

How Quality Connections and Trust Can Make Your Journey Easier

by Tim D. Keck

It was a typical night for that time of year. Cold and damp, with the moisture made worse by the river called Clyde which ran nearby. Times were hard and many struggled just to keep what they had, worrying about the future and the safety of their families. But the man who often camped in this area had no family with which to be concerned. His parents were dead and the woman he loved had been taken from him unjustly. Life had always been difficult, but things were worse than they had ever been. The journey set before him was inconceivable, the obstacles insurmountable and the path invisible.

Have you ever felt like that? Don't you sometimes feel like that today? Businesses failing, unemployment rising, politicians who may as well have the PIN number to your debit card. Ink that's red means nothing to the Fed!

So what's to be done? How can you be successful when times are hard? How can your business or your team make it through? Well, I would argue that if you want to learn to succeed, you should study successful people.

The Gallup organization did a huge study of businesses that displayed long-term profitability. This research spanned 10 million customers, 3 million employees and 200,000 managers in an effort to determine the formula for success. In a monumental feat of data analysis and simplification, they were able to pull out 12 factors that must be present within any organization if it is to be profitable over the long term. Known as the Gallup 12, they include things like "Do I know what is expected of me at work?" and "Do my opinions seem to count?"

What does this mean to you? Out of those twelve factors, eight of them are directly related to teamwork. That's right - whether it's a championship sports teams, a profitable business, or even a SWAT team like I used to be a part of where success is measured by lives saved - teamwork is crucial.

Curious as to what the remaining four factors in the Gallup 12 most relate to? Leadership.

So all successful organizations have two things in common: Great Leadership and Great Teamwork.

Great leadership is about vision, motivation, clear expectations, accountability, continuous improvement. But this article is about teamwork and what some of what it takes to build a successful team. And while I can't cover all the nuances of how to play well with others, we can simplify and cover the most essential part. The secret ingredient that enables excellence in teams.

Trust.

So how much do you trust each other? If you're like most people at work, not very much.

Here is how you can tell. Do you trust your coworkers enough to be vulnerable to them. In other words, can you give them a task or project that, if it fails, will be devastating to you, yet you don't have to keep checking back or hedging your bet in some other way?

Yeah that's kind of a problem isn't it? You see we only trust people we know and believe in.

That was the problem faced by the man in our story. But whereas you probably have some pretty big barriers to overcome, this guy's:

- Journey was Inconceivable - To bring freedom to a nation.
- Obstacles were Insurmountable - Overthrow the mightiest power on earth.
- Path was Invisible - He had no apparent means to do so.

On top of all of this he was homeless. Living in a cave. And he was wanted. In hiding and on the run. But he had two things going for him: a natural talent for leadership and a cause that was just.

Because of those two things, others were drawn to him. They saw by his actions (not just his words) that he could be trusted. You see our hero recognized he could never accomplish his mission if he made the journey alone. He would need help from others and in order to get the level of commitment he would need to persevere, he forged connections with others. And among those that he connected with, in the late spring of 1297, in the caves near Lanark, was one of my ancestors.

As leader of the Maxwell clan, my ancestor offered the lot of them to join in the fight with William Wallace against the English, saying "I am ready!" The mighty Wallace, who towered over most of his countrymen, looked directly in the eye of the Chief of the Maxwell's. His gaze was met with the determined stare of a fellow warrior, which prompted Wallace to affirm "Ready, aye ready, noble Scot." And with that, began the long and treacherous fight for the independence of Scotland.

Who could imagine that one of my ancestors, on my mother's side, played a part in that drama some 700 years ago? In fact some of the Maxwell's still use the motto "I am ready."

See, the journey I am on actually began long before I was even born. And so did yours. Those who went before us walked the road to this point, preparing the way. Consequently, they are the first people you must connect with. Some of you already have.

Maybe you have an ancestor or relative that did something noteworthy.

It doesn't have to be hundreds of years ago, it could be your mom or your cousin. My great uncle went on two expeditions to the South Pole with Admiral Byrd. But my dad was just an honest, hard-working guy who provided for his family.

There is power in connecting with your past. Even if it's only to learn what not to do.

Maybe some of you are like my friend Jeff, who's ancestry runs straight to Frank and Cole Younger of the Jesse James Gang. Truly, thieves and cutthroats do not the finest role models make. So don't focus on them. Remember, if you want to succeed, study *successful* people. That may not include convicted felons.

Even if you don't know who your family is or where they came from, consider the founders of this country or the ones who tamed the very land on which we now stand. People of all nationalities have heroes.

Take a few minutes and look back. Consider what your ancestors had to overcome to make a place for you or look at historical figures. Find one that strikes a chord with you and research them. Get inside their head and learn what made them great.

EXERCISE: Write down what would you like to discover about one of your ancestors? What attributes would he or she have? What accomplishments? What else? Picture them in your mind's eye. What do they look like? What message would they have for you today? How can you connect with that message?

