

Connected Leadership

The Key To Success In A 21st Century Company

Kerry S. Campbell



KERRY S. CAMPBELL

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

THE KEY TO SUCCESS IN A 21ST CENTURY COMPANY

Connected Leadership: The Key To Success In A 21st Century Company

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CONTENTS

	About The Author	7
	Introduction	8
1	A New Leadership Paradigm	9
1.1	Definition Of A Leader	9
1.2	A Common Leadership Problem	11
1.3	The Cost Of Poor Leadership	12
1.4	The Need For A Leadership Paradigm Shift	14
1.5	Hierarchical Leadership	15
1.6	Matrix Leadership	15
1.7	Self-Organizing Leadership	16
1.8	Connected Leadership: A New Paradigm	17
1.9	Who This Book Is For	18
1.10	Connected Leadership Characteristics	19
1.11	Creating A Connected Culture	19

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2	Actively Seeks Feedback	20
2.1	Feedback Is King	20
2.2	Ways To Gather Feedback	21
3	Communicates, Communicates, Communicates	22
3.1	Communication Connects All Things	22
3.2	Ways To Communicate	22
4	Provides Frequent Praise And Recognition	24
4.1	Recognition Makes Everyone Feel Good	24
4.2	Ways To Provide Recognition	24
5	Focuses On Problem Solving	26
5.1	It's The Problem That's The Problem	26
5.2	Ways To Problem Solve	27
6	Delegates Ownership And Empowers Others	28
6.1	People Want To Be Empowered	28
6.2	Ways To Empower Others	28
7	Focuses On Strengths	29
7.1	Everyone Has Their Unique Gifts	29
7.2	Ways To Play To People's Strengths	30
8	Encourages A Learning Culture/Growth Mindset	31
8.1	We Are All Learners By Nature	31
8.2	Ways To Encourage A Growth Mindset	31
9	Embraces Change As The New Norm	32
9.1	The Only Constant Is Change	32
9.2	Ways To Embrace Change	32
10	Treats All People With Dignity And Respect	34
10.1	Even Though We Are Different, We Are All The Same	34
10.2	Ways To Celebrate Diversity	34
11	Explores New Ideas With Curiosity And Intent	36
11.1	Curiosity Opens Doors	36
11.2	Ways To Foster Curiosity	36
12	Keeps An Open Door Policy	38
12.1	An Open Door Encourages Connection	38
12.2	Ways To Keep An Open Door	39

13	Exudes A Positive Attitude	40
13.1	Positivity Generates More Positivity	40
13.2	Ways To Generate Positivity	40
14	Conclusion And Call To Action	42
14.1	Connected Leadership Creates A Connected Culture	42
14.2	Create An Action Plan	42

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kerry S. Campbell is a training and organizational development consultant and leader with over 15 years' experience working with c-suite and senior leaders at Fortune 500 companies to design and develop organizational development and learning initiatives. She is also a certified Project Management Professional (PMP) and has managed global programs in sales, marketing, and employee development for various high tech companies, including Microsoft, Intel, and Qualcomm. She has also been a consultant to various other types of organizations, such as healthcare, local and state government, and non-profit organizations. She is a writer and published author on various topics, including personal growth and development, as well as business topics. She is a frequent contributing writer to various publications.

Kerry graduated from California State University, Sacramento with a Master in Arts, focused on creative writing and adult education. She has been teaching as an adjunct professor for 20 years. She has taught university-level courses in Writing and Composition, Business Communications, English Literature, and Project Management Fundamentals. Kerry has worked in the high tech space for several Fortune 500 companies as a trainer, program manager, marketing director, communication manager, and other roles throughout her career.

She is passionate about continuous learning, personal growth and development, cultivating a growth mindset in our corporations and schools, and embracing the diversity of others as a way for us all to be stronger together. She firmly believes in the power of awareness and learning to positively impact not only one's own life, but that of our society as a whole. Kerry is also a visual artist and poet.

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<https://kerrycampbell.wixsite.com/wellbeinglife>

Other books: [Principles of Well Being: Life Practices for Positive Change](#)



INTRODUCTION

This book is a labor of love in that it explores a new way to be thinking about leadership – a way that is near and dear to my heart. That’s because this new way focuses on fostering connection between people, their leadership, and with the company they work for. I spend a lot of my time and energy working within a corporate culture and the best thing I can imagine receiving from this experience is working with a leader who exemplifies the characteristics I describe in this book. These are the type of characteristics that, as an employee, would allow me the opportunity to enjoy more the work that I do, to thrive at work, to engage with my colleagues on a whole new level, and in the end, be more well-balanced, content, and productive for it.

As a leader in my own right, these are also the characteristics that I strive to embrace and to exemplify because I want the people I work with to feel connected to me, to the work we’re doing together, and to be the best they can be. We all want connection, we all want to feel valued, and we all want to live a life as stress-free and productive as possible. It’s a sad fact, though, that many corporate cultures, as well as small business cultures, are not necessarily focused on fostering a working environment where an employee’s wellbeing is paramount. I want to change that. I want to encourage ways to cultivate working environments that are more friendly versus hostile, more genuine versus malevolent, and more open and collaborative versus territorial. A company centered on connection and wellbeing is a stronger company because the ties that bind employees and the leadership together are stronger. And, a stronger company is more apt to weather the tides of market changes, to grow in prosperity, and to build on its successes.

Connected leadership helps drive and foster a connected culture, and that’s a good thing for everyone.

Kerry S. Campbell

Encinitas, CA 2018

1 A NEW LEADERSHIP PARADIGM

1.1 DEFINITION OF A LEADER

What makes a leader a leader in today's corporate world? This question was on my mind about a year ago as I started a new job with a new company. Here I was working with the CIO to define learning and organizational development initiatives to help him drive strategic business initiatives, which not only impacted his organization, but the entire company, as a whole. A year prior to this, it would have been impossible to have this kind of collaborative relationship. That's because there was a different leader then. And, the organization was suffering. Employee morale was low, customer satisfaction was declining, and employees were leaving in droves. Within a short period of time, this new leader had dramatically turned the technology organization around – time to value was up 40%, employee morale was coming back, there was a focus on cross-group collaboration which showed increased results in executing on company initiatives. People started to feel proud again about the work they did. This got me thinking – what was different about characteristics of this leader that helped achieve such a dramatic shift?

