

The invisible foundation

Most training in business is task-related, says **Greta Hart Montgomery** – but the success of these tasks is affected by the capacity, or lack of it, to connect with others. People skills matter.

I often hear businesses claim that people are their greatest asset. And yet, in a recent worldwide survey done by Harvard Business Review, over 20,000 employees were asked what they wanted from their leaders. A whopping 52 per cent gave the answer, “respect.” Ouch!

I look at human connection and how it impacts on the success of business processes. Human connection, or the skill that a leader or group must have to make genuine, meaningful relationships, is a powerful force. We often sense its presence in successful businesses or sports teams. We know when we are in an environment where it’s missing. It absolutely impacts the bottom line. Human connection is not something you are. It’s something you DO.

As a basketball player, one of the worst seasons I had was when I played for the most skillful and knowledgeable coach I had ever worked with. This guy knew his stuff. He had plans to improve our technique and strategy. We started the season optimistically. We had good athletes and the processes in place to succeed. Or so we thought.

This coach lacked human connection skills. I felt like I was only as valuable as my performance. He didn’t listen, never asked about me or any other player, never shared a story that wasn’t designed to teach a lesson. We didn’t get

any better. Work ethic waned, teamwork corroded, and we lost players. We had a bad season and it was miserable.

Likewise, I recently worked with a client whose management team consisted of very professional, highly qualified, people. On paper you would bet this team of individuals would be successful because they possessed knowledge, skills and experience to do superior work. You would be wrong. This collection of stellar individuals spent a significant amount of time figuring out how they fit into the group and managing social status. They had a frustrating lack of results.

What is the common link between these two unanticipated failures?

It’s the importance of human connection skills. We tend to put our attention and effort on what we can see – individual skills. But those skills hinge on interaction. Processes in business serve as a framework for a living network of personalities who bring their own strengths, fears, and varying degrees of human connection skills. Always. The development of people skills within this living network is wise leadership. It will reap valuable rewards and move your business forward – including your bottom line.

Human connection underpins all of business. It is the invisible foundational block that holds up and feeds every visible process in your business.



The first critical step for any leader is to recognise that the success of ALL your processes – whether sales, HR, finance, manufacturing or managing people – is tangibly affected by the human connection skills of your employees.

Then you lead! Educate your leaders about the importance of human connection. Invest in training that develops people-to-people skills for every level and division of your business. Most training in business is task-related. If you don’t recognise that business success is based on people’s ability to connect with others, you won’t get the results you want.

I gained valuable insight from my disappointing basketball season. Since then, I see it everywhere. Sports. Business. Life. Success is often affected by the capacity, or lack of it, to connect with others.

Now coaching basketball myself, the ability to send the message, “I see you, I hear you, you have value here,” has a direct impact on my win column.

The people in your business have a need for that same basic message. It will impact every area of your business, and ultimately your own win column.

Greta Hart Montgomery is an internationally recognised coach and keynote speaker focusing on team performance development and human connections. She is a partner with Ogilvie Ross LLP – and an award-winning basketball coach.

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