



It's easy to connect with other people when we're travelling – but we often don't do the same in the workplace. KEMINEKVAPIL is challenging you to be courageous with your connections this year.

the adventure of CONNECTION

As an executive and personal coach, it would make sense for my first *Latte* piece of the new decade to be about goals: how to set them, how to focus on them, how to take action toward them, and what to do when you don't reach them.

But I think you have probably had all the goal-setting advice you need or desire at this juncture in your career. I think it makes better sense to write about connection, because without it we can find ourselves empty and directionless; when we feel connected, we experience meaning and fulfilment in our work and personal lives.

If we are not connected to our work, our work will have no meaning. If we are not connected to our

colleagues and our teams, we will experience loneliness at work. Connection is important, and it is worth feeling a little uncomfortable to build it.

In a recent *Forbes* article, Jeff Boss stated, "With the majority of our day spent at work, the cost of not connecting to those around us poses significant threats to personal health and organisational performance." I have recently returned from a two-week trip to India with my family, which consists of my husband and two teenagers, aged 13 and 15. I travelled to India 20 years ago to train as a yoga teacher and have longed for the opportunity to take my family there to experience the beautiful, confronting, sublime – and dare I say

it – ‘crazy’ world of India. Well, South India, at least. I have never been up north, which is another reason to return again one day.

We were mainly there to visit some Australian friends who have supported a foundation over the past 20 years that provides a children’s home, school, environmental service, roving IT training, medical centre, women’s skills centre and other services to a regional community in Tamil Nadu. Our friends visit every January to engage with the children, check in with the staff, and assess the ongoing needs of the children and the foundation as a whole. And as our family has donated to the foundation for many years, and we funded the women’s centre last year, it was time to engage with the foundation on a deeper level.

But before we arrived with these friends, we had eight days to explore various cities and villages. We stayed in different types of accommodation, from the five-star to a \$50-a-night beach shack in a fishing village (where the sunrises were awe inspiring and the smells from the fishermen’s daily catch had their own way of catching one’s attention).

Our experiences were wide and varied, and we had to learn to connect to the people we met if we were going to make the best of the adventure we were on. Most of us are more open to connecting when we are travelling – we see it as part of the experience, as part of the adventure. By contrast, we may be less focused on connection when we are at work. This lack of connection can have an emotional cost and a performance-related cost.

As a coach, it is my job to ask questions, and I believe that one of the best ways to create connection with another person is to do this. There is one particular question that I personally favour to build instant connection: “Tell me more about that?” Tell me more about your weekend; your opinion on the project deadline; on the recent funding issues; how you think the presentation could be better; on why you love your dog. This question demonstrates, “I am interested in your opinion, your thoughts and your ideas. I am interested in you.” What the listener feels is that you care, and this always leads to a deeper level of connection, which builds trust. As a certified Dare to Lead facilitator, I work with the conversation of connection and trust all the time and, as we know, if there is no trust, there is no team. We are all better versions of ourselves when we feel connected. Connection is a core value of mine; connection to others, but also connection to myself; it’s how I choose to operate in the world and in my work.

As a service-based business owner, if I don’t feel connection with a coaching client, I know I’m not the best coach for them, and recommend someone who I believe will serve them better. When I’m asked to speak for corporate events, I am most effective when I am connected either to the company itself, or to its mission or vision; if I lack any connection, I know I will not do my best work with that company. This is a point of realisation that I have reached in my career, and I believe that it serves me and my clients well.

How does connection show up in your workplace or business? If you were to ask your colleagues what

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connects them to their work, you would receive a wide range of answers. If you lead a team and you don’t know what connects your team members to their work or your company, I invite you to start asking questions: as a leader, you need to be the one to start the conversation. And what about the team members or colleagues you don’t connect with? Find something! This may not be easy (although it is probably easier than you think), but it will make all the difference. Start practising the question I mentioned earlier, and see whether that makes a

difference; I believe it will.

Sometimes, we don’t feel connection to something or someone, but we have to get on with the job at hand regardless. Even if you are only able to find a small spark of connection, that spark can make a big difference. Travelling in certain parts of India, you are bound to find yourself in an auto rickshaw at some stage. These three-wheeled vehicles make up most of the traffic in some cities, and some of the drivers would be successful in Formula One: they drive masterfully in what can be hair-raising conditions.

Many times, the way the drivers connected with us, once they knew we were from Australia, was to say two words: Ricky Ponting. Now, I have no interest in cricket (my husband had to tell me how to spell Ricky Ponting), but I was interested in connection. The attempt to find a common interest – despite gaps that may exist in language, culture, socio-economic position and life experience – is nearly always enough to create connection between two human beings. Not being a cricket fan or having any pool of knowledge to draw from, I asked questions: “You like cricket? Which players do you like?” The conversations were not always long, because of the language difference, but they created a spark of connection.

In fact, one rickshaw driver started the conversation with the subject of cricket, which led to a conversation that in my opinion was hands-down one of the best moments of connection we had on the trip.

What if you were to deliberately focus on connecting with your colleagues, especially those you find it hard to connect with, as if you were on an adventure – the adventure of connection? What if building a connected team were more important than the immediate financial gains, because a connected team would increase all gains, not just the bottom line?

If you’re a leader, ask the people you work with what connects them to their role, to the organisation, to the work they put their life energy into each day. With that information, you will have the foundation to build something meaningful. We all crave meaningful connection, and it does not take much to create it. I wish you well on your adventure. ✨

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