The reasons why it was on my mind were many. One of them was because I was engaging with leadership in the c-suite that exhibited certain characteristics that were different than those I had experienced in other companies. I work in high tech. I spent many years in Seattle working for one of the most well-known high tech companies in the world, and some not so well known ones. I grew up living under my parents' mentality of the 50s – work hard, do what you're told, save your pennies, and you'll do well. But, the primary years of my career were spent working during the 90s and early 21st century, where the working landscape was a lot different and changing rapidly. Globalization expanded companies all over the world, such that you often spent more time with virtual teams and colleagues half way around the world, than you did with team members in your own local office. The advent of the internet and smart phones meant you were accessible anytime and anywhere and suddenly you were working at home in the evenings, on the weekends, or during your daughter's soccer game. Companies were organizing themselves differently too, in order to adapt to the new economy. They weren't top down hierarchical so much anymore as matrixed organizations with teams working cross-functionally. The idea of a leader was shifting. For most of the 20th century, a leader was a leader by default of his or her title being the highest one up the corporate ladder. They gave orders and people followed the orders. By the late 20th century, a leader was one who often led a team of people across different organizational functions and, while they often had a high-level title, they didn't always have people on the team directly reporting to them. They were a team lead. One style of leadership tended toward autocratic rule. The other style of leadership tended toward more how to manage a project and influence people. Both had their place in their time.

The idea of leadership was no longer to give orders and expect people to take orders like in the mid-20th century, but was now a late 20th century construct of leading cross-functionally.

However, what's wrong with these two models? If you've ever been down the chain of command or a team member on a cross-functional team, you have probably yearned for a new approach to leadership. One that actually involves you. Historically to date, leadership has been defined as a sort of "driving people to get something done." It has not been about engaging people and bringing them into the vision of the mission or feeling any personal responsibility for the outcome. People were just cogs in the machine to fulfill corporate goals and leaders were the minions who went out and moved the masses to get the work done. I can tell you how I felt working within such leadership paradigms:

- Disempowered
- Disengaged
- Disillusioned
- Disappointed
- Dissatisfied
- Disconnected

If this is the experience of many of us in our corporate lives, then we have a huge opportunity within our corporate cultures to take a look at how we define leadership and how we can be more inspiring and empowering leaders. This is especially important in our 21st century, where a new generation of workers are coming into the workforce and grew up with a different mentality. They watched their parents suffer the burn out of working too hard and too many hours under leadership regimes that negated the primacy of the person. They grew up in a world connected from day one – not only through globalization, but through social media, and instant access to information. They are entrepreneurial in nature, smart, and mobile. If companies today want to engage and retain such talent of the millennial generation, then they need to think differently about leadership.

So, what was it about the leadership characteristics of the current company I had just started working for that struck me so much? There were many – but these weren't just ones that I had only witnessed here. I had seen sparks of these characteristics throughout my career in various ways – with leaders I've worked with at various levels of the organization, as well as with the individual level from working with people who didn't even have a leadership title. See, the thing is, with the new leadership paradigm, we are all leaders in our own right. Every one of the leadership characteristics in this book should not only be something for titled leaders to develop and exemplify, but they are also ones that each individual contributor can and should aspire to. What's the common theme that threads through all these characteristics? Fundamentally, it's about fostering a sense of connection and cultivating employee engagement.



1.2 A COMMON LEADERSHIP PROBLEM

I'd like to share a story based on a real-world scenario. This is about a sales organization in a global company where each of the local regions was using different ways of estimating and pricing customer engagements. A leader at corporate headquarters was given the project to make a change in the way the organization did price estimates for customers, and to implement this change across all regions. As with all change, the impetus is pain. The pain in this situation was that all the local regions were doing it differently, causing enormous inefficiencies across the organization, price bloating, and poor business practices. Like most similar situations in corporate environments, this one was fraught with conflict. People didn't want to change what they were doing, they didn't see the benefit of the new way, they weren't involved in the decisions, and ... the list goes on. The final result? Poor leadership drove this initiative into the nether regions of the deep bucket of many other failed endeavors.

What happened? Lack of a common vision, lack of bringing people to the table to join in the solution, lack of effective communications of why doing it, how doing it, lack of using influencing power, colleagues, and incentives to drive the right behavior. In short, lack of *connected leadership*. See, a leader knows how to do all these things. What things? Get people on board, get people all pointed in the same direction, get clear on the strategy, direction, and how we're going to get there. And, most of all, get people to see the vision, *connect*

with the vision, and want to be part of that vision. A leader is like a movie producer. She sets the tone of the movie's cinematography, she guides the actors in performing their roles according to that vision, she revises the script as needed along the way, and she effectively markets the movie to drive audience engagement.

But a movie producer also knows that without the actors and actresses, there would be no movie at all. A good movie producer treats the project as a collaborative process, engages everyone with a common vision, seeks to leverage each person's unique talents, proactively solicits feedback, and provides encouragement along the way for continuing to do good work. Can you imagine what would happen if a movie producer didn't perform any of these functions or performed them poorly? You wouldn't see them working in Hollywood for very long. Or, the result would be you'd be disappointed in the mediocre or sub-par movie you just paid a pricey ticket to see.

1.3 THE COST OF POOR LEADERSHIP

There are a lot of statistics and information out there on the impact of poor leadership in corporations, and also why leadership development programs tend to fail. It's my belief this is a combination of factors, including

- a) focusing on the wrong things,
- b) working on the basis of old and outdated paradigms,
- c) investing in leadership development only in top level management versus all levels of employees, and
- d) defining and measuring the wrong success factors.

Connected leadership is fundamentally based on employee engagement. Employee engagement is seen as the driver of success, because engaged employees

- a) do their best work,
- b) remain at the company for longer,
- c) generate higher employee morale and productivity,
- d) naturally drive recruitment of top talent, and other benefits that all impact the bottom line.

In short, happy and connected employees are the most productive employees and the most productive employees are the most beneficial to the company to achieving their highest profits and other aspirations.

There is a lot of literature out there about the cost of poor leadership. I've highlighted a few interesting and enlightening stats here. So, what is the cost of poor leadership? In a word, it's lost productivity and lost productivity directly translates to dollars. Poor leadership effectively kills billions of dollars' worth of revenue a year, alone.

