

Creating Energy Through High-Quality Connections

This is a book about how leaders and managers in their everyday behaviors can make an enormous difference in activating and renewing the energy that people bring to their work. It is also about how to design and construct organizational contexts that produce energy and vitality as critical and renewable resources that make organizations (and the people within them) great.

The premise of this book is deceptively simple: the energy and vitality of individuals and organizations alike depends on the quality of the connections among people in the organization, and between organizational members and people outside the firm with whom they do business. The key to transforming both

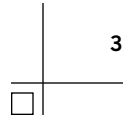


your own work experience and the performance of the people around you is to build and nurture what I call *high-quality* connections. This type of connection is marked by mutual positive regard, trust, and active engagement on both sides. In a high-quality connection, people feel more engaged, more open, more competent. They feel more alive.¹ High-quality connections can have a profound impact on both individuals and entire organizations.

One of the key insights that inspired this book is that a high-quality connection doesn't necessarily mean a deep or intimate relationship. High-quality connections do not require personal knowledge or extensive interaction. Any point of contact with another person can potentially be a high-quality connection. One conversation, one e-mail exchange, one moment of connecting in a meeting can infuse both participants with a greater sense of vitality, giving them a bounce in their steps and a greater capacity to act.

By the same token, low-quality connections exact a fearful toll on energy and well-being. Low-quality connections are marked by distrust and disregard of the other's worth. Such connections can dissolve our sense of our own humanity, competence, and worth, and they can do so in an instant. Like metal corroded through exposure to toxic substances, people in organizations are corroded through exposure to the toxicity of low-quality connections.² When low-quality connections are pervasive in an organization, they eat away at people's ability to learn, to show initiative, and to take risks. They corrode motivation, loyalty, and commitment.

In short, the quality of connections with others is one of the most powerful variables that influences the well-being of individuals and organizations alike. Before exploring this idea more formally, let me share two brief stories. They should give you a concrete feeling for the difference between high- and low-quality connections, and the enormous difference they make.



■ The Power of Connections: Two Brief Tales

Brian Sills was in charge of strategic planning at Phoenix Software. For some time he had been struggling to put a planning system in place that fit the fast-paced, lean, nonbureaucratic culture while still keeping people in all units headed in the same direction, aware of their long- and short-term strategic objectives. The task was demanding, but Brian accepted the challenge with zest. He bounced back from the occasional setbacks, energetically trying a new path.

Then Brian's boss, the vice president of Finance, left the company. The new VP proved to be a very uncommunicative manager. He responded to specific requests for information, but he did not include Brian in high-level meetings. He rarely consulted with Brian even when he was wrestling with strategic matters. From Brian's point of view, he seemed uninterested.

Initially, Brian gave little thought to his relationship with his new boss. The relationship wasn't effective, but at least it was not damaging. The connection became really corrosive when the VP reneged on promises and failed to provide assistance when Brian requested budgetary advice. He seemed to pay attention to Brian only when he had some criticism to impart. Brian spent an inordinate amount of time trying to figure out what he had done wrong. He actively sought advice from his peers about what to do. As his stress built, he found himself wrestling with frequent headaches and numbness in his left hand. His performance deteriorated as he began to feel less sure of himself and increasingly unwilling to share information with his boss. Instead of showing initiative, he kept his head down and focused on getting through the day.

As other staff members saw what was happening to Brian, the corrosion spread. Brian's colleagues started being more cautious about what they shared with the VP. Communication and



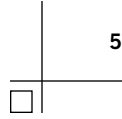
trust plummeted in the unit. The VP knew that Brian's unit was developing "performance issues," but as far as he was concerned, the problem was with the staff. He had no idea of the effects his own malignant behavior was having on the people around him.

Does this scenario sound familiar? With a little thought, most of us can point to experiences like Brian's in our own work lives. Like Brian, we may have blamed ourselves when our performance and sense of well-being deteriorated. We may not have seen the real source of the problem—a corrosive connection.

Now consider the case of Gayle, a successful consultant in a well-known knowledge management consulting firm in Minneapolis. From the outside, Gayle's work life looked ideal. She made a great salary, traveled to exotic places, and was gaining more and more responsibility and recognition. She was well known as one of the high flyers at ABLE Consulting and was actively recruited by other consulting firms.

