

Building Real Leadership Connections

Great leaders seem to have the uncanny ability to readily create large networks of people who help them and their teams get things done; approvals are given, resources are provided, projects are financed, decisions are made. Other leaders seem to struggle at getting the smallest things accomplished within the organization. What's the difference between these leaders? The leaders who have built these extensive networks understand that their real power comes not from their position, but from their ability to build strong, lasting connections with others in the organization.

First, it's important to understand the nature of a leadership connection and how it compares to most relationships we form. In most good relationships, people work well together, respect each other's knowledge and abilities, share information, and honor commitments. This is all good stuff; however, great leaders strive for a bond with others that is closer and more profound. Think about a strong leadership connection as a wide-diameter pipe between the leader and others. The leader speaks, others hear. Others speak, the leader hears. The leader moves, others act. It is deeper and more meaningful than most relationships. When this type of connection is made, the leader hears what's really important to others and, in turn, is heard. Difficult topics are broached, mistakes are admitted and feedback is exchanged. Both leader and follower are challenged to perform at their highest levels and held accountable to do so.

You would think that building these connections would be relatively straightforward — be polite, find out what common interests you share, and ask questions so you can find out what makes the other person tick. This is the process most of us routinely employ; however, great leaders take a somewhat counter-intuitive approach to building strong connections. They:

- **Honor the person** — as soon as possible after meeting someone (or meeting them again), they make a point of recognizing and highlighting something that is unique and interesting about the person. They do not simply provide some trite compliments or seek to flatter the person. They put real effort into identifying what is distinctive and special about the person.
- **Disclose key information** — they find a way to reduce the barriers of rank, position, status and the like by sharing personal information, becoming vulnerable and communicating on a distinctly personal level.
- **Learn what's important** — rather than just learn about the other person, they find out what is really important to the other person and how the leader can best interact with the person.
- **Seek to Serve** — they find an opportunity to be of significant service to the person before they ask anything of them. If this requires a significant sacrifice or investment on their part, that's all the better.

Think about the people whom you work closest with each day. Do you have a real leadership connection or just a good relationship?