

HOW A **CULTURE OF
UNDERSTANDING** TRANSFORMS
TEAMS AND ORGANIZATIONS

THE **CONNECTION**
QUOTIENT

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CHAPTER 17

POWERFUL INTERACTIONS

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

After graduating from the Dutch Royal Military Academy, I was trained to become an intercept controller and learned to guide fighter aircraft to their aerial targets. I guided Dutch pilots and those of our NATO allies – via radar and radio – during aerial defence manoeuvres and aerial combat.

The job came with high levels of responsibility and extreme peak loads. I enjoyed it initially, but I realized very quickly that it wasn't the career for me. The focus lay too much on developing routines and 'just' executing your task. I yearned for a job with more variety and dynamics.

During my period as an intercept controller, I developed an interest in business and began studying the subject at the Radboud University Nijmegen in my spare time. My manager at the Defence Department knew about my education, as well as my dissatisfaction with being an intercept controller. So, he gave me the opportunity to work on an organizational change.

In addition to a valuable lesson in leadership ('Give people responsibilities that match their interests'), this was a perfect chance to apply the knowledge I was acquiring and to learn more about how organizations work.

As an enthusiastic amateur in the field of organizational change, I constructed ambitious plans and deadlines to implement the changes. And, I expected that others would cooperate in executing these plans out of a sense of loyalty, especially if they had agreed to them. The reality was of course much less simple.

What I learned during that period is that organizations are made up of people, and people want to be seen and heard when it comes to implementing change. That means you need to get onto the work floor, make contact with them and engage in a dialogue. These conversations create the opportunity to build your message based on their answers and create a basis for change.

I also learned the distinction between nice interactions and powerful interactions. In this chapter I want to share with you my most important insights.

MULTIPLE INTERACTIONS A DAY

Interactions form the basis for creating a connection with the other, organizing work, making joint decisions, etc. Your whole day is a constant stream of interactions. And the more powerful these are, the more impact they will have on the connection and collaboration processes. To support you in creating powerful interactions, I have selected eight tips you can apply right now.

Tip 1: Getting from 'but' to 'and'

Some words in our language have an enormous impact on the effectiveness of our interactions. For example: 'You did a good job, but next time, make sure you deliver on time.' By using the word 'but,' the focus switches to the second part of the sentence and this is perceived as a judgment. Or, as the old expression so beautifully puts it: *Everything before 'but' is a lie.* It's more powerful to make use of the 'and' word. This has a connecting influence and lends a positive charge to the second part of the sentence. 'You did a good job, and next time, make sure you deliver on time.'

Tip 2: Getting from 'why' to 'what makes'

Another word that has a lot of impact on the effectiveness of interactions is the 'why' word. For example: 'Why did you choose Laura as your replacement?' It gives the other person the feeling that what he did wasn't right and that he has to justify his decision. And yes, of course it depends a lot on your tone, your intonation and your non-verbal communication whether or not the question you start with 'why' is received in this way. It's more powerful to start your question with 'what makes.' For example: 'What made you choose Laura as your replacement?' 'What makes' usually comes across as being more positive. This construction is typical for an inquiring and researching attitude, inviting a reply and maintaining the connection.

Tip 3: Getting from 'would not' to 'would'

A lot of people have trouble answering the question of what they would like to change about their work. If they have an answer, they very soon start talking in terms of what they don't want anymore. For example: 'I wouldn't work overtime anymore.' These 'would not' answers generally fail to produce any positive energy. Instead of specifying what you want to

get away from, it's much more powerful to indicate where you want to get to. For example: 'I would like to work from home every Friday afternoon.' You can almost feel the energy in that statement. If your conversation partner starts talking about the 'would not' side, stop them in mid-sentence and ask: 'And what *would* you like to do?'

Tip 4: Getting from 'we' to 'I'

When talking with team members about what works well and what could be improved – for example, in the collaboration within the team – people very soon tend to switch to talking in the 'safe' mode. By this I mean that instead of saying what they really think, they make use of generalizations. Instead of 'I don't take people to account,' a team member will say: 'We don't take each other to account.' The general statement is of course important. But, it doesn't alter the fact that the more someone formulates in the 'I' form, the more responsibility he takes for his actions and the greater the chance that he'll actually start to make changes himself. Therefore, if people are talking in general terms, ask them to talk from their own point of view, starting with 'I.'

Tip 5: Getting from passive to active

As soon as the subject turns to personal responsibility, a lot of people switch to talking in the passive voice. They say: 'A lot of gossiping is happening, something should be done about it.' This is quite a passive, not very concrete, statement. But it is based on a good observation. It becomes a little less passive if someone says: 'I should really do something if people are gossiping.' There is a positive intention embedded in this statement. Build on this constructively. The vagueness of the follow-up allows a person to remain passive and not take action. You can easily change this if you say: 'From now on, I'm going to ask anyone who starts gossiping to justify their behaviour.' This is what I call making results-based use of active language. So, next time you're in conversation with others, ask them what they will do.