According to research from the Blanchard Company:

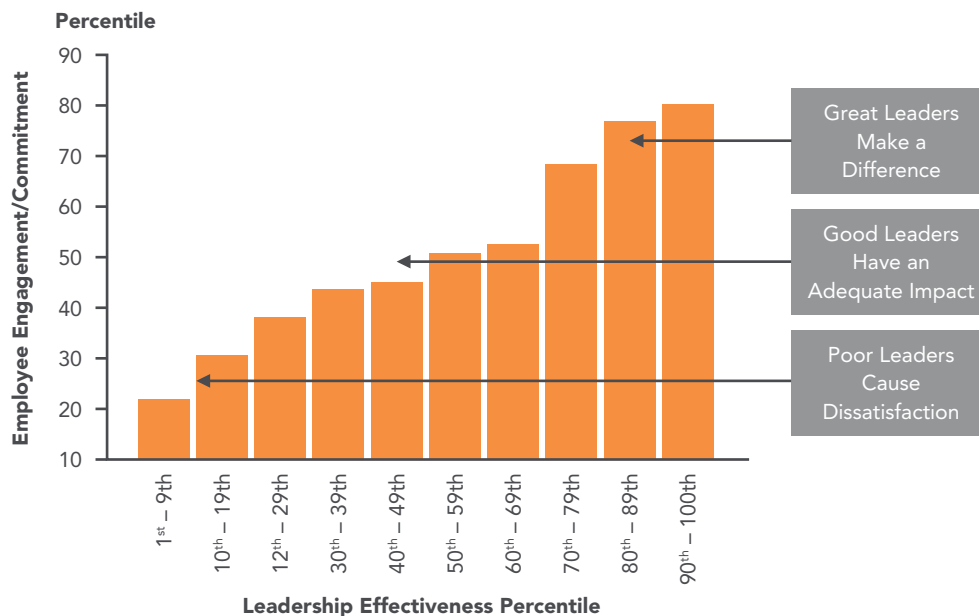
- Less-than-optimal leadership practices cost the typical organization an amount equal to as much as 7% of their total annual sales.
- At least 9% and possibly as much as 32% of an organization's voluntary turnover can be avoided through better leadership skills.
- Better leadership can generate a 3-4% improvement in customer satisfaction scores and a corresponding 1.5% increase in revenue growth.
- Most organizations are operating with a 5-10% productivity drag that better leadership practices could eliminate.

From other sources:

- Gallup's 2013 State of the American Workplace report indicates that 50% of employees merely put their time in, while the remaining 20% act out their discontent in counterproductive ways, negatively influencing their coworkers, missing days on the job, and driving customers away through poor service. Gallup estimates that the 20% group alone costs the U.S. economy around half a trillion dollars each year. ***The single greatest cause for employee disengagement? Poor leadership.***
- Authors Rosen and Brown, from their book *Leading People*, compiled findings from more than a dozen studies that focused on leading companies from the Forbes 500, Fortune 500, seven hundred privately-held firms, and interviews at the three thousand largest companies in America. They found that current leadership is costing American companies more than half their human potential. To put that another way, improved leadership alone could double worker productivity. This translates directly to the bottom line. The single biggest influence on employee commitment and performance is the leadership skills of their managers.

From Harvard:

Results from a recent study conducted by Harvard indicated the following trends.



*By Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman

Their final conclusion: A focus on improving leadership skills and creating a winning culture that engages employees is likely the single greatest area for organizational improvement, and the fastest way to decrease costs and increase profitability. While these studies were done with primarily US companies, you can imagine that they directly translate to other global corporations, regardless of where they are based.

1.4 THE NEED FOR A LEADERSHIP PARADIGM SHIFT

Why do we need a leadership paradigm shift? Because, quite simply, the old ones aren't working.

There are many different schools of leadership development and there have been many leadership models espoused, especially in the last one hundred years. But, times are changing and these leadership models no longer work or are just not that effective. Let's briefly take a look at a couple of them so we can understand where we've come from.

1.5 HIERARCHICAL LEADERSHIP

I consider this the military approach. You have the Commander in Chief at the top, his or her top staff, and then their direct reports and teams down the chain. All decision-making goes down the chain. The top dog makes the top decision. It's almost like a pack animal mentality. Everyone has their position along the rungs of the ladder and everyone has their authority only within that position. Information flows down the chain of command, decisions flow down, and actions are performed by the people getting the orders. And those people are supposed to execute without asking questions. It's also like an assembly line mentality.

This made sense during the industrial revolution, when everything became a process. One person at the top decided how the process was going to work and then each person performed their part in the process, handing their piece off to the next person to do their part in the process. This is how the steel mills worked, the textile factories, etc. Everyone had their part of the chain of production. This is also how Henry Ford became so rich – he perfected the process to be able to churn out inexpensive cars that the average person could afford and he created a process that churned them out quickly. So process-oriented management styles were the focus in the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries. This was largely an authoritarian approach. Someone gave the orders and then someone else executed the orders. It was all about the production of the product. Success was measured in the number of widgets produced. People were simply a cog in the machine and when they broke, they were replaced. In this model, a person was deemed a leader merely by the fact that they had the title and could give orders that everyone dutifully followed.

1.6 MATRIX LEADERSHIP

Things got a little more complicated during the mid-20th century during the rise of the major corporations. Decisions needed to be made across different lines of the business, or between different functions. It wasn't so simple anymore as companies became more diversified. They offered multiple product lines, production was more complicated, business functions were cross-global, and everyone had to begin to interact with each other across their respective functions in order to be successful as a whole. While the corporate hierarchy still existed, there was a need for teams of people to come together to manage specific problems or address specific needs cross-organizationally. It was the dawn of the era of teams and a matrix organization. This meant that different people across various parts of the business organized in a matrix function – where they dotted line had authority or responsibility to execute something for or with someone that was not in their direct chain of command.

In this era leadership styles were focused on managing teams and managing projects. It was about getting people to work together, so the emphasis was still on process from a project methodology standpoint, but it was also on team dynamics and getting diverse people with diverse backgrounds and motivations to communicate and collaborate effectively. Often, the team leader had no formal authority. They were responsible for the outcome of the project, but the people on the project did not report to them. This caused all sorts of internal frictions, because people had competing priorities.

The challenge with this leadership approach is that it focuses on the project outcomes. It's about getting the project done within scope, within budget, and on time. Success is measured against the triple constraint. People are seen as a means to an end, and when the project doesn't succeed team members are replaced on the team or blamed for project failure, which often causes low morale and under-performing teams. It's estimated that 70% of all IT projects fail – this approach to leadership is a key reason why.

1.7 SELF-ORGANIZING LEADERSHIP

The self-organizing organizational structure has been a trend in the high tech space with companies like Google and others. This is where different people from across the organization decide to create projects together, ad hoc. The focus is on innovation. In this way, people's creativity is allowed to flourish and input is actively sought out. Communication and collaboration is more free-flowing because success is measured on innovation versus being on time, within scope, or on budget. There is much more room for exploration in this model. There is much more focus on the unique strengths and attributes a person could bring to the group. People's unique traits and skills are more valued. They aren't considered just a cog in a machine to produce a widget, or execute some task on the project plan. This was the dawn of the 21st century. People working under this leadership model had no leader, per se. Everyone was a type of leader in their own right. However, this model tended to only work in largely "incubation" scenarios where there was plenty of capital and investment for teams to self-organize around a common passion to solve a problem. It didn't tend to take hold as a corporate model outside the innovation bubbles within tech companies. Leadership within these structures was flat. There was no true hierarchy in a sense. Let's consider it like a commune. It has its purpose and can be effective, but its capacity to scale is limited.

