

guru speak Michael Lee Stallard, President and co-founder, E Pluribus Partners

Why connecting people matters

Connection cultures foster shared ideas which fuels innovation at work, says Michael Lee Stallard

By Priyanka Sangani

Not all cultures are created equal. Companies that foster a 'connection culture' are more likely to perform better than others because their people are willing to go the extra mile to make a difference. In his new book, *Connection Culture*, Michael Lee Stallard, president and co-founder, E Pluribus Partners, uses examples ranging from rock band U2, to leaders like Ratan Tata and Alan Mulally of Ford Motors as examples of how to do it right. He answered questions from *Corporate Dossier* on how leaders can build a connection culture. *Edited excerpts:*

What made you write this book?

I wrote *Connection Culture* to help organisations achieve greater productivity, innovation and results. Most employee engagement "programs" fail to improve engagement and the bottom line. Engagement cannot be improved with a program. It requires implementing a system-wide process that promotes a healthy culture and identifies unhealthy sub-cultures, then intervenes to help managers learn to create and sustain connection cultures.

It is essential to develop managers into leaders. A manager is someone who organises tasks and resources to achieve desirable ends. People follow managers because they have authority to hire, fire, pay and promote. A leader goes beyond managing, to connect with the people he or she leads. People want to follow leaders (rather than have to) and that makes all the difference to performance.



When you are in a connection culture, you feel included and part of the team versus feeling unsupported

What is a 'connection culture'?

A connection culture is the collective attitudes, language and behaviours of a group that create a bond that moves self-centred people toward group-centred membership. When you are in a connection culture, you feel included and part of the team versus feeling unsupported, left out, or lonely. In a connection culture, people develop supportive, cooperative, and collaborative relationships.

This is in contrast to a 'culture of control' and a 'culture of indifference'. In a culture

of control, those with power, control, status, and influence rule over others. In a culture of indifference, everyone is so busy they don't take time for relationships. Connection cultures excel at relationships while cultures of control and indifference do not.

As a leader, how do you determine whether this kind of a culture exists in your organisation or not?

Two ways. First, get out of your office and interact with people on the front

lines so you can see for yourself if they are thriving or struggling. Are they energetic and engaged, or are they simply going through the motions? When you are meeting with them, do they feel free to speak up and share constructive criticism?

In addition, it is also wise to conduct an annual employee engagement survey to assess whether or not managers are living the values and creating connection cultures. Relying on your observations and conversations alone is insufficient as people may merely put on a happy face or 'say the right thing' in your presence, especially if his or her supervisor is there.

If not, what steps can the leader take to establish and foster this kind of an environment?

Connection cultures have leaders who communicate an inspiring vision and live it, value people, and give them a voice. We teach the 3V leadership model, Vision + Value + Voice = Connection. Vision, value and voice are created through attitudes, language and behaviours that leaders cultivate.

The year Alan Mulally arrived at Ford as CEO, sales, market share and profits were falling, and the automaker's culture could be described as silo rivalries with leaders embroiled in turf wars. Ford's culture drove it to the verge of bankruptcy. By the time Mulally announced his presence in May 2014, he had led Ford to 19 consecutive profitable quarters and rising market share in North America. Ford had become one of the finest carmakers in the world.

Alan Mulally changed the Ford culture by communicating an inspiring vision, using founder Henry Ford's 'opening the highways for all mankind' to express how Ford is making the world a better place and serving others. Mulally described Ford as giving people 'freedom of mobility' so they can 'access opportunities for growth'. This united Ford's people around the vision and focused them on a cause greater than self. Mulally valued people. In meetings, he was a facilitator/coach rather than a dictator. He

prohibited humour made at the expense of others. Rather than thinking of other individuals and organisations as competitors, Mulally employed a 'win-win' mindset and approach in relationships that helped him forge mutually beneficial agreements with the United Auto Workers' union and Ford's suppliers.

In the area of 'voice', Mulally expected leaders to openly share the obstacles they faced. He celebrated and enthusiastically praised leaders who helped one another instead of focusing solely on problems in their domain. Mulally developed a process called the weekly 'Business Plan Review' meeting that increased voice by encouraging feedback and honest dialogue.

What are the possible fallouts of not having a connected culture?

Subcultures of control or indifference ultimately lead to subpar performance. People in these environments withhold information because it's not relationally safe to share it. This results in knowledge traps that sabotage performance.

Only connection cultures meet the human need for connection so that people perform at the top of their game. In connection cultures people give their best efforts, increase alignment with their managers' and an organisation's objectives and communicate more so that decision makers have more information to help them make optimal decisions.

Finally, in connection cultures the marketplace of shared ideas and information fuels new product, process and business innovation.

