

Living the 21 Laws of Leadership

The Law of Connection Leaders Touch a Heart Before They Ask for a Hand

“To get others to come into our way of thinking, we must go over to theirs.”

—William Hazlitt

Application Guide

The *Law of Connection*, like a coin, has two sides. Connecting with an audience and connecting with individuals. Though the two sides are different in their practical application, many of the components to successfully connect with others in both arenas are the same.

The best place to begin is to study people who have the ability to connect with others. Elizabeth Dole continues to be loved, admired and respected today, even after her husband, Bob, has retired from the Senate and lost the presidential campaign to Bill Clinton. Why? She connects with people. She is a marvelous communicator, and very warm and personable both with an audience and person to person.

Mrs. Dole is a lawyer by trade and was a cabinet member in the Reagan and Bush administrations. She is currently (and has been for many years) the president of the American Red Cross. True, she is competent, accomplished, and has some clout, but that is not what earned her popularity and power. Her ability to connect with others at a heart level is what won the heart of the American people. There are many who have accomplishments and far more power than Elizabeth Dole, but not nearly the influence she has with the public.

In 1996, she demonstrated her ability to connect with the whole country when she spoke at the Republican National Convention. If you watched it on television, you know what I am talking about. When Elizabeth Dole walked out into the audience that night, everybody there felt that she was their best friend. She was able to develop an amazing connection with them.

Also speaking at that convention was Bob Dole, Elizabeth's husband — not surprising since he was the Republican nominee for the presidential race. Anyone who watched would have observed a remarkable difference between the communication abilities of those two speakers. Where Elizabeth was approachable, Bob appeared stern and distant.

I believe Bob Dole is a good man, but I also know that throughout the campaign he never seemed to be able to connect with the people. Ironically, after the presidential race was over, he appeared on *Saturday Night Live*, a show that made fun of him during the entire campaign, implying that he was humorless and out of touch. On the show, however, Dole came across as relaxed, approachable, and able to make fun of himself. He was a hit with the audience. I can not help wondering what might have happened if he had done more of that kind of thing early in the campaign.

As I stated, the greatest leaders are able to connect at both levels: with an audience and with individuals. One of the best leaders to do both in this century was Ronald Reagan. His ability to develop rapport with an audience is reflected in the nickname he received as President: the "Great Communicator." He also had the ability to touch the hearts of the individuals who were close to him. Former Reagan speech writer Peggy Noonan said that when the President used to return to the White House from long trips and the staff heard his helicopter landing on the lawn, everyone

would stop working and staff member Donna Elliott would say, "Daddy's home!" That is a great illustration of someone able to connect with people at a personal level.

I. Assessment

The following questions will give you insight as to how well you are living the *Law of Connection*.

- A. When you first meet people in a group or individually, does the conversation seem to flow easily?
- B. When you are engaged in conversation do you find and focus on the other person's agenda?
- C. When you are speaking in public or in private conversation do you seek common ground?
- D. In dealing with people, both with audiences and privately, are you open and honest or reserved and self-protected?
- E. When you are addressing an audience, large or small, are you aware of the atmosphere and how people are perceiving the experience?
- F. When you speak to an audience are you focusing on the whole crowd or on individuals?
- G. What are the key signals that tell you a connection has been made?
- H. Was your time together more heart to heart or head to head?

II. Application

★ *I believe the ability to practice the principles of connection apply first to individuals and second to an audience. In other words, if you can not connect with people on a one to one basis, you will have great difficulty connecting with larger groups.*

Though based on the same principles, connecting with larger groups requires additional skill. For example, where the environment or atmosphere plays a small role in individual connection, it plays a significant and complex role in connecting with a large group. Another example is the difference of connecting with one person's desires, personality, background, age, etc, in comparison to connecting with numbers of people on multiple agendas.

The following 8 principles of connection will help you first connect with individuals and small groups, then larger audiences.

Each of the 8 principles is written contrasting a positive trait versus a negative trait to communicate the idea in the fullest form.

