Influence: Connecting with People

By Dr. John C. Maxwell

As a train’s source of energy and direction, the locomotive plays a vital role. However, unless a locomotive connects to other cars on the track, it is relatively useless. A train’s value comes from its ability to transport massive amounts of cargo, and doing so requires the locomotive to link up with dozens of freight cars. Traveling by itself, a locomotive would arrive at its destination empty-handed. In that case, its journey would be nothing more than a waste of fuel.

Leaders are like locomotives in that they’re blessed with drive, energy, and vision. However, until leaders learn the art of connection, their influence remains minimal. In isolation, their talents accomplish little, and their efforts are squandered.

Let’s look at practical ways whereby leaders can make meaningful connections with others.

8 Steps for Connecting with People

#1 Don’t Take People for Granted

Weak leaders get so caught up in the vision of where they’re going that they forget whom they’re trying to lead. Instead, leaders would be wise realize that connecting to people and developing them are the surest ways to gain influence. Results happen through relationships.

#2 Possess a Difference-Maker Mindset

A hesitant and indecisive leader doesn’t enliven the hearts or imaginations of people. On the contrary, leaders who influence and inspire have a difference-maker mindset. They connect with others by passing along an infectious confidence in their ability to succeed.

#3 Initiate Movement Toward People

Freight cars sitting on the railroad tracks won’t go anywhere by themselves. They will rust and collect dust unless a locomotive makes contact and connects to them. Similarly, most people stay parked due to self-doubt, fear, or absence of vision. It takes the connection of a leader to tap into their potential and rouse them to action.

#4 Search for Common Ground

Anytime you want to connect with a person, the starting point should be shared interests. If you’re attentive to the hobbies, histories, and habits of those you lead, then you will find ample areas of common ground. Launch out from these areas of agreement to build rapport.

#5 Recognize and Respect Differences

We are capable of finding common ground with others, but at the same time we need to acknowledge that we’re all different. The greatest influencers realize that differences ought to complement rather than
clash. When you demonstrate regard for diverse personalities and meet people on their terms, they will appreciate your sensitivity and connect with the understanding you’ve shown.

#6 Learn the Key to Others’ Lives

People have core motivations that vary drastically, and a leader has to discern them to forge a connection with others. Generally, the key can be unearthed by examining what a person has already done in life and by discovering what he or she aspires to do in the future. Once you’ve found the key, do not exploit it. Turn the key only when you have the person’s permission, and always use it for his or her benefit - not your own.

#7 Communicate from the Heart

Nothing repels people like a phony leader. Be authentic when you speak, and align your actions and words. People respond to passion, and they will latch onto a vision when it’s communicated directly from the heart.

#8 Share Common Experiences

Shared experiences cement a relationship. For this reason, it’s wise to be intentional about eating out with teammates, inviting them to join you on an errand, or taking in a play or ballgame together. The more time you invest in those you lead, the greater the connection you will forge with them.

Summary

One is too small of a number to achieve greatness. No one ever accomplishes alone what he can do in partnership with others. If you’re looking to grow as an influencer, start by strengthening your connections with the people around you.