From the inside, Gayle's situation looked very different. She didn't think she was working excessively hard, yet most of the time she felt physically exhausted. When she wasn't working, she would find herself without energy to try the hobbies that she had been telling herself she would try when she found the right city, the right job, the right time. Interactions with others at work felt like mini-intrusions that were taking her away from the "real work" of her job. She found herself continuously apologizing for times she had been short with customers, unhelpful to colleagues who sought her out for help and advice, or unavailable to subordinates whom she saw as demanding and needy. She was starting to dislike her job and herself without any readily apparent reason.

Things turned around for Gayle when she received some very direct feedback from a long-term client. The client knew Gayle well enough to see that her unhappiness was growing, with costs to both Gayle and her unit as a whole. The client's ad-



vice was simple. He advised Gayle to take a different stand in the way that she thought about interacting with others. He suggested treating interactions as opportunities to build nourishing and replenishing connections—even if they lasted less than five minutes. He told Gayle that this form of interacting did not take a lot of work, but it did require a major change in attitude. It meant seeing and acting on the possibility that in every connection there was a wellspring of vitality to tap. It meant seeing the building of positive connections not as a waste of time but as the best investment she could make in her own well-being and sustained performance and that of her unit.

At first Gayle thought the advice was silly and overly simplistic, but she decided to give it a try. On her client's advice, she started small. The next day, on her way out of her apartment building, she happened to meet her mail carrier. Instead of brushing past him as she would normally do, she stopped and asked him how he was doing. It was the first time she had so much as made eye contact with him. With a smile, the mail carrier said he was doing just fine. He shared a brief story about his daughter's progress in school and said he hoped she'd grow up to have a nice career like Gayle's.

Gayle went on her way. Now she was smiling, too. It had just been a momentary exchange, yet the little glow and sense of sparked connection stayed with her all morning. When one of her subordinates, Jack Farley, came in for his monthly update meeting, Gaye tried a similar experiment with him. She felt Jack perk up when she listened carefully to his answers, and she noticed that he shared more information than he usually did. He even offered some ideas about how she could help him achieve his objectives for the next month. That had never happened before.

Gayle began to feel that she was on to something. She started paying more and more attention to the quality of her interactions with others. Soon this small set of experiments blossomed into a conscious change in the way she approached

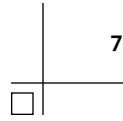


everyday encounters. Within a couple of months, Gayle's experience at ABLE Consulting fundamentally changed. It was as if her positive encounters with others were nourishing something inside her. She felt her sense of health, vitality, and stamina improve. Not only that, but she could see the heightened energy spread through her unit. Encouraged by Gayle's example, people started offering each other more help. Ideas for new services from her group were openly shared. Meetings became more fun and creative. Gayle's colleagues from other units wanted to know what explained the buzz and heightened sense of activity. Gayle wondered if they would believe her if she told them. She would never have imagined that small moves to make meaningful connections could be so transformative.

Gayle's and Brian's stories illustrate the difference that the quality of connections can make to individuals and organizations. If you reflect on your own experiences, my guess is that you will find similar examples in your own history. And what you know on the basis of experience is borne out by considerable research into the effects of high- and low-quality connections on motivation, learning, commitment, and general well-being. The next section outlines some of that research.

■ **Connections and Energy**

This book views energy as a renewable resource that contributes to making organizations and the people within them extraordinary. By energy I mean the sense of being eager to act and capable of action. Positive energy is experienced as a form of positive affect, making it a reinforcing experience that people enjoy and seek.³ Greater energy feels like more enthusiasm and greater zest.⁴ Reduced energy feels just the opposite—like a reduced or depleted capacity to act.



Energy is the fuel that makes great organizations run. Chief Executive William L. Robertson of Weston Solutions, a privately held national environment and redevelopment firm, describes the power of energy this way: “Energy can make all the difference between whether you know you are going to have greatness, mediocrity, or failure.”⁵

Every interaction with others at work—big or small, short or lengthy—has the potential to create or deplete vital energy. Energizing interactions are high-quality connections. The energy they create is infectious. Where positive energy is activated through a high-quality connection, it can lead to what psychologist Barbara Frederickson calls “positive spirals.”⁶ The logic of positive spirals goes something like this. People who have high-quality connections experience more energy and more positive emotions such as joy, interest, and love. This state of being increases their capacity to think and act in the moment. In turn, this change builds more capacity and desire to effectively interact with others, generating more opportunities for energy to spread.

