them. Pay attention to people's personalities, and do your best to meet them where they are. They'll appreciate your sensitivity and understanding.

6. Find the key to others' lives

There are two clues to help you do it: to understand his heart, look at what he aspires to do. That will help you find the key, and once you do find it, use it with integrity. Turn the key only when you have the person's permission, and even then use that key only for his benefit, not your own-to help, not to hurt.

7. Communicate from the heart

Once you have initiated a connection with others, found common ground, and discovered what really matters to them, communicate to what really matters to you. And that requires you to speak to them from your heart. Being genuine is the single most important factor when communicating with others, whether one-on-one or before large audiences. No amount of knowledge, technique or quick-wittedness can substitute for honesty and the genuine desire to help others. As you communicate with others to build connections with them, share from your heart and be yourself.

8. Share common experiences

To really connect with others, you have to do more than find common ground and communicate well. You need to find a way to cement the relationship. People are lonely because they build walls instead of bridges. To build bridges that connect you to people in a lasting way, share common experiences with them.

No one ever achieves alone what he can do when partnering with others. Share meals with people. Go to a ball game together. Take people out on a call or visitation with you. Anything you experience together that creates a common history helps to connect you to others. Look for ways to build bridges with people within your influence, especially during times when they experience adversity. The connections you make will strengthen your relationships incredibly and prepare you for the journey you can take together.

9. Once connected. Move forward

If you want to influence others, and you desire to get them moving in the right direction, you must connect with them before you try to take them anywhere. Attempting to do it before connecting is a common mistake of inexperienced leaders. Trying to move others before going through the connection process with them can lead to mistrust, resistance, and strained relationships. Always remember that you have to share yourself before you try to share the journey. A challenge for any influencer is connecting with people from another culture.

About the Author



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