

C-4 Relationships to Foster Regionally and Globally

We have earlier reflected on communion as intrinsic to consecrated life. The verse from St. John (Jn. 13:35.) speaks of our discipleship. **By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”**

The leader is a person of communion. He is the link in the chain of community and mission. This becomes more imperative in our day and age, when we find ourselves swimming in a sea of messages, texts, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, voices mails, etc. In this vast ocean of instant communication, there seems to be a loss of that human touch we all yearn for. The irony is that with all this social connection, you’d think we’d really feel connected. The truth is we can always make it even better. There is nothing more rewarding than a face to face genuine dialogue. We want to have an authentic connection, not just virtual conversation.

The call of Jesus pushes each of us never to stop at the surface of things, especially when we are dealing with a person. We are called to look beyond, to focus on the heart to see of how much generosity everyone is capable. (Poe Francis, Jubilee Year of Mercy)

We are a person of relationships! Our human need for being connected is essential. It’s part of our purpose on earth. We have evolved and progressed throughout history by the connections we made and the world is a better place as a result of more and more people embracing social authenticity. Yet, we can always do better. We can always make those connections even more meaningful and more authentic to enrich our communities. We constantly want to improve our relationships with confreres, friends, associates, mission partners, etc. How do we cultivate our relationships and nurture those opportunities we are faced with?

Without authentic relationships, we will not develop and expand our life. Here are some core elements that could help in building and cultivating authentic relationships:

Authentic communication

What does it mean to communicate in authentic relationships? It simply means being real with yourself and others. The first person we need to have authentic relationship with is ourselves. We have to reach inside our heart and truly seek to understand our communication process. Do we communicate in an honest way that fosters a genuine dialogue with the people around us?

Authentic communication takes place when people are caring enough to speak the truth and learn the truth communicated back to them. Authentic communicators embrace the on-going feedback on the conversation they want to have.

Let people be who they are, not what you want them to be

One of the best ways to foster authentic relationships is by understanding that everyone has a gift inside them. That gift is their authentic self. We are not here to change anyone but to help people become the best version of what already resides inside them. Don't take the easy way out and judge. Make the effort to really get to know and accept the gift in front of you.

People flourish in an environment where they are accepted as they are. If you are trying to fix someone or trying to change them, you are creating an environment of judgments around you. No one feels safe in that kind of environment which can lower morale. The only person we must change is ourselves.

Have fun and celebrate

Life is a celebration of our God-given gifts we all have. We are here for a reason. We are here to make a positive difference in the lives of others. Why not celebrate and enjoy the accomplishments we achieved together? It goes back to our human connections. When we make the world better, we celebrate it through the spirit of joy, fun and the discovery of who we can become together. We really need to do more of those fun little things in our society. As Helen Keller said, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

It is caring for people and building positive relationships that matter. Leaders have to work on themselves in order to give the best service to the people they lead. The best leaders are not the ones that advance their own cause but the ones serving the needs and aspirations of their communities. As John Quincy Adams, the second President of the US said, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader."¹

Leaders are defined by their values and their characters." "At the heart of leadership is the leader's relationship with followers. People will entrust their hopes and dreams to another person only if they think the other is a reliable vessel." (quoting David Gergen)

Leadership and Relationships²

Mary Jo Asmus (Aspire Collaborative Services)

Leadership theory is simple. Putting the "practice" of leadership in motion is complex. "Leadership" is really about human nature and developing successful relationships with other people. This gives us hope that leadership can be learned through changing our behavior and strategically improving relationships.

Leadership 101: Do you have what it takes? There has been so much written about leadership, that it is impossible to keep up with the various definitions and theories. Some have defined "leadership" as primarily a discipline of task – setting a goal, and then devising strategies to reach the goal. This is

¹ Tal Shnall

² Mary Jo Asmus. Aspire Collaborative Services

certainly important, but the goal can't be reached without involving people (or the leader's "followers") to help execute the strategies to reach the goal.

The skill set that is most important to "leadership" is the ability to develop successful relationships. When the relationships with others – followers, key stakeholders, etc. – are healthy and successful, people are motivated to work toward the goal. The goal becomes "our" goal rather than "my" goal.

A question: Are exceptional leaders born or made?