Management researchers Rob Cross, Wayne Baker, and their colleagues have been studying the effects of energy in work networks. They note how energy can be renewed and spread as individuals infect each other by connecting in positive ways. One of the managers in their study describes meetings where people are connecting on a real and engaged level that creates a sustained sense of energy: “They are just amazing meetings. People are naturally building off of each other. I am able to think faster and retrieve more for sure. And the ideas themselves, and the way they are forming, just generate a self-reinforcing loop that drives the energy higher and higher.”⁷

By the same token, corrosive connections drain vital energy from the organization. Like high-quality connections, they can be infectious. As one manager told me, “Corrosive connections



are like black holes: they absorb all of the light in the system and give back nothing in return.”

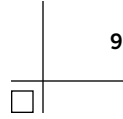
The Damage Done by Corrosive Connections

Exactly how do low- and high-quality connections produce such dramatic effects? Like high-quality connections, corrosive connections can be simple, everyday encounters. They are contacts in which attention, trust, and mutual regard are lacking. It’s tempting to shrug off incivility and thoughtlessness as inconsequential, but such connections are not benign. Corrosive connections inflict multiple levels of damage on individuals and organizations that should not be ignored.

Damage to Individuals

Corrosive connections have a number of damaging effects on individuals. To begin with, corrosive connections make it more difficult for employees to do their work. Connections that sap energy turn people inward, both for protection and for sense-making. When people are caught in low-quality connections, they end up doing lots of what psychologists call “motive work,” trying to figure out why people are treating them this way. Thus low-quality connections cause distractions that make it difficult for people to engage fully in their tasks. This effect is visible in Brian’s story, where the corrosive connection with his boss began to infect and distract other people in his unit. Over time, this type of lower task engagement takes a toll in the quality and efficiency of the work people are able to deliver.

The damage done to people’s capacity to do work when dealing with corrosive connections is clearly evident from the effects of incivility in organizations. Uncivil behaviors include being rude and discourteous and displaying a lack of regard for others—all of which are indicators of corrosive connections.⁸ Employees who are targets of incivility at work spend an inor-



dinate time worrying about the incident and trying to avoid the person who instigated the uncivil behavior. Not surprisingly, in these kinds of situations people are reluctant to do extra work that goes beyond the strictest job specifications.⁹

Corrosive connections are also a potent force in damaging psychological well-being and inducing stress.¹⁰ In corrosive connections people often have the experience of being devalued and disrespected, eroding feelings of felt worth. Such experiences create a major strain that taxes people's emotional and cognitive capacity to function effectively. For example, Brian found himself getting more and more anxious when he had to interact with the vice president of Finance. The increased anxiety contributed to his fear of giving presentations or even sharing information, making him perform less effectively. The deterioration in his performance further fueled his anxiety and self-focus. The corrosion in the connection sent him spinning in a downward spiral that made it increasingly hard for him to perform well.

Managers can leave major damage in their wake by creating corrosive connections with their subordinates.¹¹ Often, the source of corrosion is not a major blowup but a series of everyday acts that communicate disrespect or mistrust. In Brian's case, small acts of exclusion and the simple lack of recognition chipped away at his sense of worth and competence. Even worse is being managed with what organizational researcher Blake Ashforth calls "petty tyranny" (using little digs that whittle away at people's sense of self-esteem or punishing people for unexplainable reasons).¹² This kind of management style increases frustration and alienation, and creates a sense of helplessness for subordinates. The result can be anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion.¹³

The damage done by corrosive connections at work can also migrate to other domains of people's lives, such as connections with family and with friends. One senior manager told me, "I wish I could turn the clock back to the time that my kids were



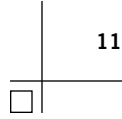
young. I was under extreme pressure at work and many of my working relationships were absolutely poisonous, yet I felt that I couldn't escape them. What did I do as a result? I brought it all home and tried to 'control' everyone. As a result I made a mess of almost everything, at work and at home. It was a very sad time and it continues to hurt even after many years."

Damage to the Organization

If you hold in mind the costs of corrosive connections on individuals, it is easy to see how corrosive connections undermine an organization's capacity to perform well. Low-quality connections eat away at employees' capability, knowledge, motivation, commitment, and emotional reserves. Moreover, corrosive connections can spark revenge, cheating, and other destructive behaviors.

Corrosive connections also harm organizations because the damage often spreads beyond the initial connection. People cannot help being influenced to some degree by the role models around them, even if they see that a behavior is harmful. For example, in one study of thirty-five work groups in twenty organizations, the antisocial behavior of the group (for example, saying something to purposely hurt another person at work, criticizing people at work, saying rude things) had a strong effect on the antisocial behavior of individuals.¹⁴ As the title of the research article ("Monkey See, Monkey Do") suggests, simply observing the way people treat each other in low-quality connections changes the behavior of the observers, magnifying the corrosive effects.

