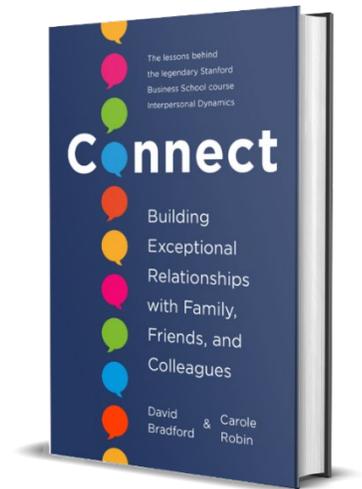


# Putting Connect Lessons to Work

## Setting Up a Learning Group

As the book suggests, the best way to learn how to build more meaningful relationships is to practice doing just that – and then **learning what worked and what didn't**. A great way to do that is to form your own Learning Group. **Do you have four or five friends who want to join you?** You can help each other clarify how to apply the book's lessons.



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## Guidelines for your first meeting

### Setting expectations.

- How frequently do you want to meet taking into consideration that you will need time between sessions to work on your application plans?
- How do you want to use this group? To deepen your relationships with each other? To explore how to deepen a relationship with someone who is not in the group? Both?
- Make agreements regarding confidentiality— what is OK and not OK to share outside the group? It can be easier to disclose ideas and concerns about building deeper relationships with this group of friends if you know what you say in the group will go no further.

On the other hand, you also may want to share what you're learning with others. How to do that without revealing what others in your group have shared? One solution which we use with the *Touchy-Feely* groups at Stanford is, "you can share what happened to you and what you learned, but not what anyone else shared." Another option is to end each meeting with each person saying what they prefer not to be disclosed. Creating a place that feels safe for all of you is what matters most to your learning.

- Another issue to discuss is how to be most helpful to each other. Often just having the chance to think out loud is enough to get clearer about what you want to do. But the others in your group can also deepen your exploration by asking open-ended questions. For example:
  - *How are you feeling about this situation (use the Vocabulary of Feelings in the Appendix)?*
  - *What have you considered doing/saying/raising?*
  - *Of these options you've generated, which one are you most considering? Are there any other options to consider?*

- *What concerns do you have about doing this?*
  - *How might you respond if the other person responds as you feared?*
- Even if your group members don't respond the way the person you are discussing would, they can share how they would: "If you said that to me, I would feel X and would likely respond with Y." Open-ended exploratory questions and sharing your reactions can be much more helpful than giving advice.
  - Listening for unstated or under-expressed feelings can also be useful. For example, "You sound a bit hurt; is that true?" Make sure that when anyone says "I feel..." they are expressing an emotion, not an opinion (again, using the Vocabulary of Feelings if needed.)

## **How to structure your meetings**

There are different ways to structure your meeting. You may want to go through the book systematically and see how the lesson from each chapter applies to an existing relationship. Or you might want to focus on deepening a couple of relationships and explore what parts of the book might apply to doing that. In either case, consider spending ten minutes at the end of each meeting identifying what was most useful.

### **Option One - A couple of chapters at a time**

- The first meeting focuses on the first three chapters. Beforehand, each person selects four relationships they want to improve. After setting expectations (as described above), each group member briefly describes what they want with their four key relationships. Then, they select one with whom they intend to use the material in Chapter 3.
- Over the course of the next five meetings work through Chapters 4 to 12. Start each meeting with each of you reporting on the outcome of your application plan. What worked and what didn't and – most importantly – what you each learned. Then, explore questions about the material in the chapters assigned for that session. Spend most of the time with each person talking about how they plan to use the chapters' material with one of their four key relationships before the next meeting. Consider how self-disclosing and vulnerable each of you have been in talking about your issues and what you are doing that encourages others to be more open as well.
- In the 7th meeting focus on Chapters 13-17 – getting to exceptional relationships. Of the various traps in these chapters, which ones could you see yourselves making? Then explore what might be keeping some of your relationships from moving to exceptional.
- The final meeting is an opportunity to deepen your learning one more time. In the previous meetings, you have gotten to know and learn about each other – what each of you does well and how you each limit yourself. Appendix B in CONNECT [pp. 285-287] contains the key skills and competencies needed to build strong relationships. Before the meeting write down your answer to the following two questions:
  - Which are the two to three you do best and which two to three are more difficult for you?
  - Now answer that question for each of the other members of your group.

During the meeting, taking turns, first listen to the others' answers; then compare those with your own self-assessment.

Close the meeting by each sharing a key learning or takeaway.

## **Option Two – Starting with Relationships**

Whereas Option One started with the book's content and then focused using it with specific relationships, this option reverses the process and makes deepening specific present relationships the initial focus.

- In the initial meeting, after setting expectations as in Option 1, discuss questions people have about the concepts in the book. These concepts will become even clearer through subsequent discussions, but it is useful to begin knowing everyone has enough clarity to proceed.
- Each person then briefly describes the four key relationships they want to work on. Two people then volunteer to prepare an analysis for one of these four relationships to present at the next meeting. This analysis will have two parts:
  1. A diagnosis of what is going on in the relationship drawing from relevant concepts in the book (Chapters 3 through 12.) Is this a case where one or both need to be better known? Feeling emotionally unmet? An influence imbalance? Unresolved pinches or deeper conflict? Other concepts from the book?
  2. An Application Plan that includes a plan of action

The two group members present their analysis at the next meeting. Most of the time is spent with members helping the two of them further explore their analysis. Using open-ended questions, seeing if the diagnosis is complete and whether the action plans fit. Before ending the session two new groups members volunteer to develop an analysis and action plan for one of their relationships for the next meeting.

- Subsequent meetings start with a report on the outcomes of application plans – what worked, what didn't, what might have been alternative approaches and what each person learned. Then the group turns to the two new analyses. The process is repeated until every group member has had an opportunity to explore at least one relationship.

The final two meetings are the same as suggested in Option One – looking at barriers to achieving exceptional relationships, feedback from group members about what each does well and is problematic and a closing that includes sharing what each has learned and is taking away.