A. Personal _____ vs. self-_____

Being real (being yourself) is the foundation of the *Law of Connection*. The fullest sense of this point is knowing yourself, liking yourself and being yourself. You are always at your personal best when you are yourself. People cannot connect with that which is not real.

The counter-trait of personal authenticity is one of guarding yourself from anyone knowing the real you. This is perceived to be "safe", but is more lonely than safe, and it does not allow anyone to connect with you. Self-protection works well if isolation is the goal, but for a leader who desires to connect with people, self-protection is a mistake. The concern of some leaders is being hurt, misunderstood or even attacked by "information" gained from being themselves. This risk is real, but is worth it, and the risk of self-protection (for a leader) is greater, because your influence is greatly diminished.

This really is a simple point. Just be yourself! Be open and candid about what you think and feel, and people will respond. That does not mean everyone likes or agrees with you, but they can connect with you!

B. _____ vs. _____

Intimacy is "related" and therefore similar to personal authenticity. Authenticity is one of the components of intimacy, but there is more involved. First, and perhaps the most important, is honesty. Nothing violates intimacy faster or deeper than dishonesty. Second, is vulnerability. In order to connect with people, you must be willing to "let them in" close to your heart. Third is trust. If you do not have a basic trust for others, people will be slower to trust you. Without trust there can be no real intimacy. Simply put, intimacy is about being close.

This is possible whether you are speaking to hundreds of people or sitting in your office with one person. Candidly, intimacy can be more challenging with one person because "opening up" to a crowd seems less threatening to the speaker, but the principle is the same.

Its counter-trait is distance. Keeping arms length from everyone is a vivid picture of how not to connect. Here is the formula: If people can not see your heart (intimacy), they can not connect with you. If they can not connect — they can not trust you, and if they can not trust you — they will not follow you!! This is the core of the *Law of Connection*.

C. _____ and _____ vs. _____ and _____

Because I have spent most of my adult life in pastoral leadership within the local church, I have seen hundreds of examples of both sides of this principle amongst literally thousands of pastors. There are many warm, caring pastors who express their concern well. These pastors are invariably more successful, even than those who are better leaders who function more in the counter-trait of coolness and being aloof. A good leader, that is a pastor with natural leadership abilities who is cool and aloof cannot connect with his/her people. This makes it difficult to impossible to grow a healthy church. This is a significant complaint of church members . . . not being able to connect with their pastor. Certainly, this is not always the pastor's fault, but the leader is the one who takes responsibility to correct the situation.

D. _____ vs. _____

I wrote about Bill Clinton in this chapter in my book on the 21 Laws because of his ability to connect with people, even people who do not like him or support his politics.

In the 1992 election, Bill Clinton worked extremely hard to develop a sense of connection with the American people — to do it, he even appeared on the talk show *Arsenio* and played the saxophone. This is a classic display of identification. People watched him play the sax and thought, "look at him, he is like me." Not literally, but figuratively. People saw a "regular guy" who was not very good on the sax, not taking himself too seriously, and having some fun! That is what I mean when I say "he is like me." That is identification, and without it you cannot connect.

The counter-trait is that of an independent loner who just does not relate to anyone. From the quintessential nerd, to the brilliant egg-head, to the multi-millionaire blue-blood aristocrat. When people can not identify with you, they can not connect. What about the case when you genuinely and reasonably *do not* identify?! Then you find a way — any way, even if its playing your saxophone in front of a huge crowd!!

E. _____ vs. _____

One of my most cherished memories was the time I met Billy Graham at his 40th anniversary celebration of his evangelistic ministry. We were in a nice hotel in Los Angeles and a friend of mine, Dennis Agajanian, arranged for the private meeting. Of all the people in the world, Billy Graham could be intimidating. For decades now, kings, presidents, and the most powerful people in the world have sought his counsel and presence. Standing well over six feet, with those fire blue eyes, and his character of steel, one would think he would be simply overwhelming. To the contrary, he was humble, friendly, kind and treated me as if I was the most important person in the world. He was very approachable, and this provided the entryway for us to connect.

