

Rose Porterfield Group

“Making Connections”

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We all make connections with other people – but some of us do it more quickly and consistently.

How do we do it?

I first saw the contrast in good versus poor connection-making many years ago when we interviewed two different groups: engineering managers and presidents.

THE INTERVIEWS

RPG was doing developmental assessments with 11 engineering managers. At the same time, we were also doing developmental assessments with nine presidents working for a large holding company.

Developmental assessment involves psychological, interest and intelligence testing, feedback and two to three hours of interviewing—all designed to help the individual pursue his/her developmental goals.

Interviewing the engineering managers could hardly have been more painful for me as the interviewer and, I feel sure, for them. Time dragged by, information was hard won and both of us seemed glad when it was over.

The interviews with the presidents were effortless, the time flew by and both interviewer and interviewee had fun. Why the difference? Why did one group make a positive connection so quickly?

WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE IN EFFECTIVE ‘CONNECTORS’ AND THE REST OF US? PERSONALITY TRAITS, AGE, LOOKS?

Certainly there are some personality traits that are associated with influential people. They tend to be outgoing and intelligent—and being tall and physically attractive doesn't hurt. But those traits are not necessary.

Being good at making connections involves doing specific things. The same specific things

that worked 2000 years ago – and will work 2000 years from now.

SO HOW DO THEY DO IT?

Respect – Neither engineers nor presidents were rude. The presidents, however, went out of their way to be polite and respectful. They were on time, not twenty minutes early or ten minutes late. If they were offered coffee they said ‘please’ and when served said ‘thank you.’ When they had questions they would preface with ‘would you mind if I ask you a question about that?’

I’m like you – One president noted where I went to school – he had attended the same school for a semester. Another pointed to a book on my shelves that she had read. Person after person found some way to be like me at least in some small way.

Carrying the conversation – The engineers gave the briefest most laconic answer possible and they answered the question and only the question. The following exchange was typical of all of the engineers.

What do you like most about your job?
Science.

Can you tell me about your typical work day?
(I heard a list of activities, in monotone, with no distinction of what was key and what was ancillary)

The presidents, by contrast, made an active attempt to understand what I was trying to find out.

What do you like most about your work?
Can I tell you a funny story?
(The funny story offered excellent insight into his likes and dislikes).

Here is who I am – The presidents wanted me to get to know who they were – mostly their good points but also some of their limitations.

When the presidents talked about their successes they always referred to the team that helped them. ‘We’ and ‘they’ were pronouns I heard a lot.

The presidents could also answer a question the engineers found difficult – *‘what are your shortcomings and failures?’*

The engineers had to work at answering it. And when they mentioned failure there was always a reason out of their control (which meant it was not a personal failure).

The presidents were as easy with shortcomings as with strengths. ‘Impatience,’ one president said.

‘Well, Judy, at your level I guess you have to be demanding,’ I responded.

‘Demanding, yes, but impatient means I am unrealistically demanding at times. It hampers my performance.’

You are interesting – At the end of the interview we always ask if the person has any questions of us. Not a single engineer had questions; not a single president did not.

WHY DO THOSE THINGS WORK SO WELL?

Very simply – it appeals to who we are.

The respect factor is obvious. The other factors bear closer, sometimes uncomfortable examination.

Why do we like people who are like us? Because we are – to a greater extent than we would ever care to

admit – prejudiced. We try to be tolerant but in fact we are not nearly as tolerant as we think.

We like to be around successful people; but, we don’t like to be around perfect people. We want to know strengths but we need to see some weakness.

And at the center of everything is our need to feel important and interesting. We had a hard job from age two to seventeen coming to grips with our not being the center of the universe and it is still hard at times.

SO THESE ACTIONS ARE...MANIPULATIVE?

Con artists manipulate by creating a false sense of having things in common and by making you feel interesting and important, in some ways appealing to your basest motives. Their goal is a very one-sided relationship with little value and often harm to the other person.

Good people use the same techniques to establish healthy and reciprocal relationships. And if we term what we have called our ‘basest’ motives with ‘most basic’ doesn’t that give things a different slant? There is a part of you that truly is altruistic, that wants diversity of opinion and to focus on others. There is also part of you that needs personal attention and a feeling that you are safe with people who are like you and who value you. And that part of you will always be there.

When we were working in China a Chinese Chief Executive told me that when he was a teenager he had attended a English school in London for a year. In the school all the students were given English names and his was ‘Bob.’

‘We are both ‘Bob’ he said, grinning.’

I knew we were different in almost every way. But it felt good to know we were both ‘Bob’s in however trivial a sense.

Think of the good people you know, people who get other people to do things – even though you would never call them ‘manipulative’ – and you will find similar behaviors among them as with the con artists.

The difference is, of course, the ultimate goal.

The techniques used by the Presidents work, and will work consistently. You can use their approach in job interviews – from both sides of the table – sales calls and any time you need to establish rapport with another person.

Be influential –make a connection quickly.

RCG has helped in the selection and development of thousands of people primarily at the executive level. For more information visit our website at: www.roseporterfieldgroup.com

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