

Maps or Magnets

Connecting with people is what makes the world turn - I know, it's not the scientific explanation, but it is the TRUTH! More importantly, it's a universal truth that applies to every generation, every community, every culture.

Leaders at every level have unique opportunities to connect with a variety of folks, from colleagues to clients, staff to suppliers, outsiders to insiders, family to friends. How we choose to connect provides us with the building blocks for those relationships. And what better way to connect than through the stories and experiences we share.

What does all this have to do with 'maps and magnets'?

Well, for many years I have collected magnets, most of which live on my refrigerator (the door, the sides, wherever there's an open spot). Many of them have been there so long they are actually part of the 'landscape' and I rarely notice them any more - especially the one that says 'Square meals make round people', which was purchased to help me refrain from eating when I shouldn't. Naturally, that was the first magnet to lose its uniqueness for me. But for those I do take the time to look at and enjoy, I am often reminded of where I was, who I was with, what I was doing when the magnet was purchased - they're inexpensive, colorful, and, most importantly, easy to slip into my purse or briefcase when travelling. And the stories those magnets bring to mind are priceless memories of connections I have been fortunate enough to make through the years.

Maps, on the other hand, allow me to visualize specific geographical areas, but I typically get so caught up in trying to figure out north from south, east from west (remember that I am 'directionally dyslexic'), whether I should be looking at the map from the bottom, top, or sideways, that I generally end up being confused (not a huge stretch, of course) and quite frustrated. Given that experience, looking at a map may (eventually) prove to be helpful for me to get from point A to point B, but the potential richness of the journey is definitely negated by the challenge of the instrument.

Now I realize that not everyone feels the same way I do about maps, i.e. generally helpful and necessary, but absolutely no fun at all, even though they can be reminders of places I've been and things I've done. Next to my colorful refrigerator magnets and the stories they represent, maps pale in comparison.

If your leadership style was based on my explanations of maps vs magnets, how do you think your colleagues and clients, staff and suppliers, family and friends might describe you? Are you generally helpful and necessary, but absolutely no fun at all? Or, are you colorful in character and full of reminders and stories that enhance the workplace and journey?

Last week I spoke to a new group of people I had never met before, sharing ideas about the evolving world of work and the power of stories in that arena. Predictably, I got lost driving to the venue (yes, I had a map). After several wrong turns, a detour or two, I pulled into a parking lot for another company and asked a 'fellow-parker' for help. I arrived relatively 'sane', on time, and enriched by the experience of meeting yet another 'traveler' who helped me on my way. When I left later that afternoon, I was headed for the airport (fortunately for me, I had plenty of time before my flight), and once again I lost my way. I actually got close to the airport (I could see planes arriving and departing), but I just couldn't get there. I ended up seeing many neighborhoods that I would never have seen (and probably some I shouldn't have seen), knowing that the airport was 'right over there', but at a loss as to how to get there. Finally, I saw a mail truck that had stopped at the entrance to the street I was on. The mail carrier was both gracious and helpful, and, you're going to love this part . . . he drew me to a map (to go all of 3 blocks)! The upshot of it all, the people connections helped me find my way; the stories behind those connections are reflected in the latest magnet addition . . . a mail truck:-)

I may never pay as much attention to the 'Square meals make round people' magnet as I should, but

I prefer my life, my work, and my connections with others to be filled with stories I can share and colorful memories . . . how about you?

Aloha,