

# **Quality #1: Connecting with People**

## **Awakening Empathy and Intuition**

Empathy is the ability to put ourselves on someone else's path – put ourselves in their shoes and accurately assess where they are and what they are experiencing. Intuition is a gut feeling or inner sense of knowing. These two essential tools needed for connection are often buried under mountains of deprecating self-talk. Let's start by uncovering and awakening these two gentle giants. Once awakened, we will use these tools to help us master the characteristics of connecting with people.

Chicago, 10:30 PM. I am lying in bed contemplating the events that will unfold in the morning. In ten and one half hours I will be on the platform speaking to seven hundred people who want to become intentional creators. The magnitude of the responsibility is heavy but welcomed. I reach over and touch Ramona's hand. Her gentle squeeze in return is comforting.

Tomorrow's message will need to be direct. This group wants the truth and I have come prepared to share it. On the outside, this audience looks okay, but they are indeed quite fragile. They have been filleted wide-open by their career choice. All of their fears and weaknesses have been exposed. Direct sales have a tendency of doing that to people particularly those who are making their first foray into the world of entrepreneurship. For the truly courageous this career choice is self-improvement on steroids. I must be direct but also compassionate.

Because of the thought processes unique to 97% of those actively seeking financial abundance, many have engaged in escape and avoid fantasies – very vivid thoughts about what it will be like when they are finally rich. These fantasies have created expectations - concrete conditions for happiness. However and for the vast majority, reality keeps showing up differently. This most common of all challenges is further compounded by job insecurities, struggling businesses, past business failures, challenged or failed relationships, unhappiness and disillusionment with life, in general, and most poignant of all – scars from childhood traumas. The resultant frustration and pain is debilitating. The impact all of this is having on their ability to connect with people is legendary.

I finally drift off to sleep about 11:00 PM.

3:00 AM. I awakened from a very vivid dream. “What just happened? It was so real?” I reach over and again clutch Ramona’s warm hand. She returns a gentle squeeze and then turns on her side. “I am a coach not a therapist,” I remind myself. “I am not trained to help people process through traumas. My role begins when people are finally ready to move forward with their lives and want a coach to shed light on the path to freedom.” I sit up. “The dream was so vivid and the message so clear.”

I stand and pace the floor while a multitude of thoughts seek a logical conclusion. “Many with whom I will speak today want to break

free. Many do not know what is holding them back. It is as if they are trapped in a dark and lonely emotional and financial cocoon. They are so eager to find the secret for moving out and moving forward. They want so badly to become active participants in the human experience. They want to be comfortable connecting with people and building long term, meaningful and trusting relationships. They want to feel alive and free again or for the first time. They want to live lives of significance and be significant.”

I sit back down on the edge of the bed confident that this dream is part of the solution. It was also the answer or a significant portion of the answer to one of the most troubling and challenging questions I have been asking privately for years? I decide to call the experience The Chicago Dream. I lie back down and replay this extraordinary experience in increasingly vivid detail.

I am struggling along a path, both hands clutching a large white muslin sack. The sack is draped over my right shoulder and is dragging on the ground behind me. It is exhausting to move forward.

A man approaches me. I need to connect with this man. I rehearse the mechanics – the techniques found in The Seven Principles of Intrinsic Validation – the art of connecting with people.

As I review these principles, I am instructed to let go of the sack. I do as instructed, stand tall and immediately feel a sense of relief. It is only momentary. I am almost immediately instructed to turn around and face the sack.

I do not what to turn. I know what is in that sack – all of my living nightmares, failures, mistakes and disappointments – the burdens that had held me back, many for a lifetime. Reluctantly I turn.

I am instructed to pick up the sack and empty the contents. I hesitate but do as instructed.

There before me is a large pile of chrome-like orbs about five inches in diameter, each covered with sharp pointy spikes. The sight stings my soul and I begin to spontaneously weep - slowly at first, but soon uncontrollably. I don't want to revisit these scenes and attempt to look away.

I am instructed to pick up the most painful experience of all from the pile. I know which one it is. I have been avoiding it for fifty years. It happened right here in Chicago of all places.

I was between the ages of two and four at the time. My dedicated and hardworking father was attending college during the day and working much of the night. My very young angel mother was working fulltime in a skyscraper in a

strange bustling city far from the quiet farm of her recent adolescence.

At the height of my parent's exhaustion, a husband and wife team, who could not have children of their own, befriended our little family.

They showered my sister and me with gifts and created many "special occasions" where we were left in their keeping. For my stressed out and very innocent parents this outpouring of generosity must have seemed like a godsend.

One major problem, "uncle" Al and "aunt" Rose were pedophiles. When it was all finally over, these devils took far more than they ever gave.

As I stand holding this experience in my trembling hands, I am instructed to press it against my chest "until it was engraved on my heart." The request seems odd but I comply.