Corrosion also spreads because people in corrosive connections often take out their pain on others. One manager I know who was in a taxing yet strategically critical staff job explained the dynamic this way: "I have several people I work with where the relationship is really difficult. They come and see



me and throw up on me. What do I do with that pain? I often find myself looking for someone else to throw up on.”¹⁵

Clearly, corrosive connections directly impair the effectiveness of the organization in a variety of ways. When you couple these direct costs with the opportunity costs of not having energy-generating, high-quality connections, the performance implications are stunning.

The Benefits Created by High-Quality Connections

The upside of high-quality connections is enormous.¹⁶ The benefits are much greater and more wide-ranging than you might imagine, and they have momentous consequences for both individuals and organizations.

Benefits for Individuals

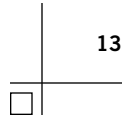
High-quality connections benefit individuals both in their overall well-being and in their work performance. First, high-quality connections facilitate physical and psychological health.¹⁷ Research suggests that people who have more high-quality interactions during the course of a day register greater well-being, as evidenced by more positive emotions and greater experienced vitality.¹⁸ High-quality connections revitalize, helping people to live longer by reducing the risk of death through strengthening the immune system and lowering blood pressure, reducing stress levels, and arming people with protective factors that make them less susceptible to depression and self-destructive behaviors.¹⁹

Second, high-quality connections enable individuals to engage more fully in the tasks that compose their jobs.²⁰ When people are in high-quality connections, they feel a heightened capacity to devote time to and concentrate on the work at hand. Why do high-quality connections have this effect? Some argue it



is because they provide a safe psychological haven that gives people freedom to get engaged, to let go and to more fully concentrate on the tasks at hand.²¹ Others argue that in high-quality connections one person provides safe emotional space for another, allowing for the expression of natural feelings of confusion, uncertainty, anxiety, and frustration. Expressing such feelings is often essential to letting oneself get fully connected to mastering a task or activity.²² Finally, network researchers point out that high-quality connections give people access to both emotional resources (such as excitement or support) and instrumental resources (such as information) that allow them to engage in their tasks more effectively.²³

Third, people learn more easily when they enjoy high-quality connections with others. Being in this form of connection calls up positive emotions like joy, excitement, and interest. Positive emotions expand people's capacity to attend to and think about different types of actions.²⁴ For example, experiencing joy creates the desire to play, to be creative, and to think outside the box. This emotional response facilitates people's willingness and capacity to learn.²⁵ People also learn better when in high-quality connections because these kinds of connections create conditions where information is more easily shared and where people can more easily make mistakes and take risks. For example, anthropologist Julian Orr did an in-depth case study of Xerox technical representatives that showed how high-quality connections facilitated the development and sharing of tacit knowledge for fixing copiers. The vitality of the connections between people facilitated storytelling and made asking questions safe. The effect was to enhance both individual learning and the learning of the group.²⁶ The case of Gayle at the start of this chapter illustrates this kind of effect. As Gayle took time to be present and listened more actively in her meetings with Jack Farley, he shared more information. In turn, Gayle opened up with a wider set of concerns, allowing Jack to participate more fully in decisions that affected



both of them. With a more vibrant connection, both people experienced enhanced conditions for learning.

Benefits for the Organization

The organizational benefits of high-quality connections are just as striking as the benefits to individual employees. First, high-quality connections enhance the capacity to cooperate within and across units. Cooperation is a lubricant that makes the everyday work of organizations run smoothly. Cooperation shows up in organizations in all kinds of ways. Sometimes it means staying late and going the extra mile to help a fellow employee. Other times it involves investing time and effort in problem solving or in meeting or exceeding the expectations of a coworker or boss. Whatever form it takes, cooperation implies a loyalty to the relationship over and above loyalty to oneself. When there are high-quality connections between employees and their peers, between employees and their bosses, and in other critical connection points, cooperation is a natural by-product.

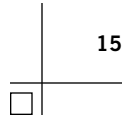
Second, high-quality connections facilitate effective coordination between interdependent parts of an organization. For example, the complicated task of producing on-time flight departures for airlines requires enormous coordination between members of cross-functional teams of pilots, flight attendants, gate agents, ticket agents, ramp agents, baggage handlers, operations agents, cabin cleaners, fuelers, mechanics, and freight agents. Management researcher Jody Hoffer Gittel found that the level of problem solving, helping, mutual respect, shared goals, and shared knowledge between employees during the complex delivery of flight departures strongly predicted team performance in terms of both efficiency (gate time per departure and staff time per passenger) and quality (customer complaints, baggage handling, and late arrivals).²⁷ In the airlines that maintained high-quality connections, employees readily adapted their work to help each other out to make performance goals.