Tip 6: Getting from behaviour to intention

One reason irritations arise is that other people demonstrate behaviour that you consider unacceptable. For example, an employee might keep asking you whether the next step in a certain project is the right one.

You could call that person to account by telling him that this really has to change. But it's unlikely that he will change his behaviour. It's more powerful to ask him what he intends by constantly raising this question: 'What makes you always check the next step with me?' This way, you will discover what motivates him and you can start a conversation around this. You are tackling the core problem and not just its external manifestation.

Tip 7: Getting from the general to the specific

Good feedback contributes to the growth of the other. A statement such as 'You did well' isn't really helpful. It's too general and doesn't tell the other person what you are talking about. What is meant by 'did' and what does 'well' mean exactly? It's more powerful to specifically indicate what you have observed, what the other person should continue doing, and what could be improved. For example: 'Your report about yesterday's incident is factual and clearly formulated. This gives me confidence in you. And next time, I'd like to see you also suggest a possible solution.'

Tip 8: Getting from compliment to acknowledgement

If someone hands out a compliment, it's usually about a result that has been achieved. For example: 'Great that you managed to supply the data today.' These compliments are important – carry on giving them and ensure that you mean them. Yet, acknowledging someone's qualities would be even more powerful and would really hit home. So, instead of only focusing on the functional behaviour, you need to mention explicitly the qualities you see in the other person. For example, 'You are trustworthy' or 'You are genuine.' This way, the other person is seen as a human being and not just as a production machine.

ASSIGNMENT: Eating a bit of elephant

How do you eat an elephant? Bit by bit. Relating this to personal development, the essence is as follows: instead of focusing on implementing many changes all at once, and wanting to execute them perfectly, choose a single change that you want to implement. Choose a change that you know you are interested in, or that you expect will have a big impact on the desired goal. Once you've chosen the change, take action.

Experiment and reflect until you understand the essence of the change and the change has become part of your thinking, attitude and behaviour. Then choose the next change, and so on.

If you re-read the eight tips above (I'm sure you can add a few of your own), which single tip will you start experimenting with in your interactions? What makes you choose that particular approach? What impact do you expect this will have on yourself and the other if you start to apply it in practise?

How and when will you actually start? What does that look like and who can help you achieve it? And now... action!

Open and honest interactions are an inexhaustible source of connection and form the basis for organizational change.

ABOUT COURIUS

SPECIALISTS IN THE HUMAN SIDE OF CHANGE

Getting started with the Connection Quotient

Reading this book will get you thinking about what the Connection Quotient means for you. You will become aware of your connecting qualities, acquire new insights and start (or continue) to develop them. This way you will be contributing to building a lasting collaboration within the teams and organizations you work for. This in turn will lead to powerful results. This development – of yourself, your team and your organization – is an ongoing process of being curious, inspiring, reflecting, experimenting, failing, recovering, achieving goals and celebrating successes. COURIUS will support you throughout this journey.

Motivated team

We are specialists in the human side of change. Our team consists of enthusiastic and motivated individuals with a passion for their profession. We have many years of experience in the field as managers, advisers, trainers, executive coaches and team coaches. We have the knowledge and expertise required to optimally support you, your team and your organization.

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What can we do for you?

COURIUS offers a broad selection of leadership programmes, master classes, training courses, business coaching, team development and consultancy. We also provide interactive lectures at customer sites and during congresses. Call us on **+31 412 752633**, or mail us at **info@courius.com**. We hope to meet you soon!

WHY BRINGING HUMANITY INTO YOUR RELATIONS IS THE PATH TO BETTER BUSINESS RESULTS

“*The Connection Quotient* shows us that bringing humanity to our workplaces and our relationships creates sustainable business results – and, ultimately, a more positive world. Marco Buschman is a champion for all leaders who put humanity first, day after day, and a challenger of those who do not.”

Mike Carson, Partner, McKinsey & Co, Founding Partner, Aberkyn, and author, *The Manager – Inside the Minds of Football’s Leaders* (Winchester, UK)

“*The Connection Quotient* provides the reader with many references and practical tools to expand their leadership effectiveness. Starting with individual consciousness, Marco Buschman offers frameworks for reflection, exercises for personal discovery and shares his experience as a consultant and coach of executives and senior teams for those that want to lead teams, organizations and the larger context.”

Felipe Paiva, Partner, Artisan Consultoria (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

“Being a good ancestor today demands us to connect to build better futures for tomorrow. In *The Connection Quotient*, Marco invites us into a structured conversation where we can explore what connection means as a practice. It’s playful and sincere, emotional and rational, fun and hard work; like many of the best things life has to offer.”

Charlie Ursell, Head of Advisory, Watershed Partners (Victoria, British Columbia, Canada)

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