The desire to lead may be an inborn trait but the skills needed to lead effectively can be learned. These skills are all about the relationships leaders develop with themselves and with their followers. Developing successful relationships is the foundation for excellent leadership, and improving our ability to develop sound relationships can improve our ability to be successful leaders.

Emotional Intelligence theory indicates that self-awareness—how well we "know" ourselves—and social awareness—how well we "know" others—can be improved. Daniel Goleman, who has popularized the understanding and importance of emotional intelligence ("EQ") in business, defines EQ as consisting of five competencies: • Self-awareness • Self-regulation • Motivation • Empathy • Social skills.

The first three competencies determine how well we manage ourselves. Self-awareness means recognizing our own emotions, strengths and weaknesses, self-worth, and capabilities. Self-regulation deals with managing our emotions and impulses, maintaining integrity, being flexible, and taking responsibility for our performance. Motivation focuses on meeting organizational goals, taking the initiative, and maintaining excellence and optimism. The last two EQ competencies determine how well we handle relationships. Empathy requires reading the feelings of others and includes developing others, leveraging diversity, and understanding the needs of others. Social skills deal with handling others' feelings well, thereby inducing desirable responses.

These five EQ competencies are fundamentally about relationships – with ourselves and with others – and all five are essential to effective leadership. Emotional Intelligence teaches us that the more complex the job to be done, the more important it is for the individual to have a high level of Emotional Intelligence.

The good news is that, unlike cognitive ability, or I.Q., emotional intelligence is not fixed genetically but can be learned, practiced, and improved. Better relationships begin with self-understanding. Improving relationships is a complex process, but it all begins with self-awareness. Until a leader understands him or herself, he or she cannot be open to really understand others. And understanding the other person is essential to the development of good relationships.

Carole Peters was a CEO in a mid-sized organization who was leaving a trail of bodies in her drive to achieve her goals. She had been hired for her position three years previously and her direct-reports had "replenished" twice in that time, through firings and resignations. The problem was that Carole expected her staff to be as goal-driven and focused as she was, and her definition of focus included 12-hour workdays and weekend meetings. There was no consideration on Carole's part for individual differences: some of her staff required more personal and face to face contact, others required more time to process information, some had families they needed to attend to. Carole expected her staff to meet her goals and did not allow for differences in work style or personal situations.

After the second wave of staff turnover, Carole's Board of Directors hired an executive coach to work with her. Carole and her coach began the work of "understanding self" using self-assessments and a multi-rater instrument (also known as a 360° assessment) to get feedback on her approach and style from her staff and others. Through the assessment results and discussions with her coach, Carole became aware of her role in the staff turnover situation. Carole discovered that she was expecting her staff to work in a manner that came naturally to her, but was a stretch for many of them. Once she understood this, she could work with her coach on discovering the best way to utilize the talent reporting to her using their distinctive work and behavioral styles. This was hard work on Carole's part, but it resulted in higher morale and lower staff turnover. By beginning with herself Carole started to learn how to foster and develop relationships for improved results.

Stephen Covey uses a metaphor as the "Emotional Bank Account"³. The concept is that we build trust in a relationship by making deposits and withdrawals in the emotional bank account we have with each person, just as we do with our checking account.

Carole had learned that if her account balance was solidly on the positive side with individuals who reported to her, the account balance would take care of mistakes that she made. This allowed her some leeway as she continued to practice and learn the skills necessary to be a more effective leader. Even if she had to require a Saturday morning meeting once in awhile (a withdrawal) the overall emotional bank account balance was positive enough that the weekend meeting would not push the relationship into deficit. In order to achieve goals, successful leaders must learn to manage relationships effectively. Driving followers toward a goal without effective relationship management will result in staff turnover, burnout and loss of motivation.

No Relationship, No Leadership ⁴

Have you ever heard the saying "It's lonely at the top?" It's been said so often that some people in leadership positions actually believe that it should be lonely at the top.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The real truth is this: if you're a leader and you're feeling lonely, you're most certainly doing something wrong.

You should absolutely not be lonely, you should be the most sought out person in your organization. Maybe not the most popular because authentic leadership is anything but a popularity contest, but your people should be seeking you out regularly with questions and ideas.