People felt a strong sense of mutuality; if one person worked hard to accommodate an overburdened ticket agent, the helper could count on the agent to help out in a future crunch time. Gittell's study provides compelling evidence that the quality of the relationships between people facilitates complex coordination as individuals work effectively together to improvise and adapt in order to deliver a complete service performance.²⁸

Third, high-quality connections strengthen employees' attachments to their work organizations. It should come as no surprise that where employees enjoy positive connections with others at work, their intention to stay at the organization strengthens.²⁹ High-quality connections function like relational anchors, mooring and stabilizing people's sense of attachment to their work organization. A vice president of marketing in a large cosmetic manufacturer told me that she put up with salary inequities, infrequent raises, and frustration with the firm's relative slowness of competitive response because of the quality of her connections with other employees: "It is not fake, it is real. I can count on them to be there if life turns sour or things get rough. This feeling is something that money can't buy." Another manager told me about his department's weekly intake meeting of new consulting work: "At some times of the year, we are very busy and find it difficult to take on new projects, but when we ask whether people can help each other with questions or problems with their current projects, it is amazing to hear them say that of course they can help. Our staff meetings have become a place where people receive expressions of support and help from others. Members of the team know that they can come to the meetings and receive the energy and help of others."

Fourth, high-quality connections can facilitate the transmission of purpose, a key consideration for organizations that rely on culture and the transmission of values as a means to build loyalty and assure competitive success. High-quality connections between employees, and between employees and cus-



tomers, create a type of high-speed, rich conductivity that sustains an organization's culture and strengthens employees' commitment. For example, at Charles Schwab Inc., management relies extensively on the transmission and diffusion of stories that concretely illustrate its core values of fairness, empathy, responsiveness, and service, thereby deepening employees' commitment to these values.³⁰ Without mutuality and energy in the connections between people at Schwab, the infectiousness of the culture would be minimized.

Fifth, high-quality connections encourage dialogue and deliberation and thereby facilitate organizational learning. Connections are the repository for social knowledge about how to get things done.³¹ They are major conduits by which managers learn about their organization's capabilities relative to other firms.³² Connections are also the medium that creates communities of practice where people learn and achieve competence.³³ High-quality connections create the social fabric that supports ongoing learning processes.

Finally, an organization's capacity to adapt and change is tied to the quality of the relationships between organizational members. Arguments for this link come from people applying ideas from the science of complexity to the understanding of organizational effectiveness.³⁴ Consultants Roger Lewin and Birute Regine make the link this way: "In complex adaptive systems, how we interact and the kinds of relationships we form has everything to do with what kind of culture emerges, and this in turn, has everything to do with the emergence of creativity, productivity, and innovation."³⁵ According to this perspective, what these consultants call "care-full relationships" between people are key to innovation and change. *Care-full* (high-quality) connections ensure richer, more frequent communication between people. They motivate people to do their best. They allow people to take risks for the good of the whole. In short, high-quality connections are the foundation for adaptive change.



■ Structure of the Book: Building and Sustaining High-Quality Connections

Given the costs of corrosive connections and the benefits of high-quality connections for both organizations and individuals, it follows that paying attention to the quality of connections should be a top priority for any manager. This book is designed to assist managers by addressing three core questions:

- How do I build high-quality connections in my work organization?
- How do I help myself and others deal with corrosive, low-quality connections?
- How can I design or select organizational contexts that are conducive to building and sustaining high-quality connections?

The answers to these three questions form the structure of the book. Figure 1.1 shows a simple model of the book's core arguments.

Chapters Two through Four develop the core idea that high-quality connections are created in everyday interactions with others. They outline a range of strategies for energizing your workplace, organized in terms of three main pathways to high-quality connection: respectful engagement, task enabling, and trusting. Each chapter explains the essence of a particular pathway, enumerates several strategies, describes and illustrates specific behaviors for deploying these strategies, and considers the challenges you might face, together with some starting points for overcoming them.