1.8 CONNECTED LEADERSHIP: A NEW PARADIGM

A new leadership paradigm is needed. One that considers the business world and life in the 21st century. What's different in the 21st century than in the 20th? While the internet started to gain wide-scale use in the late nineties, it wasn't until the early 2000s that it really took off. Then, came the era of smart phones, apps, and social media. Not to mention full blown globalization of commerce, knowledge flow, and the realization that we are all truly interconnected. Witness the global economic recession in 2008 that was spawned by the housing market crisis in the United States. Things that happen elsewhere have a tremendous effect and impact across the globe, no matter where it originated.

The 21st century also saw a new generation being raised on technology and social media. So, from a very young age the millennial generation was socially connected by their technology devices and was used to having a platform for speaking their voice. In short, this current generation is vocal, shares, is constantly connected, and expects to have a say in things. This generation also witnessed their parents burning out, over stressed, and working too long hours under the old model of "the matrix organization." Kids of this generation aren't interested in that route. Not only that, they want their work to matter. It's not just about a paycheck anymore. It's about value and impact. What is also important for employers to be aware of is that this generation is poised to be perhaps the most mobile in terms of changing jobs on a frequent basis. This trend started in the previous generation with Gen X, who no longer stayed at the same corporation for most of their careers like their parents, but tended to follow opportunities to advance their career. They weren't loyal to a specific company – mostly because they could no longer expect similar loyalty back with a corporate pension after serving 30+ years in the rank and file.

Today's business world is fast paced, dynamic, and ever changing. While most companies need to organize themselves in some fashion in order to operate effectively, and most companies tend to use a hierarchical or matrix structure, what is apparent is that the old ways of leadership are no longer applicable. Part of this is because the leaders don't always have the answers and part of it is because the definition of leadership success has changed. It's not about managing a team anymore, or setting the strategy and expecting others to execute it. It's really about employee engagement and connection to the vision, coaching others to be successful to help deliver on the vision, and it's about ensuring that everyone is empowered and leveraging their full strengths to lend to the corporate growth. Most of all, it's about attracting, developing, and retaining top talent. It's the leader who is effective in these areas that is demonstrating true leadership capabilities. It's no surprise that the attributes female leaders naturally bring to the table around collaboration and connection are becoming so popular in the 21st century as must-have leadership skills. In order to adapt at the speed of change, one must be able to not only define the vision, but take everyone along with them for the ride in ways that leverages everyone's talents together to be most

successful as a whole. It's a holistic and healthier approach. This can only truly be done by embracing and demonstrating connected leadership characteristics. That's what this book is about – what are these core characteristics, why do they matter in supporting successful 21st century companies, and how can you develop your skills in these areas.



1.9 WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR

This book is for two audiences.

- **Leaders** who are looking for new ways to think about being a leader in a changing and dynamic corporate landscape.
- **HR, organizational development, or learning professionals** looking to understand new ways of thinking about leadership development and what a leader needs to be doing in a 21st century to engage and retain top talent.

1.10 CONNECTED LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

We'll go through each one of these characteristics in detail in the following short chapters. In each chapter, I'll discuss what the characteristic looks like in practice, why it's so important and how it builds a connected corporate culture, and I'll share some practical tools, tips, and strategies for exemplifying this leadership characteristic. Why are these called characteristics versus something else? Because they are learned behaviors that anyone can do. They are not defined as natural-born personality traits or skills that someone may or may not have. Simply put – they can be learned and they can be developed. It's not a matter of whether you have this talent already, or whether it is one of your strengths or not. It's a matter of making a conscious choice to behave in certain ways that engage employees, connect people with a common cause, and encourage the best out of people, so that employees are invested, willingly bring their "A" game, and commit to remaining part of a vibrant corporate community.

The connected leadership characteristics are:

- Actively seeks feedback
- Communicates, communicates, communicates
- Provides frequent praise and recognition
- Focuses on problem solving
- Empowers others
- Focuses on strengths
- Cultivates a learning culture/growth mindset
- Embraces change as the new norm
- Treats all people with dignity and respect
- Explores new ideas with curiosity and intent
- Keeps an open door policy
- Exudes a positive attitude

1.11 CREATING A CONNECTED CULTURE

All of these 12 characteristics of connected leadership do one big important thing: they help foster a connected culture. This is a culture where employees thrive, they enjoy being at work, they are connected to each other, they are producing their best work, and where they plan to stay for a long time to come. The biggest contributing factor for driving employee engagement and the biggest investment a company can make is by hiring leaders who demonstrate connected leadership qualities. The second best thing is to help leaders develop these skills and learn ways to incorporate them into their leadership style. In the end, connected leaders help create connected cultures. And, a connected culture is a like a spider's web: strong, flexible, resilient, and quite beautiful.

2 ACTIVELY SEEKS FEEDBACK

2.1 FEEDBACK IS KING

Have you ever heard the phrase “Content is King”? Well, in today’s fast paced world, feedback is king. Feedback tells us if we are on the right track with new technology or innovative processes. Feedback engages with the end-users and gets their “skin in the game.” Feedback allows us to adapt, to grow, to course correct, and ultimately to be better than if we hadn’t received it all. That’s why a connected leader is always actively seeking feedback. A connected leader knows that the most impactful and powerful work doesn’t happen in a vacuum, or inside his or her own head. Feedback gives us insight and data, and knowledge. And, knowledge is power.

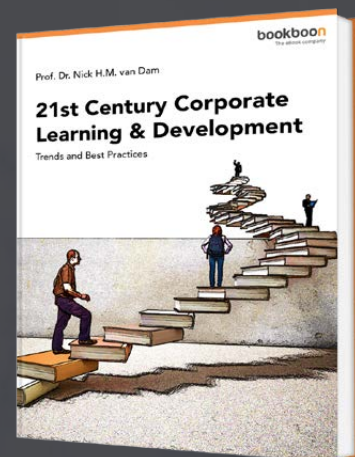
A connected leader knows that everyone on the team and in the organization has insights that he or she doesn’t. A connected leader values those insights as nuggets of gold. This is why a connected leader will actively seek feedback from the team and others and is constantly asking these key questions:

- What’s working well?
- What should we streamline, minimize, or eliminate?
- What else should we be doing?