If you don't have regular, daily conversations with the people you lead it could well be that you're lacking real relationships with them. When a relationship isn't present it becomes very hard for a leader to demonstrate that they care for and value the people they lead.

³ Stephen Covey. Seven Habits of Highly Effective People

⁴ Steve Keating,

If your people get so much as a hint that you don't care about them as people your opportunity to truly lead them will be lost.

Authentic leaders make building real relationships with their people one of their top priorities. They are intentional about it. They will literally schedule time into their day to "relationship build." They get out their office and seek out the people they lead. Authentic leaders know that their success is completely dependent upon the success of the people they lead. Authentic leaders invest time with their people to ensure their people's success. Authentic leaders celebrate the success of their people as much, or more, than their own.

If the corporate world values relationships for the sake of business, so much in a religious community. An authentic leader knows that his people value a relationship with him as much as they value recognition, promotions and often, even rewards. A relationship needs to be robust enough for members to know, without a doubt, that they are valued for what they do and who they are.

A leader's relationship with their people needs to be "real." As a leader, you need to know something about the people you lead. You can't lead someone effectively until you know something about them. You can't demonstrate that you care about them unless you can first demonstrate that you actually know them.... as a person. If you don't have the time to build real relationships with your people then maybe, just maybe, you don't have time to lead.

Leadership Strength Through Relationships⁵

The world is not made up of things – it is made up of relationships.

We achieve results primarily through relationships. Relationships are truly the most effective pathway to the highest levels of commitment, creativity, and performance within organizations. The reason is that positive relationships have a transformational impact on the individual. They draw out the best in each of us. But here's the bottom line for our organizations. Human capital is useless without relationships – particularly in our fast-paced, global economy. In fact, leaders can be best measured by their ability to create "social capital" – the sum total of all their relationships. It is through this network of relationships that their work is conducted. The undeniable truth is that where there are high levels of trust and mutual understanding between people, you will see meaning.

Some relationships form fast – most don't. Some relationships form almost automatically but for the most part, relationship building activities are not easy to do (due to differences in style, values, etc.). A root issue is that we fail to fully understand the art of "relating" that is core to

⁵ Mike Morrison, Leadership Strength through Relationship. theothersideofthecard.com

the science of relationship building. That's a mistake. The essence of relating begins with the heightened awareness of others and is fuelled by trust-building interactions – such as self-disclosures. As leaders, we need to be relentless relationship builders and be 100 times more deliberate about the “relating” to people.

Followers overemphasize the importance of relationships. It's a key source of meaning in their lives. Traditionally, the balance of power rests with the boss. It often goes way beyond the obvious power differences – where the leader controls resources, information, and access to meaningful work. Followers look to the leader for validation of their personal worth to the organization. And that can't come from an e-mail. It takes face time and a stable relationship for that to occur. Studies consistently point to the lost productivity attributed to “worrying about the relationship”.

Leaders underestimate the significance of relationships. It is clear that a great deal of interaction is required to explain, reassure, and facilitate actual elements of a follower's performance. While facilitative-type behaviors are often prescribed as effective strategies for leaders in motivating their followers, the reality is that the broad challenges of the leader's role and the lack of skill and insight into relationship building serve as formidable barriers. In the heat of the battle, “relating” and the creation of meaning gets lost to the perceived needs to command, control, and communicate.

Simply stated, our organization leaders need a better understanding of the dynamics of relationship formation and the determination and patience to put them into play.

Why Have Good Relationships?

Human beings are naturally social creatures – we crave friendship and positive interactions, just as we do food and water. So it makes sense that the better our relationships are at work, the happier and more productive we're going to be.

Good working relationships give us several other benefits: our work is more enjoyable when we have good relationships with those around us. Also, people are more likely to go along with changes that we want to implement, and we're more innovative and creative.

What's more, good relationships give us freedom: instead of spending time and energy overcoming the problems associated with negative relationships, we can, instead, focus on opportunities.

Good relationships are also often necessary if we hope to develop our careers. After all, if your boss doesn't trust you, it's unlikely that he or she will consider you when a new position opens up. Overall, we all want to work with people we're on good terms with.

We also need good working relationships with others in our professional circle. Customers, suppliers, and key stakeholders are all essential to our success. So, it's important to build and maintain good relations with these people.