Chapter Two focuses on strategies of *respectful engagement*—how to engage others in ways that send messages of value and worth. I describe five major strategies for creating respectful engagement: being present, being genuine, communicating affir-

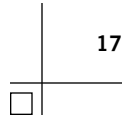


Figure 1.1. Contributors to and Consequences of High-Quality Connections

mation, effective listening, and supportive communication. Being present can take multiple forms, including minimizing distraction, using appropriate body language, and being available. Being genuine involves acting from authentic feelings and motivations. Communicating affirmation can be achieved by looking for the value in another person, communicating recognition, expressing genuine interest, and treating time as precious. Effective listening involves both empathy and active listening. Finally, supportive communication can be achieved by making requests rather than demands, communicating in specific rather than general terms, and making descriptive rather than evaluative statements.

Chapter Three zeroes in on *task enabling*—ways of interacting that facilitate another person’s successful performance.

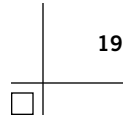


Again, five strategies are discussed: teaching, designing, advocating, accommodating, and nurturing. Teaching involves the sharing of useful knowledge, insight, and information. Designing involves structuring features of a job to facilitate another's performance. Advocating involves actively helping another navigate the political landscape of the organization. Accommodating involves being flexible in ways that enable others to perform better. Finally, nurturing involves facilitating others' success by addressing their developmental needs.

Chapter Four focuses on *building trust*—acting in ways that convey to others the belief that they will act with integrity, dependability, and benevolence. You build high-quality connections through trusting by what you say (for example, by sharing valuable information about yourself), by what you don't say (not accusing another person of bad intent), by what you do (sharing responsibility) and by what you do not do (not using surveillance or monitoring to check up on someone else's behavior).

Chapter Five changes direction and faces squarely the issue of how to deal constructively with corrosive connections. The chapter describes a range of strategies, including bounding and buffering (minimizing the damage), buttressing and strengthening (increasing your capacity to deal with corrosive connections and derive strength from them), and targeting and transforming (changing the connection itself). These strategies can help you and the people you manage consider a fuller range of possibilities for reducing the cost of these harmful relationships at work.

Chapter Six, the final chapter of the book, moves the discussion from individual interactions to the features of organizations that enable or disable the building of high-quality connections. Simply said, some organizations are highly conducive to building high-quality connections and others are not. How do you as a manager think about building a context that enables these generative connections? Chapter Six addresses



this question by presenting seven key clues for identifying contexts that enable high-quality connections: values, practices for rewards and recognition, structure, practices and procedures for getting things done, norms for interpersonal helping, the design of physical space, and the behavior of leaders. Each clue suggests strategies you can deploy as you work to improve the climate for high-quality connections in your own work group, department, unit, or organization.

Each chapter in this book concludes with assessments and other tools for putting the ideas into practice. I've designed the assessments to help spotlight areas of connecting that are working well and areas that may be in need of repair. You can use these insights both to improve your own connecting practices and to enhance the connecting strategies of the people you manage.

■ An Invitation

Let me conclude this introductory chapter by inviting you to engage seriously in exploring how you can energize your workplace by building and sustaining high-quality connections. In work, and in life generally, more generative possibilities appear to people who believe they can understand and make a difference in their own situation and the situation of others. This book is all about helping you see new possibilities for bringing greater energy and vitality to your own life, and the lives of people you work with, by managing in a way that reduces corrosive connections and increases high-quality connections. I hope the book gives you a heightened sense of understanding and a strengthened belief that you can in fact make big differences with even small changes in the actions you take each and every day.



CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter I have introduced the core idea that effective leadership and management requires building and sustaining high-quality connections for yourself and for others. High-quality connections are ties between people that are marked by mutual regard, trust, and active engagement. They can happen in an instant, and they infuse both people with a sense of vitality and energy. These kinds of connections are life-giving. Unfortunately, too often organizational involves just the opposite—low-quality or corrosive connections that diminish people’s sense of worth and drain them of energy.

The quality of connections has a profound effect on both individuals and organizations. Corrosive connections diminish employees’ capacity to get their work done well and can damage their health. The toll on individuals can severely impair organizational effectiveness, especially since the corrosion often spreads across the organization. In contrast, high-quality connections enhance psychological and physical health, facilitate task engagement, and enable learning. At the organization level, they facilitate cooperation and effective coordination, increase employee attachment, help transmit organizational culture, and enable organizational learning and adaptation.

This book describes three pathways to building high-quality connections: respectful engagement, task enabling, and trusting. It also offers strategies for dealing with corrosive connections. Finally, it suggests ways to create an organizational context that is conducive to building and sustaining high-quality connections. My hope is that it will both inspire and equip you to take the small steps that can make a major difference in your life and the life of your organization.