

Emotional & Social Intelligence: Interpersonal Relationships

How Do You Build Connections?

It's important for all of us to stop for a moment at various times in our lives and assess our personal landscape. I like to do this at the end and the beginning of each year. I ask myself several questions and some of them are: How am I behaving? What messages am I sending others, overtly and covertly? How do I feel, physically and emotionally? What do I want, personally and professionally? How am I managing my relationships? Am I acting on auto-pilot or am I conscious in my daily endeavors? These are also some of the questions you can expect to be asked by a coach as you begin your coaching engagement.

Once you have a general sense of the landscape you can begin to map out where the high spots are, where the lower land lies, and where there are potholes that need to be addressed immediately. Part of what is being determined is your personal emotional and social intelligence. Emotional intelligence is really about managing your own personality and your relationships with others; it's the process of being a human being. To be able to manage something you first have to be aware of it.

I have a colleague, Tina, who shared with me that she had been putting a lot of effort into getting to know her new boss, Bill. It seemed to Tina that Bill would continually just focus on himself when in conversation with her. I asked a few questions about Bill's general personality and Tina told me, "Bill is an extremely positive, upbeat, energetic, fun person that many people like. He's just the kind of manager I thought I wanted, but when I talk to him I feel like I'm invisible; I feel very small in his presence. I go over it in my head and there is nothing that he says that is unkind or that should make me feel that way and he continues to give me new projects, so I must be doing a good job. I just don't know what it is."

I happened to be a bystander the next time Tina saw Bill and I noticed some interesting things about Bill's way of communicating. He walked up to Tina and said hello, smiled, and began reporting about his holidays and how he was recovering from the stress and the overeating. Tina was appropriately engaged in the conversation, nodded yes, and then said, "I'm trying to recover as well." As Tina started to share something about her holidays Bill turned around and began looking around the room, as though he didn't hear anything Tina had said, or maybe wasn't interested in it. Tina immediately stopped talking and Bill turned back and smiled and said, "Well, good to see you, let's have lunch soon," and off he went. Tina told me this was how her conversations generally go with Bill.

A unique part of my business as an Executive Coach is something I do called Observational Coaching. I spend two or three days following my clients around and observing their interactions with their staff, peers, managers, and others very closely. I'm watching for signs of clear, emotionally intelligent conversation and connection, as well as where the gaps might be. There

are tons of clues in voice tone, body language, facial expressions, etc. to let me know if someone is truly engaged in a conversation or if they are disconnected, and I watch for how the others in the room are reacting to them.

Right away I picked up the signs that Tina wanted to connect with Bill, and Bill was nowhere close. I shared with Tina what I observed and asked her to try an experiment the next time she talks to Bill, “try not saying anything, only nod your head and see what happens.” My guess is that it will be the same interaction because Bill is not trying to connect with Tina, he is just reporting in; talking **at** her not **with** her. If he is truly attempting to connect he will notice that Tina is not responding and do something different, like asking some direct questions to keep the conversation flowing.

There are many possible reasons for Bill’s interactive style. One part of his career involves standing in front of groups and instructing them, so he may be used to not getting a lot of feedback so he doesn’t look for it. Many of the leaders I coach have a personality style in which they speak more than they listen, this may be the case with Bill. Maybe he is always in a hurry and is only saying hello to be courteous. My bet is that Bill has no idea whatsoever that he is making people feel small, or invisible. On the contrary, he would probably be shocked that others feel that way. He may even wonder why people give him poor scores on his 360-degree feedback in the communication section, because in his mind he does talk to people. However, that is only half of a communication interaction; the other half is listening.

“No single factor more clearly predicts the productivity of an employee than his relationship with his direct superior.” –Gallup Organization

We are human beings and connection is what makes us thrive as children; it’s not any different as adults in the workplace. Take the time to stop and focus when you are speaking with someone, look them in the eyes, smile, allow them time to respond to what you just said. If you are in a hurry, communicate that and let them know that you don’t have much time, but you wanted to stop and say hi.

How are you managing your personality and relationships? Do people know what you really mean to say? Are you leaving a different message than the one you intended? Executive Coaching is a method that can help you assess the situation, identify your personal roadblocks, and remedy them before they become a career derailer.

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