Defining a Good Relationship⁶

There are several characteristics that make up good, healthy working relationships:

- **Trust** – This is the foundation of every good relationship. When you [trust](#) your team and colleagues, you form a powerful bond that helps you work and communicate more effectively. If you trust the people you work with, you can be open and honest in your thoughts and actions, and you don't have to waste time and energy "watching your back."
- **Mutual Respect** – When you respect the people that you work with, you value their input and ideas, and they value yours. Working together, you can develop solutions based on your collective insight, wisdom and creativity.
- **Mindfulness** – This means taking responsibility for your words and actions. Those who are mindful are careful and attend to what they say, and they don't let their own negative emotions impact the people around them.
- **Welcoming Diversity** – People with good relationships not only accept diverse people and opinions, but they welcome them. For instance, when your friends and colleagues offer different opinions from yours, you take the time to consider what they have to say, and factor their insights into your decision-making.
- **Open Communication** – We communicate all day, whether we're sending emails and IMs, or meeting face-to-face. The better and more effectively you communicate with those around you, the richer your relationships will be. All good relationships depend on open, honest communication.

How to Build Good Work Relationships⁷

So, what can you do to build better relationships at work?

- **Develop Your People Skills**
Good relationships start with good people skills. Take our [How Good Are Your People Skills?](#) quiz to find out how well you score with "soft skills" such as collaboration, communication and conflict resolution. This self-test will point you to tools that will help you deal with any weaknesses that you have.
- **Identify Your Relationship Needs**

⁶ Mind Tools website

⁷ Ibid.

Look at your own relationship needs. Do you know what you need from others? And do you know what they need from you?

Understanding these needs can be instrumental in building better relationships.

- **Schedule Time to Build Relationships**

Devote a portion of your day toward relationship building, even if it's just 20 minutes, perhaps broken up into five-minute segments.

For example, you could pop into someone's office during lunch, reply to people's postings on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#), or ask a colleague out for a quick cup of coffee.

These little interactions help build the foundation of a good relationship, especially if they're face-to-face.

- **Focus on Your EI**

Also, spend time developing your [emotional intelligence](#) (EI). Among other things, this is your ability to recognize your own emotions, and clearly understand what they're telling you.

High EI also helps you to understand the emotions and needs of others.

- **Appreciate Others**

Show your appreciation whenever someone helps you. Everyone, from your boss to the office cleaner, wants to feel that their work is appreciated. So, genuinely compliment the people around you when they do something well. This will open the door to great work relationships.

- **Be Positive**

Focus on being [positive](#). Positivity is attractive and contagious, and it will help strengthen your relationships with your colleagues. No one wants to be around someone who's negative all the time.

- **Manage Your Boundaries**

Make sure that you set and [manage boundaries](#) properly – all of us want to have friends at work, but, occasionally, a friendship can start to impact our jobs, especially when a friend or colleague begins to monopolize our time.

If this happens, it's important that you're [assertive](#) about your boundaries, and that you know how much time you can devote during the work day for social interactions.

- **Avoid Gossiping**

Don't gossip – [office politics](#) and "gossip" are major relationship killers at work. If you're experiencing conflict with someone in your group, talk to them directly about the problem. Gossiping about the situation with other colleagues will only exacerbate the situation, and will cause mistrust and animosity between you.

- **Listen Actively**

Practice [active listening](#) 🗣️ when you talk to your customers and colleagues. People respond to those who truly listen to what they have to say. Focus on listening more than you talk, and you'll quickly become known as someone who can be trusted.

Difficult Relationships⁸

Occasionally, you'll have to [work with someone you don't like](#) 🗣️, or someone that you simply can't relate to. But, for the sake of your work, it's essential you maintain a professional relationship with them.

When this happens, make an effort to get to know the person. It's likely that they know full well that the two of you aren't on the best terms, so make the first move to improve the relationship by engaging them in a genuine conversation, or by inviting them out to lunch.

While you're talking, try not to be too guarded. Ask them about their background, interests and past successes. Instead of putting energy into your differences, focus on finding things that you have in common.

Just remember – not all relationships will be great; but you can make sure that they are, at least, workable!