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By soliciting feedback from the team, as well as providing multiple channels for how to gather and provide feedback, a connected leader is asking the employees to be involved at a most intimate level. That's because whatever they share could potentially change the course of the company, contribute to strategic direction, or otherwise help the company be more successful in any number of ways. When employees feel like their input matters, when they feel like they have ways to provide feedback, when they see their leadership actively asking for feedback and input, then they respond by getting more involved! And, an involved employee is more bonded with the company and more apt to stick around if they feel invested. One of the biggest and simplest things a person can do to develop his or her skills in connected leadership is by simply making a point to ask others what they think on a more frequent basis.

2.2 WAYS TO GATHER FEEDBACK

There are a variety of ways to pro-actively solicit feedback. The main goal is to encourage sharing of feedback as part of the fabric of the way you do business. This way, it is normal and people feel comfortable sharing. You'd be surprised what kinds of insights and golden nuggets you can find that can lead to business innovation, improvements, or increased employee engagement, just by asking.

- Use a quarterly employee engagement survey, like Glint, or create your own using survey creation tools, like Survey Monkey
- Ask questions as a regular habit, to seek to explore other alternatives and insights
- Do a round robin in meetings/share out – ask each person to share what's working, or what could be improved. Make this a standard practice.
- 1:1 meetings. Have regular one-on-one meetings with your direct reports and pro-actively ask them to share feedback, then listen.
- Ongoing conversations – always be soliciting feedback in any conversations you have with anyone across the organization, with customers, with other business leaders in your industry, etc.
- Ask for feedback any chance you get – one of the ways I do this is by leaving a survey link to a short one question survey at the end of any communications (emails, newsletters, blog posts, etc.)
- Provide ways for people to give feedback, such as an anonymous employee feedback line

3 COMMUNICATES, COMMUNICATES, COMMUNICATES

3.1 COMMUNICATION CONNECTS ALL THINGS

"The art of communication is the language of leadership."

– James Humes

Somewhat the opposite of actively asking for and seeking feedback, is sharing information. If your organization does engagement surveys of any kind, typically one of the lowest ranking scores on a company's engagement survey is around communication. Many corporations do not spend a lot of time thinking about their communication strategies to employees, or actively spending time communicating to employees on things like what's going on in their marketplace, what is the direction of the company's strategy, how can you contribute to the company's success as an employee, and other things. Most employees are thirsty for knowledge. They want to know how the company is performing, they want to know about key trends in the marketplace that impact the company's success, and they are interested to hear what's on the mind of their leaders. This information helps them also understand where their work connects with the wider corporate goals and helps them feel part of the corporate vision and strategic execution. It connects the dots for them, so to speak. And, if they have a good idea for how to help support those goals and you have good feedback mechanisms in place, this can help strengthen that connection.

3.2 WAYS TO COMMUNICATE

A simple way to do this as a leader is to maintain a corporate blog. Blogs are informal communication mechanisms that are simple to manage and maintain, especially if you have a corporate social platform, such as JIVE. If you don't have this, an email will suffice. The point is to share your thoughts as a leader. When you share your thoughts as a leader, this lets everyone else in to what you're thinking and what's on your mind. When you let people in, they feel more connected to you because they know you a little bit more. This works the same way with a leader sharing his or her thoughts with the team. Writing a blog post or an email once a month shouldn't take too long, but will pay enormous dividends in making people feel more connected to what's going on, to the business, and to the company, as a whole. Of course, this is just one communication mechanism and an informal one. Personally, I think a quick video would be even better. You can do this on your phone pretty easily and with high quality.

Other ways I've seen connected leaders communicate is through:

- Corporate social platforms, such as JIVE
- Monthly email newsletters
- Quarterly All-Hands meetings
- Status updates – either in an email or on an intranet page
- Leadership meetings
- 1:1 meetings
- Informal communication channels, such as social functions
- Through existing communication channels across the company – for example, a corporate newsletter, or a company YouTube channel, or some other forum where communication is already shared company-wide
- Training can also act as a communication mechanism

A connected leader is a constant communicator and seeks the opportunity to share information in many different forums and many different ways. It doesn't matter if the message may change over time, if the business shifts or direction changes, what matters is that things are being communicated. One of the top things that drives employee disengagement is to feel like they aren't involved in what's going on. Connected leadership is all about communicating, communicating, communicating. One of the number one reasons why large corporate change initiatives fail is because of lack of communication or poor communication. That big roll out of a new payroll process? Dead and never adopted. That new software tool for tracking sales and revenue that was costly to develop? Dead and never adopted. And, the list goes on. Think about that!



4 PROVIDES FREQUENT PRAISE AND RECOGNITION

4.1 RECOGNITION MAKES EVERYONE FEEL GOOD

Consider what it feels like whenever you receive praise or recognition from someone. What are your emotions? For example, when your boss tells you “good job” on a project, how does that make you feel? In short, it makes you feel good. And good feelings release happy neurotransmitters in our brains, including oxytocin, which is known as the “bonding” chemical. Oxytocin is what floods a mother’s body when she gives birth and which is responsible for the incredible connection a mother has with her newborn baby. Consider what it means when the “bonding” chemical is frequently released in an organization or team environment because the leader is giving out ample amounts of praise and recognition.

A leader who demonstrates connected leadership is one who frequently acknowledges people’s efforts and lets them know they are appreciated. It doesn’t matter if the person is just doing their job, what matters is their work and effort is recognized. Simply sprinkling the saying “good job” around a little more can go far in making others feel good. They’ll be thrilled to be acknowledged for their contributions and they will feel more connected to the team.

Even more important is that they will continue to want to do a good job. Why? Because they like feeling good and they want more of it. So, praise and recognition has many benefits to creating a connected culture. If you’re a leader, you could consider some simple but effective strategies for developing a habit of praising people. This is not about just giving out gratuitous praise, rather it is about showing appreciation to people for the effort, skills, and hard work they bring to the team and making sure everyone knows it is valued. It’s about honoring people and showing respect. More than anything, it’s about being grateful. And gratitude spreads like butterfly wings and touches everything in deep and profound ways. Everyone appreciates being appreciated. A connected leader expresses gratitude out loud more often and gives it away freely.

4.2 WAYS TO PROVIDE RECOGNITION

Create a spot award or kudos program. Small monetary rewards go far – they are exciting to get and provide a little bit of financial relief, even if it is a \$25 gift card. This would be a way to call out people who deserve specific recognition for extra effort on a project, helping a colleague be successful in a time of crisis, or some other extraordinary effort.

Make “shout-outs” a typical feature of meetings or specific types of meetings, like a quarterly All-Hands. This is where you create a habit of recognizing people in a public forum.

Come up with some common phrases you can use to give recognition and praise, so you have them on hand at all times. Some phrases are “A good job was done by X, for contributing in Y way.” Call out the impact and value of the person’s work, specifically. Showcase to others how the person helped the organization be stronger, improve quality, or innovate on the product, or whatever the outcome was.

