



Creating Competitive Advantage Through Connection

How creating a "connection culture" can drive business results & the bottom-line

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We are all living and working in an increasingly volatile environment where accelerating change is the norm. This, with the fact that most people like to live and work within their comfort zone, can cause problems for leaders and their businesses as people strive to cope with change whilst keeping some semblance of control. They often feel disconnected and disengaged in what they do. Unfortunately, since 2000 nearly 75 percent of people working in the United States have been disengaged with their jobs (Gallup 2013b). As leaders, to deal with this, we have to create an environment of connection where people can feel reconnected and they can choose to connect and engage themselves with those people around them, and in what they do.

Connection in the workplace is an emotional bond. It is based on shared identity, empathy and understanding that moves primarily self-centred individuals towards becoming group-centred members. As connection is an emotional bond it is intangible, but we can sense it in our relationships. When it is present, we feel energy, empathy, and affirmation, and are more open; when it is absent, we experience neutral or even negative feelings.

When people look for connection, and they always do, they do so in a variety of ways including how they connect to other people (relational); to their work (task mastery); and to a sense of purpose (existential). These can be summarized below:



6 Connection Needs of People

Connection Needs	Needs Type	Description
Respect	Relational Needs	Being around people who are recognize us and who are courteous and considerate.
Recognition	Relational Needs	Where we are recognized by other people for what we do, achieve and contribute; and the strengths and skills we use in doing so.
Belonging	Relational Needs	Being part of a group or team helps us to be more resilient and better able to cope with unexpected or adverse events.
Autonomy	Task Mastery Needs	The freedom to do your work in your own way, to be free of being told what and how to do the work.
Personal Growth	Task Mastery Needs	Where you have the necessary level of skills to deal with the challenges we face, and to achieve a state of 'flow' where you are fully involved and immersed in an energized way, in the process of the activity of the work,
Meaning	Existential Needs	When you are engaged in work that is important to you in some way, you are energized and put additional effort into it. You feel a sense of significance from doing this work.

The Benefits of Connection

Benefits accrue to both the individual as well as the business. Research has found that businesses which create a strong connection culture, by fostering an environment where each of the six connection needs can be met, realize significant benefits over their competitors. Compared to business units with engagement and connection scores in the bottom 25 percent, the top 25 percent's median averages were:

- 21 percent higher in productivity
- 22 percent higher in profitability
- 41 percent lower in quality defects
- 37 percent lower in absenteeism
- 10 percent higher in customer metrics (Gallup 2013)

Employees who feel engaged and connected are



- 20 percent more productive than the average employee
- 87 percent less likely to leave the organization (Corporate Leadership Council 2004)

Connected employees are not only happier, but are high performers. Again research has shown that:

1. Employees who feel connected perform at the top of their game.
2. Employees who feel connected give their best effort and persevere.
3. Employees who feel connected align their behavior with organizational goals, so there business has more people pulling in the same direction
4. Employees who feel connected help improve the quality of decisions as they are prepared to speak up and share information.
5. Employees who feel connected actively contribute to innovation as they actively look for ways to improve the organization. As a result, new products, services, processes, and businesses will arise

So the question is not can you afford to create and sustain a culture of connection, but rather can you afford not to. Your people drive your competitive advantage, so help them to help themselves to do so.

About Andrew Cooke

Andrew Cooke is the director and founder of Blue Sky GPS and is known for his work with executives, managers and teams in helping them to grow, develop and achieve results. Using a blend of consulting, facilitation and coaching he is noted for his ability in "bringing people potential to life". Andrew takes the time to understand and assist successful business executives in creating a customized plan that allows them grow and develop their leadership effectiveness. In doing this he guides executives to manage, direct and make change work for them and their stakeholders and teams in an increasing volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous business environment. From this he helps others to become more successful in both what they do and how they do it.

Andrew demonstrates a proactive attitude and empathy that blends enthusiasm, energy and a pragmatic approach in engaging leaders and their stakeholders. He has over thirty years of international business experience and insights on which to draw, and has worked with blue-chip clients and other leading businesses across a range of industries. Andrew is passionate about helping others to be more successful personally and professionally.



Qualifications & Accreditations

Andrew is an experienced international expert in executive coaching, leadership development and business consulting. He has qualifications, certifications and accreditations from recognized leading global organizations, including:

- International executive coach with certifications for Marshall Goldsmith Stakeholder Centered Coaching and Global Leader of the Future 360⁰ Assessment
- Masters of Business Administration (MBA), London Business School, UK
- Bachelor of Business BA (Hons), University of Plymouth (UK)
- Diploma from the Institute of Marketing (UK)
- Accredited DISC Facilitator & Coach