

The Surprising Power of Connectedness

It seems like everyone wants to know what it takes to live fulfilling lives, foster happier families, create and manage stronger teams, and have happier clients. And why not? Can you imagine a life where all those outcomes are a reality?

The good news: There's a way to pursue those results that research has shown works. The key to it all is connectedness—a concept pioneered and championed by world-renowned psychiatrist Dr. Ned Hallowell. Connectedness is the feeling of being part of something larger than yourself that matters to you. It can be a major driver of your success in your life, your work and (if you're an entrepreneur) your company.

Connectedness is one of those topics that can look “soft” on the surface but is in fact rooted in science and research.

- The warmth of relationships throughout life has the greatest positive impact on life satisfaction, according to the Grant Study.
- People who are isolated face a 50 percent greater risk of premature death than those who have stronger social connections, according to the T.H. Chan School of Public Health.
- Lack of connection with others can damage the immune system, according to a study out of the University of California, Los Angeles.

There are three elements of connectedness that Dr. Hallowell suggests we all focus on.

Connect with yourself

Do you find that you focus more on your negative traits and perceived shortcomings than on the positive characteristics you possess and display to the world around you? This is a common habit of successful people—however, it's one that can sap life of its joy at work and at home.

Try taking the following steps:

- Make a list of 12 adjectives that describe you. Draw a rectangle around the one that you'd like to change or modify. Draw circles around the three that you are most proud of. Then write down one thing you did in the past year that makes you feel proud of yourself.
- Write one sentence to your favorite teacher or coach from the past, telling that person how he or she helped you. Just bringing that person to mind will help create a sense of connection and strengthen your ability to feel and show appreciation.

Ultimately, what you write isn't as important as simply doing these exercises. The actions themselves increase your connectedness with yourself.

People who did these exercises report that doing so helped them prioritize what matters most to them, that sharing their lives with others felt more important than being ambitious and that they felt joyful afterward.

Disclosure: Dr. Ned Hallowell is not affiliated with Gordian Investments, LLC.

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Two More Ways to Connect

Connect with your team

Your team could be the people you supervise at work, or it could be the people you partner with in a group (charitable, political, social, etc.). Teams that are connected have members who trust each other deeply and who communicate with openness and candor—not with secrets and backstabbing.

Connected teams also have conflicts. Pushback and creative tension among teams are signs that the team members are engaged and can speak their minds freely. Connected teams also have a growth mindset—a belief that, no matter what, you can acquire the skills you need to achieve big things.

If you are in a position of power or authority on your team, lead the way in these areas. For example, encourage team members to give you feedback on your performance—if they see you making mistakes, tell them to let you know about it!

Here are two ways to start building team connectedness:

- Write one sentence describing your team. In five bullet points, describe the leading strengths and weaknesses of your team. Include three strengths and two weaknesses, so that you focus more on the positive than the negative.
- Write one congratulatory sentence to your team and share it with them. It might be something like “This last quarter was especially challenging, but you all put in the extra time we needed in order to hit our goal, and I really appreciate it!”

People who did these exercises reported that doing so helped remind them of all the positive attributes they have as a team and to stop overfocusing on negativity.

Connect with your clients

Not surprisingly, deep connections with clients can generate huge payoffs. The more you can connect with clients, the more successful you will be at creating loyalty and convincing them to take the actions you want them to take.

Building deep connections starts when you pay attention to your clients. Connection cannot happen without attention. Your job is to get rid of the devices and distractions that block you from connecting with clients. During client interactions, close the door. Turn off the screen in front of you. Slow down. If you can, wear a headset and walk around the office so that you can focus entirely on the call, not the computer and other distractions on your desk.

You also must pay attention consistently over time—one good client meeting isn't enough. Have regular face-to-face meetings with your clients (virtual video-based meetings if necessary). Spend time with them. Meet their children, and even their pets. Your curiosity about and interest in their lives will amaze them, because they don't get that kind of attention from most people in their lives—especially professionals and service providers they work with.

The upshot: Be a student of your clients. Don't be driven only by an urge to present them with facts and figures and then call it a day.

Powerful and free

Perhaps the greatest thing about connectedness is that it's both powerful and free for the taking. You just need to tap into it using the steps and strategies highlighted above.

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