Pro-actively keep an eye out for ways to congratulate and encourage people on the teams for exhibiting good corporate citizen and team mate behaviors, such as collaborating across teams on an important project, covering for someone when on medical leave, picking up an assignment to help someone who is overloaded, etc. And lastly, always find ways to say thank you, even for the small and common things. Everyone likes to be appreciated for what they do, even if what they do is the expectation. It’s nice to feel valued, no matter what your job or function. Expressing thanks and recognizing people’s efforts goes a long way toward cultivating a culture of gratitude and appreciation for each other, which keeps bonds strong.

5 FOCUSES ON PROBLEM SOLVING

5.1 IT'S THE PROBLEM THAT'S THE PROBLEM

I've been in many situations at work when if something goes wrong, it quickly descends into a blame game. Everyone starts pointing fingers and blaming someone else. And, no one is actively seeking to address the problem. If they are, they typically get shut down by everyone running around trying to blame each other. The problem with this scenario is it is very demoralizing to everyone involved. Usually, when something goes wrong, it's due to a chain of events that doesn't even have a direct and single owner. Thus, it's a fruitless exercise that puts people on the defensive and makes them feel victimized. A connected leader does not promote a blame-based culture.

Instead, a connected leader asks "How do we address this problem so this situation doesn't happen again?" And, the connected leader looks to his or her team to provide the answer. In this way, the connected leader is engaging the team in an exercise of jointly finding a solution. This focus on the solving the problem contributes to team bonding, gives the team



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a productive task when things go awry, and helps develop team confidence in rising to the occasion and taking care of an issue together. It also addresses the problem and hopefully keeps it from happening again.

5.2 WAYS TO PROBLEM SOLVE

There are various strategies and techniques for problem solving. Seek solutions, not blame.

- Brainstorm with each other to come up with some creative ways to solve the issue
- Gather input from others outside your sphere and get an outsider perspective
- Use the Delphi technique – ask experts and assess what they say
- Benchmark – ask what do other corporations do with a similar problem?
- Focus groups – create small groups of key people and ask for their insights and suggestions
- Hire an outside expert, or hire the skill needed to fix the problem

Use other connected leadership skills, such as actively seeking feedback and communicate. This means ask others for their input on how to solve the problem. Once the problem is resolved, communicate how it was resolved and what's the go forward path.



6 DELEGATES OWNERSHIP AND EMPOWERS OTHERS

6.1 PEOPLE WANT TO BE EMPOWERED

A connected leader is definitely not a micro-manager. Surprisingly, many people in senior-level positions, particularly in smaller organizations, can be quite the micro-manager. They have to have control over everything and be involved in every decision. This is not only inefficient, taking the leader's time away from focusing on more pressing matters, but it is disempowering to the employees. If the employees don't feel they can make decisions and be trusted to do so, then they won't feel very engaged in the work that's being done. They will simply sit around and wait to be told what to do. This doesn't encourage a highly functioning working environment.

A connected leader clearly delegates tasks, projects, and outcomes to other people on the team. And they allow that person to manage how it gets done, thus giving them the keys to being successful in the matter. Delegating to others gives them the power to have ownership and authority over the outcome. This also demonstrates trust. Even more than delegation, which is useful, is that the leader just expects the work to be done and doesn't even delegate at all. Instead, she or he seeks input and status updates, and merely coaches on something if there is a particular area that needs attention.

This dynamic helps people feel empowered about having control over contributing to the company's success and this in turn keeps them engaged in their work. If they have ownership in it, they will participate in it. And, when their leader expresses thanks and gratitude for the work that is done, even better!

6.2 WAYS TO EMPOWER OTHERS

There are many ways to empower others. The key is to make sure it is legitimate. There are many companies that say they are about empowerment, yet it is only lip service. False pretenses only makes employees bitter. Make sure you put in good practices for empowering your employees.

- Allow others to seek and find answers to problems, issues, or challenges on their own (versus telling them what to do and how to do it)
- Give them a task or project to complete and entrust them to take care of it – have faith
- Encourage them to take risks, when necessary, and not fear repercussion
- If mistakes are made, focus on solving the problem, so people don't fear failure
- Provide coaching and suggestions, as needed

7 FOCUSES ON STRENGTHS

7.1 EVERYONE HAS THEIR UNIQUE GIFTS

A connected leader not only delegates and empowers employees to take ownership in the work being done, but a connected leader will delegate to the appropriate person for the task, regardless of that person's position or title. That's because a connected leader looks at each person's strengths as an individual and makes a decision based on who is right for that particular job or task. It's not always the manager or a senior leader on the team who is the right fit for what needs to be done. In this way, the connected leader spreads the responsibility across the team, and allows others to let their true talents shine in a given situation.

The working environment truly becomes more of a democracy where people are given choice projects or important work, not because of where they are in the pecking order, which can often be arbitrary, but because of their unique talents and strengths. In this way, the connected leader is connecting the task or project with the right person who has the right strengths and talents to be the most successful at it.

For example, let's take our c-level executive as an example. He had a challenging situation on his hands, where two groups weren't playing well together. They needed some arbitration to learn how to address gaps in their joint processes to a mutually satisfying conclusion. Neither leader of these two teams was up for the job. So, this connected leader looked across his organization and asked the question, "Who has the right people skills, personality, and experience with negotiations, to help these two teams resolve their conflict?" That person wound up being someone in the business operations group, a completely separate team. But, she was the right choice for this specific need and task at hand. So, he asked her to specifically see how she could help with this particular matter. And, help she did. This is called playing to people's strengths and leveraging them across the organization, regardless of where they sit in the org structure or even what their core functional role is.

Leveraging people's strengths to the benefit of the whole organization does several things – it crosses organizational boundaries and therefore infuses different and new blood into the mix, it allows people to stretch outside the current confinements of their functional role, and it utilizes a person's complete skill set and capabilities rather than pigeon-holing them.

7.2 WAYS TO PLAY TO PEOPLE'S STRENGTHS

In order to play to people's strengths, it's important to know what they are. This can be done in various ways. One is just by asking and getting to know your people personally. Another is to maintain a database of skill sets. You can also get a strengths finder assessment done for your team, such as Clifton Strengths Finder, to learn more about each individual's natural strengths and talents. You may be surprised to find that your core developer may be very strong in strategy – perhaps it might be useful to get his feedback on new direction for a new product development initiative.