As we have earlier reflected on Prophetic Stance of Leadership, Religious life is *signum fraternitatis*, a sign of communion in the Church and for the world, called to bear witness to the sense of communion between peoples, races and cultures. Despite the advanced and sophisticated means of communication and transportation in this globalized world, there is growing experience of isolation, of mutual suspiciousness, mistrust and defensiveness. And consecrated men and women are not unaffected by these tendencies and experiences. Thus, Pope Francis exhorts us to rediscover our fundamental communion, to promote the mystique of living together. He teaches us that we find true healing in contemplative fraternity, in fraternal love capable of seeing the sacred grandeur of our neighbor, of finding God in every human being, of tolerating the nuisances of life in common by clinging to the love of God, of opening the heart to divine love and seeking the happiness of others.⁹

Your General Chapter has encouraged greater regional collaboration and networking. The link to make this happen is in your hands. As international congregation, and with the world made smaller by information technology and faster means of travel, there is no reason not to be connected. No province/no community/no congregation can do it alone. Your Family has expanded as to be all-embracing and inclusive.

After 12 years living in our Curia at Via Cassia, where we could be some 17 nationalities at a given time, I could not imagine myself living with one type of nationality anymore. There was a

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 103-104

lot of stretching, of going beyond, of learning new patterns of relating, of unlearning what used to serve me well in my younger years. There are no limits to learn new ways, to be enriched and to enrich others.

We are asked to discover the responsibility of being prophecy as community...to live in the light of the loving relationship of the Trinity, the model for all interpersonal relationships. Religious are called to be experts in communion.

Where there is community, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is community and every kind of grace. The Holy Spirit, who is the very heart of community, molds the consecrated life in its multiple forms of fraternal life. Indeed fraternal communion is constitutive of the spirituality of the Religious.

Our fraternal communion becomes the locus of the Gospel, when we secure a space for God in our everyday life. Living spirituality of communion is recognizing our diversity and cultivating our complementarity. Communion is not uniformity and does not reduce any member to anonymity. On the contrary, communion highlights and promotes personal identity and uniqueness. Communion is unity in diversity, where all members are partakers of the same common charism and mission.

Religious community is heterogeneous, intergenerational, and intercultural. It brings together people of different ages, personality types, mentalities, cultural backgrounds, professional training, etc., Hence, the inevitable conflicts and difficulties inherent in common life. Yet, fraternal community has an enormous power to call people together. But there is in every human person the longing for communion....Something is missing in community if there is no conflict. A life without conflict is not life. Conflicts are inevitable and have to be faced appropriately. Yet criticism, gossip, envy, jealousy, hostility have no place in our houses. We can model an authentic relationship made stronger through conflict.

Saint Paul tells the Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female"(3:28). So then, what is there? *Plenty of good work to go around*; the work of preaching the Gospel and leading people to Christ. Good work for Jew and Greek, boss and employee, male and female.¹⁰

Questions for Reflection, Workshop

- Is my understanding of Leadership as Relationship profound enough that I truly believe that persons are valuable?
- How do I deal with the times and setting where I feel limited to promote life-enhancing relationships?

¹⁰ Rev. David Andel, Human Development. VOI 33, No4. Winter 2012

- In situations of apparent weakness have I been able to “connect” in a more fully human way with others experiencing struggles and pain?

Self-assessment tool: How good are your people skills?

Exercises

- Have each community member/councilor write a story about a conflict he witnessed in his own family as a child and the lesson about conflict he took away from it. Explore within the team how our experiences of conflict in family have shaped differing perspectives on the meaning and value of conflict. Is it to be avoided or welcomed? Can relationships survive conflict or does it inevitably end them? Is it possible conflict can deepen a relationship?
- Have members of the team create a "Conflict Charter" at the beginning of their time with one another in which they decide on guidelines for how they want to handle disagreements with one another in the future. To what are they willing to hold themselves accountable in times of discord?
- When a conflict arises in the team, treat it as an opportunity for learning and practicing good conflict skills. Take time for each person to prepare for the discussion using some of the discernment tools. Before the discussion recall together the listening and problem solving skills that have been part of the learning during the year. Afterwards, process together, "What did we do well here? What really seemed to work? What did we not do well in addressing this conflict together? Where do we need more work?"