Research has shown that these benefits provide a powerful source of competitive advantage to companies that have connection subcultures throughout their organisation. Companies that predominantly have cultures of control and cultures of indifference are being left behind simply because they are being outperformed. **✉**

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EXEC SALON



How can men groom their eyebrows?

Big, thick eyebrows aren't a problem for men (see George Clooney or Akshay Kumar) but if they meet in the middle, you may have a problem on your hands - and face. You need exceptional features to carry off the unibrow look. Older men are better off going through a little trouble and plucking out those hairs in the middle. Plucking is a time-consuming exercise, so it may be best to ask your barber to tidy your brows up. But if you don't quite trust your barber to pull off this delicate task or if you just like doing these things yourself, we suggest you get a good pair of tweezers, the kind that doesn't slip when gripping the hair. Tweeze right after you come out of the shower when your hair follicles are relaxed. You can tweeze out the thicker hairs and leave the finer ones. This will thin out the area making the hair look less noticeable, but not completely hair-free. Eyebrow hairs take a long time to grow back, so be careful. If you remove too much hair from the middle, you risk making your eyebrows look feminine. Mark the limit with a pencil from the outer sides of your nostrils to your brow.

Write to us with your grooming queries at execsalon@gmail.com

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GRAPHICA

5 BLUNDERS THAT BUSINESSES LIVED TO REGRET

These business bloopers cost companies a lot of money



ABC TURNING DOWN BILL COSBY

In 1984, Bill Cosby approached ABC about buying his sitcom which centred around a wealthy black family. Unfortunately, they turned down his proposal. ABC was worried about the fact that viewers would find the unrealistic portrayal of an upscale and well-educated black household incredulous. Bill Cosby went on to sell his show to NBC and it was the network's #1 show four years on the trot and became the most profitable series on television.

XEROX LETTING APPLE INTO THEIR LAIR

In the 1980s, Apple offered Xerox \$1 million of stock to allow a good number of Apple employees (including Steve Jobs) to visit their facility for three days. Apple went on to leverage the knowledge they acquired at Xerox to build the modern personal computer and today the company is worth \$110 billion dollars. Xerox sued Apple in the late 1980s for using their Graphical User Interface technology, but the case was dismissed.



THE RECORD COMPANY THAT REFUSED THE BEATLES

The iconic British band The Beatles were eager to get a record deal. They were nervous during their audition but confident in their chances of snatching it. Decca's A&R representative, Mike Smith, decided to sign another band because he felt "guitar groups were on their way out." That was undoubtedly the greatest bungle he ever made. Rest, as they say is history.



THE AWKWARD AOL/TIME WARNER MERGER

When AOL and Time Warner announced their amalgamation in 2000, it received a lot of press and hoopla. Unfortunately, by the time the companies divorced, their collective value had plummeted from \$300 billion to \$40 billion. The deflation was mostly due to culture clashes, leadership differences and bursting of the dot com bubble.



JC PENNEY ELIMINATING SALES

The department store strived to excel among competitors, so CEO Ron Johnson came up with a new strategy: to eliminate "sales" and "fake prices". Instead, they would make everyday prices reflect the previous sales prices and wouldn't price items ending in 9 but use whole figures. Eventually, it turned out to be a blunder. That customers preferred to feel like they were getting a bargain, because JC Penney's revenue dropped 25% that year, and almost 20,000 employees had to be pink-slipped.

(Excerpted from Business Insider)

WANDERLUST



R.M Vishakha
MD & CEO, IndiaFirst Life Insurance

Far out destination: A secluded beach resort at Pataya

Bon Vivant moment: Snorkeling. Getting over the feel of weightlessness to view the coral reef up close at Mauritius

Outdoorsy activity: Cycling along the hilly terrains of Kodaikanal and realising that 'being out of touch' can be a mental state..... some things just come back to you

Panoramic views: The Himalayan range from Gangtok

Indian Surprise: Ragi Dosa on the road from Bangalore to Kodaikanal. The healthiest and tastiest meal I have encountered

Best Drive: Newark Airport to Penn State university in USA in spring

Gourmet Delights: Shiro's at Parel in Mumbai... not sure if it is the ambience or the food or the service. The whole experience make me want to go back to celebrate special moments

Street Food Surprises: Nothing like a *mirchi bhajji* on the streets of Hyderabad

Best Bar: The concept of The Bar Stock Exchange in Mumbai is extremely interesting

Goofy Traveller moment: Trying to ask for safety pins during my first ever visit to Hong Kong. Spelt it out, drew it and finally went over to the housekeeping section and rummaged through their things and showed them what it was

Traveller tips: Always carry band aids, rubber bands, safety pins, basic medicines for a common cold, upset stomach and silly ailments. It is so difficult to get any of these if you need them.