- Ask who is the best person for the job, based on their strengths
- Seek to understand people's individual strengths
- Actively assess how people's strengths can be more realized and leveraged
- Map people's work to their strengths, as much as possible
- Give thanks and recognition to people when their strengths hugely impact the success of a project
- Have your team take a strengths-based test, such as Clifton Strengths Finder, to learn about everyone's strengths



8 ENCOURAGES A LEARNING CULTURE/GROWTH MINDSET

8.1 WE ARE ALL LEARNERS BY NATURE

Connected leadership is also characterized by a leader who encourages and embraces a learning culture. What's a learning culture? This is supporting and fostering an environment where people are encouraged to be continuous, active, and ongoing learners. A growth mindset is an active approach to cultivating a learning environment where leadership development is encouraged at all levels of the organization. This not only means learning new skills through formal training, but also providing opportunities to try new things, be innovative about solving a particular problem, allowing time to explore other options that may otherwise not be looked at, and to always learn from things, even mistakes.

This is one of the key changes that Satya Nadella brought into the culture at Microsoft when he became CEO in 2014. He encourages, strongly supports, and drives a growth mindset. This has had a tremendous impact on changing the often caustic culture at Microsoft, to one that is more open, collaborative, and innovative. And, this in turn has helped the company grow in exponential ways. A growth mindset encourages constant innovation and a connection to one's work. It also encourages employees to take an active role in their professional and personal development, to stay engaged in the work they are doing by always striving for improvements, to grow, to learn, and to try new things, and most importantly to be leaders in everything they do, even if they don't have a leadership title.

8.2 WAYS TO ENCOURAGE A GROWTH MINDSET

Embracing a growth mindset starts by encouraging others to be learners and leaders. Then, it follows by allowing a psychologically safe place for people to be more openly collaborative and innovative in the way they do their work. It values taking risks and learning from failures as part of the process of doing great things.

- Actively promote and invest in learning opportunities, by leveraging corporate training programs, tuition reimbursement programs, and other educational mechanisms
- Encourage people to explore and try new things, including new innovative tools, new techniques, different processes – allow people an opportunity to think and act creatively
- Have dedicated sessions where people share ideas, or share best practices, or share lessons
- Create peer-to-peer knowledge sharing groups
- Establish innovation labs or hackathons, or other types of learning forums or academies that are informal and exploring cutting edge concepts
- Block dedicated time on people's calendars for focused professional development and include it as part of their day-to-day job

9 EMBRACES CHANGE AS THE NEW NORM

9.1 THE ONLY CONSTANT IS CHANGE

As we all know, but often don't think about, the only constant in nature is change. And, this is especially true of 21st century companies. Change is inevitable, all around us, and won't be going away anytime soon. However, as we all know people are naturally resistant to change because it can be frightening and disorienting. But, someone who focuses on being a connected leader embraces change as the norm and exemplifies calm in the eye of the storm whenever big change is happening. A connected leader is grounded in the midst of change. He or she essentially acts as an anchor that keeps everyone connected to the sea floor, so that the ship everyone is on isn't ripped apart by the violent sea storms. When a leader demonstrates that change is normal, doesn't over-react to it, and takes it in stride, this shows everyone else that they too can "ride the wave" so to speak.

A connected leader not only embraces the change, but stays the course by demonstrating a lot of the traits we talked about earlier, such as seeking feedback (on how to address the change needed), focusing on solving the problem, leveraging people's strengths, and so on. You can see how these other connected leadership characteristics are really important in a time of urgent or potentially catastrophic change. That's when a connected leadership approach helps the most in keeping people on board and on task, without jumping ship to the competition. This is true of little change initiatives as well as big change initiatives. The point is that connected leaders demonstrate that change is normal and that it's okay.

9.2 WAYS TO EMBRACE CHANGE

Since change is a constant in nature and in business, one of the biggest things leaders can do is encourage people and the business to be adaptable, flexible, and nimble.

- Be flexible in the way you plan and execute on your initiatives
- Be open and willing to adapt and change course as needed
- Learn to "roll with the punches"
- Encourage others to celebrate change as an opportunity, versus a threat
- Sponsor training around change management, so that team leaders learn about change management principles and ways to successfully manage change
- Identify and highlight the benefits of change and the opportunities it brings

- Be proactive in addressing people's concerns and listen to what people have to say about it – give people an opportunity to have a voice
- Put in a comprehensive communication plan so the change is effectively communicated across all levels of the organizations, with varying messages and actions based on who the communication is going to and for what purpose. The lack of effective, consistent, and comprehensive communication is one of the key reasons why change initiatives fail.



10 TREATS ALL PEOPLE WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT

10.1 EVEN THOUGH WE ARE DIFFERENT, WE ARE ALL THE SAME

In a business landscape where major corporations now have an Office of Diversity and Inclusion, treating all people with dignity and respect is an important attribute of any leader. But, this is particularly true of a connected leader. This is because, as mentioned before, a connected leader is naturally looking to solve problems, leverage people's strengths, and encourages a growth mindset. It is these attitudes that align with embracing the diversity of thoughts, approaches, etc. which naturally fall out from a spectrum of people from different backgrounds, of different ages, different gender associations, and so on.

The news is full of stories of a leader's grand demise because they failed to treat people with dignity and respect. A recent example that comes to mind is Travis Kalanick of Uber, who was forced to resign as CEO due to his treatment of women, in particular. But, his whole attitude toward people in general was disrespectful when you look at it. A leader who tolerates treating others poorly is contributing to a culture that breeds distrust, low morale, and hostility. This kind of working environment causes stress and stress kills productivity. It also kills connection to the work you're doing, the people you work with, and the company you work for. The biggest killer of a connected work culture is when people don't feel respected or treated with dignity, where they feel like they don't have a voice that is heard, and they are treated with contempt. A connected leader builds a genuine, compassionate, and respectful relationship with all the people she or he works and interacts with. And, a connected leader expects all people in his or her organization to do the same.

10.2 WAYS TO CELEBRATE DIVERSITY

One of the key ways that a connected leader can demonstrate treating people with respect and dignity is by celebrating everyone's diversity in outward ways.

- Provide opportunities for people to share about their cultural practices
- Show an appreciation for everyone's cultural holidays
- Be respectful and mindful of people's specific needs related to cultural or religious practices, such as Muslim prayer times
- Seek out and ask for people's perspectives, insights, and suggestions – their cultural perspective may be informative

- Hold others accountable for treating others with respect – if someone says disparaging remarks about another person’s religion, culture, sexual orientation, or anything else, let them know that you value a diverse team and expect everyone to treat each other with respect
- Provide training on diversity and unconscious bias, so that people become more aware of their own biases or unconscious behaviors that can be demoralizing
- Conduct “cultural days” where different people bring in food, or share and tell about their culture, values, and beliefs so that others can learn more about each other



11 EXPLORES NEW IDEAS WITH CURIOSITY AND INTENT

11.1 CURIOSITY OPENS DOORS

Connected leaders also exhibit a core characteristic of exploring new ideas and ways of doing things. In short, they are curious cats. They ask questions, they explore options, they consider many inputs, and they ask the 5Ws – who, what, where, when, and why, and also how. The point is, they are always seeking innovation and exploring new territory. Not only does this keep them future forward thinking, staying ahead of the competition, and growing and developing the business, but by default it encourages employee participation. Connected leaders don't explore new ideas in a vacuum. No, they reach out to their leaders and their teams to help identify what can we improve, where should we be going next, what else should we be doing, etc.