Fearing the worst I press the spikes into my heart but immediately begin to feel something that is indescribable and certainly unexpected. I am filled with an unusual sense of peace accompanied by a broadening and deepening of my understanding. As I press harder and harder I no longer feel the burden of pain and shame. In its place I feel a strange sense of ownership.

Task complete, I am instructed to pick up the next experience and do likewise. With each successive experience my heart continued to swell in order to accommodate my new levels of ownership. As I proceed, I became increasingly joyful.

This process is taking some time - so many painful memories. It is made clear to me that this process was not about forgiving or being forgiven - that had already happened. This is about learning how and where to hold my life experiences.

After picking up, examining and engraving the last of the memories on my heart, I am instructed to turn around. It is in this moment that the full magnitude of this surreal experience becomes readily apparent.

I had not noticed it before, but the man standing in front of me is also struggling to drag a large sack. At the beginning of this experience I could not see his sack – his struggles, pain, disappointments, shattered hopes and dreams – I can now, but apparently only after I owned mine.

I see this man as a person – a human being. He matters. We connect.

I finally know why I have been instructed to engrave all of my past negative experiences on my heart instead of hiding them

in a bag and dragging them behind me. These experiences are the reference points from which I draw empathetic and intuitive insights in order to better understand and connect with this man. I knew that before I owned my experiences I could not see his sack. Now I see.

I am very aware that in times past I wanted to be someone else, somewhere else, doing something different. I wanted these painful and burdensome memories to belong to someone else. In resistance, I could not access these reference points effectively – they were not mine to access. They belonged to someone else – the person I did not want to be.

For the first time, I own who I am. With ownership came a new-found awareness, peace of mind and compassion for this man.

I could finally see the humanity in this struggling human being because I finally owned my own humanity.

The Thursday morning following The Chicago Dream, I was in a coaching session with my coach, Kevin Hall, an amazing human being. Kevin is an etymologist. You may have read his seminal work, *Aspire – discovering your purpose through the power of words*. Kevin has been a rich resource of inspiration and clearly a contributor to this work.

I was sharing the dream and started to describe how I engraved these memories on my heart. Kevin shouted through the phone, “Stop. Stop.” He had my attention. He continued, “Do you know what it means to engrave something on your heart?” I told him that I did not know what it meant but I did know how it felt. Kevin enthusiastically explained, “To engrave something on your heart is the purest definition of the word character. You see, when we engrave something on our heart it becomes part of who we are - our character.”

That was the capstone to the dream, the last piece in a huge and complex mosaic puzzle that had taken over fifty years to complete. In owning my experiences I discovered my character. I found me. I felt a warm and peaceful feeling of completion and wholeness that has only grown in clarity since that time.

What negative experiences from the past have you been dragging around? What stories have you been hanging onto? Did someone violate a sacred trust? Have you violated the trust of another? Have you lost someone you loved to divorce or death? Ever made a bad investment that cost you dearly? Ever been cheated or swindled?

Ever been excluded or left alone? Has anyone ever intentionally or unintentionally offended you and you cannot let it go? Are you struggling with health challenges? Ever been fired or laid off? Ever been passed over for a promotion you worked hard to get and felt you deserved? Ever failed, felt inadequate or incapable? Ever felt ugly,



unworthy, unlovable? Have you ever wished you were someone else, somewhere else, doing something different?

Have you ever been told to go down to the ocean, write all of these negative experiences and feelings on a rock and then throw the rock out into the ocean? Have you tried this? I did. Felt better for a little while, but it didn't take long for the tides of life to wash those experiences back on to the rocky shores of memory. What has been your experience? Have you ever tried something similar? Have you wanted to forget? Were you able to forget?

**Our character has been forged in the furnace of adversity. We know what pain feels like. We cannot change the past. However, we can choose to use these reference points as a rich resource to assist us in better understanding and connecting with people. When we use our life experiences in the service of others, we will finally find purpose in our suffering, joy in our journey and much needed healing in our souls.**

As we own our humanity by engraving our life experiences on our hearts, our empathy for others grows and our intuition is sharpened. We can more effectively put ourselves in the shoes of others, more clearly see things from their perspective, more accurately assess where they are, more confidently trust our intuition and more easily validate their experience.

As a result, we will cease “throwing up on” or “tearing down” walls. We will create real connections with real people in tangible

reality and people will begin to “open up.” As walls come down, they will naturally release the huge reserve of cooperation and productivity saved only for those who learn, practice and apply the art of connecting with people.

There are a lot of folks out there right now who are in the middle of what you have already experienced and conquered. You don't have to share the gory details of your experience in order to serve them. You know how it feels. You know the questions to ask that will validate that you know. The past cannot be changed but it can be the foundation of our character and the catalyst in mastering the quality of connecting with people.