The counter-trait of intimidation is when a leader uses power, rank, authority and force of personality to get their way, or to "make" others follow. This obviously is not effective, and certainly does not aide in helping people connect with you.

F. Mutual _____ vs. _____ / _____ relationship

This principle addresses the issue of connection being a two-way proposition in which healthy relationships are conducted on even ground. In most relationships one person is in fact more educated, better networked, more experienced, makes more money and perhaps even more intelligent. The principle of mutual rapport says that even *if* this is true, *never* act like it is. The truth of the matter is that rarely is one person superior in circumstance and ability over another in every area. This helps prevent the counter-trait of superior / inferior. More importantly, the very thought or awareness of a superior attitude prevents connection.

I can honestly tell you that when I have lunch with one person or speak to thousands, those kinds of things never cross my mind. My focus is on a mutual exchange, not necessarily an equal exchange, but mutual. In other words, one time I may give more than I receive, and another, I may receive more than I give.

The counter-trait is that of superior / inferior. This basically says: "I am better that you are," and this will set the guidelines for our relationship. This is a connection killer!

G. _____ and _____ in people vs. cynicism and _____

People know if you love and believe in them. They can sense if you are in the relationship for their best interest or yours. Whether the relationship is brief or long term, people have an inner sense about your motive. Sometimes they verbalize it this way . . . "I do not know, I just have a good feeling about him." I have never heard anyone say this about a leader whose basic nature was cynical about people. In long term relationships, it is easier for people to know if you love and believe in them, because your actions tell the truth every time.

The counter-trait is that of cynicism and distrust. You do not believe the best in people and you basically trust no one. Leaders cannot see the potential in people with this mind-set, and find people difficult to love when they see only their weaknesses and shortcomings. ***A manager says what you inspect is what you get. A leader says what you expect is what you get.***

H. _____ and depth vs. empty and _____

Meaning and depth is necessary to carry any connection you establish beyond a fleeting

moment of inspiration to something of lasting value. The key word is value. People connect with you at the point where they see that you will add value to their life. The possibilities are limitless from encouragement, to learning, to coaching, to healing etc.

A public speaker who is very motivational accomplishes little without substance in the material. When a motivational public speaker also has great content, the connection is powerful because a need has been met. Meaning and depth adds the value that is needed to connect.

Three goals for connected communication:

1. Give them something to feel.
2. Give them something to learn.
3. Give them something to hold on to.

When a patient sees that a doctor has diagnosed the problem successfully and knows the cure, there is an immediate connection. There is a deep value, something of substance.

When a pastor delivers a sermon in which there is powerful life changing truth that causes someone's life to be different forever, there is a deep connection.

It may be as simple as an encouraging word over a cup of coffee, but the connection is made.

The counter-trait is that of an empty encounter, shallow, and no value is given or received. We have all been to parties like this. People chattering, talking small talk, and passing the evening away with little substance. Now, I am all for a fun party, but my point is that there is no deep and meaningful connection made in that setting.

III. Action Assignment

We have all been on phone calls where there is a terrible connection, especially now with cell phones. We can call across the world but not across the street! As we have studied, there are good and bad connections, or connections and no connections, between people as well.

The following is a simple and practical list of signs of a good connection. Some are for an audience, some are for individuals, and some are for both. Use this list throughout this month to monitor your growth according to the *Law of Connection*.

Signs of a good connection:

- The audience wants more.
- The person you are talking with seems relaxed and at ease.
- The person you are talking with tells you something personal about himself or herself.
- The audience is focused and engaged in the appropriate response. (IE. laughing, taking notes, weeping etc.)
- There is a sense of warmth and inner fulfillment.
- You feel like you have identified with each other.
- You personally would enjoy repeating the experience.
- After the conversation is over, you both know something about each other you did not know before.
- After the exchange is over, you both have something of value added to your life.
- The time together had depth and meaning, not just a shallow exchange.
- You felt like the time together was more heart to heart than head to head.

Challenge - Try to connect with someone that is difficult to connect with.