Connected leaders will even sponsor such things as hackathons or innovation days to encourage employees to take a break from their daily work, work as a team to address a particular challenging problem, or come up with new solutions and ideas. These types of events and dedicated time help foster team work, thinking outside the box, and sharing of ideas. All these activities in turn foster developing stronger connections across the organization and with colleagues.

11.2 WAYS TO FOSTER CURIOSITY

Encouraging curiosity helps others explore different ways to do things, which can lead to innovative breakthroughs or help get through an impasse, or just find better processes and ways to get business done for improved impact. A connected leader is always curious and open to trying and considering new ways of doing things and proactively encourages others to be the same way.

- Encourage people asking questions
- Encourage exploration of alternative ideas and approaches to things
- Allow people to try new things, new systems, new tools, new approaches
- Ask questions and seek feedback and suggestions
- Encourage a growth mindset to always be learning, always seeking, always being open-minded, and curious
- Seek to learn new things

- Research and consider what others have done
- Embrace and encourage curiosity as a meaningful way to how one approaches work
- Promote ongoing learning and professional development to explore new approaches, new mindsets, new theories, new technologies, etc.



12 KEEPS AN OPEN DOOR POLICY

12.1 AN OPEN DOOR ENCOURAGES CONNECTION

Many leaders will say they have an open door policy, but not really demonstrate it. A true open door policy means the leader is accessible to anyone in the company no matter where they are in the food chain. And, that's not just lip service. What's an open door policy? The purpose of an open door policy is to encourage open communication, feedback, and discussion about any matter of importance to an employee. When a leader has this policy, employees are free to talk with her or him at any time.

This includes making it known to, and comfortable for, all employees in the organization to offer unsolicited input, comments, feedback, seek counsel on a matter, or otherwise have access to the leader if the person feels the matter is important enough to require their attention. This means that at social gatherings, leaders mingle and speak with everyone on the team, not just their direct reports or executive team. It means they frequently say publicly at meetings, "If you need something or want to discuss something, come by my office, or drop me an email." It means truly listening when someone does offer their observations,

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comments, or feedback and thanking them for it. Granted, most people will not actually avail themselves of walking up to the CXO and having an intimate discussion, but knowing that the option is there goes a long way toward making a person feel as if they have a connection to the CXO and can reach out at any time.

12.2 WAYS TO KEEP AN OPEN DOOR

When employees feel their leadership is available to them and open to them, they feel more involved, part of any solution, and engaged as a connected member of the company.

- Literally, keep your door open at all times (unless in a meeting)
- Constantly remind people that they can reach out to you directly at any time
- Encourage your team leaders to maintain an open door policy, as well
- When someone uses your open door policy, be open to their input, and thank them for sharing it



13 EXUDES A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

13.1 POSITIVITY GENERATES MORE POSITIVITY

"A positive attitude causes a chain reaction of positive thoughts, events, and outcomes. It is a catalyst and it sparks extraordinary results."

– Wade Boggs

A positive attitude is infectious and can have ripple effects throughout the organization. A leader who can keep a positive and can-do attitude during times of adversity or change is an incredible asset. But, a leader who keeps a positive attitude even during doing the mundane tasks of the day-to-day grind is even more of an asset. Why? Because, let's be honest. Work is work. And it can be dull and boring. So, a positive and upbeat attitude can help keep things fresh and invigorating. It also builds team morale. This means doing little things that keep things fun, like cracking a joke during a team meeting, or sharing something personal with others, or giving kudos to people who went the extra mile.

Whatever it is, a positive approach to everything, including problem solving, keeps people engaged. It encourages them to relax a little and to enjoy the work at hand. This fosters camaraderie and team connection. If you can all share a joke together, and if you can be positive in attitude and approach to things, it makes everything more pleasant and enjoyable. And, people tend to stay in places where it's enjoyable.

13.2 WAYS TO GENERATE POSITIVITY

Having a positive attitude and being cheerful is a way of being and a habit that anyone can develop or deepen.

- Celebrate individual and team accomplishments
- Let everyone know their work is appreciated, by saying "Thank you."
- Tell people positive things about their work, such as "Job well done." "You did amazing work that was really impactful to the organization's success."
- Reward people for going the extra mile, through reward programs
- Focus on the positive, even when things are tough

- Find the golden nugget, the opportunity, the things that are going well and showcase them to others
- Encourage others to share their positive experiences, stories, or accomplishments



14 CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

14.1 CONNECTED LEADERSHIP CREATES A CONNECTED CULTURE

All of these 12 characteristics of connected leadership do one big important thing: they help foster a connected culture. This is a culture where employees thrive, where they enjoy being at work, where they are connected to each other, where they are producing their best work, and where they plan to stay for a long time to come. The biggest contributing factor for driving employee engagement and the biggest investment a company can make is by hiring leaders who demonstrate connected leadership qualities. The second best thing is to help leaders develop these skills and learn ways to incorporate them into their leadership style. In the end, connected leaders help create connected cultures. And, a connected culture is like a spider's web: strong, flexible, resilient, and quite beautiful. A leader either poisons the well, keeps things at a flat line, or inspires employees to do great things together.

A connected leader is the one that inspires employees to do great things together. Anyone can develop these 12 characteristics of connected leadership to enhance their own leadership strengths and capabilities, and to help their company be more successful. Ultimately, investment in learning and applying the 12 characteristics of connected leadership is an investment in one's own career and success as a leader.

14.2 CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

Create an action plan that includes activities, initiatives, or things you are going to put in place to:

- Develop your own connected leadership skills
- Foster opportunities for your organization to become a connected culture

Ask yourself: What are the top three things you could do to a) develop more connected leadership traits within yourself, or exhibit some of the characteristics described above, and b) what are some of the things you could put in place within your organization as specific programs to foster a more connected culture.

Make a plan for how you will execute on the top three things you identified, such as what program or action will you put in place, how will you put it in place, is there budget required, how will you communicate or demonstrate it, what does success look like, and when will you implement it. Then, go do it!