An ancient fable tells the story of a orphaned tiger cub that was adopted by a herd of goats. Growing up with the goats, he learned to eat grass like a goat, to talk like a goat and in virtually every way to act like a goat. He believed he was a goat. One day the goats heard the roar of a tiger nearby and they all fled. All except the young tiger who was both afraid of the new sound and strangely drawn to it. As the big tiger approached and tried to speak to the young one, he would only reply by bleating and making goat sounds. The older cat asked him why he was acting like a goat but the young tiger just nibbled the grass. In frustration the big tiger took him to a pool of water where he could see their reflections side-by-side. Suddenly the young cat realized what he was supposed to be. "But I don't know what to do now," he said, "I have lived my whole life as a goat." "I don't care so much what you do," growled the wise old tiger, "but whatever you do, from now on, do it as a tiger!"

Your journey will be easier if you know where you came from. William Wallace knew he wasn't an Englishman. He was a Scot. The Maxwell clan knew the same thing and marched into battle wearing the red and green tartan plaid to prove it. Knowing where they came from gave them inspiration to get where they were going. That was fuel for their journey. It can be fuel for yours and it starts today.

Connecting with your past helps you trust that, if they could do it, you can do it!

But you can't focus all your energy connecting with the past. You also have to connect with where you are right now, with those around you. Remember: connections build trust. Trust is the foundation of all teamwork. So make a commitment to get to know your coworkers as people, not just as colleagues.

Learn about their history. Both ancient and recent. Where did they grow up? How many in their family? What is important to them? A twenty-minute conversation over coffee could change the entire course of your relationship - for the better!

How will you know if you've made progress? You will know because you'll feel differently about other people at work. The mood will change and hard conversations will become easier. Teamwork will begin to happen. Wow.

I challenge you to start connecting and building trust with anyone in your life that matters. Make it a part of who you are. What might happen? How could a habit of connecting make your journey more successful?

Sir William Wallace used his ability to connect to bring freedom to Scotland. But maybe you'd like an example that's a little closer to home.

How about the restaurant owner that was looking for a way to improve his product offerings? He owned and operated two establishments in Atlanta, but it had been a tough year. After suffering what he hoped would be the only major tragedy of his lifetime a decade before - losing both his brothers/partners in an airplane crash - he received a phone call late on a wintry night saying one of his restaurants was on fire. Not only did it burn to the ground, it was underinsured so he wasn't able to build it back. Then, a few months later, he found out he had cancer. Then came surgery and a near-fatal reaction to the anesthetic and a return of the cancer and another surgery. He had never been so demoralized in his life.

But TC was a man who made connections. And one of them was about to pay off.

You see the folks at Goode Brothers Poultry had recently won an airline contract to provide boneless, skinless chicken breasts that would fit the exact dimensions of the meal tray. That was a good deal for them, except after they trimmed off the excess part, they had to throw it away and that seemed like a terrible waste. So the Goode brothers went to talk to their friend TC who had always left such a great impression on them.

Within minutes of hearing their problem, Truett Cathy knew he had a mutually beneficial solution and a way to sell those unusually shaped breast pieces. Without the connection he had made with the Goode brothers, there might not be a Chick-fil-a. Can you imagine life without waffle fries?

So what connection might you make that will pay off in your future?

Because it doesn't have to be someone from the outside, it could be someone you have worked with for years...maybe one of those C analytical types that are hesitant to open up.

Dr. Spence Silver was one of those types - he was scientist. Funny thing about researchers; sometimes they invent things but don't know what their product could be used for. That was Dr. Silver's situation as he worked on a way to improve the stickiness of tape. The problem was, he didn't exactly come up with the linear version of super glue. His new adhesive didn't stick worth a hoot. But he didn't give up. He kind of thought he was on to something and tried for five years to convince someone, anyone, at the company, that there was a legitimate use for his accidental invention. But he had no luck.

Enter Art Fry, a fellow employee. Art was a member of the choir at his local church. During practice, he would use small scraps of paper to mark his page in the hymnal so he could quickly turn to the right song on Sundays and not perform an inadvertent solo. During one particular rehearsal, Art was getting really frustrated because his homemade bookmarks kept falling to the floor. "There has got to be a better way" he thought to himself.

Enter God, the creator of the universe, with a dash of inspiration. Suddenly, Fry remembered Dr. Silver. The two of them had connected some months before and Spence had shared the story of his unintentional invention. What would happen if we put Silver's not-so-sticky adhesive on scrap paper...?

The result? Post-it notes! Want to guess what that little connection was worth? About 20 billion dollars and stellar careers for both Silver, Fry and their entire team. Post-it's are listed as one of 3M Corp's top two assets.

I hope you aren't thinking "I can't do anything like that" or worse yet "We can't do anything like that." Who were Spence Silver and Art Fry before they invented Post-it's? Two science geeks. Who was Truett Cathy before he connected with the Goode Brothers and came up with the world's first "chicken steak sandwich?" A fry cook.

What about you? When will you realize you are a tiger? Each of you are magnificent creations with God given talents and the ability to be wildly successful together.

So why not start making those connections today? Are you ready? Aye ready!

Contact Tim Keck at www.bulletproofteams.com for more information about growing successful teams.