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Connect: How the Right People Can Move You Forward



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by RICH FELLER

Rugged individualism is an iconic American trait. We revere the lone ranger, from Mother Teresa to James Bond. These marquee names may get the glory, but they had a supporting cast—sometimes public, sometimes behind the scenes. You can be sure they did not do it alone.

Magic happens when you connect with other people: As you move out of isolation, you become more thoughtful, creative, adventurous and energized. When you're struggling, it can be tempting to isolate yourself, to quarantine your dilemma, but that's a mistake. The most important move you can make during uncertainty is to reach out.

So go ahead. Harness the power of counsel and companionship as you explore possibilities and determine your next step. Having a sounding board or a group of trusted advisors can help you gather information, weight options and imagine possibilities.



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Who should be on your advisory board? Think about your go-to people to at these seven critical moments:

1. When the going gets tough and you need feedback
2. When you have to make a decision
3. When you're stressed or worried
4. When you need to be told to get your act together
5. When you are emotional and can't think clearly
6. When you want to lose track of time
7. When you need to laugh

How John Rediscovered a Passion

John was feeling a bit flat. Something was off. He had worked as an insurance broker for 30 years, and for the most part he enjoyed his work. His relationship with his wife of 25 years was steady, and their two kids were off at college discovering what adulthood is all about. John, who's 55, had everything he had worked for: He and his wife, Maria, were OK financially, he had a secure job, a close family, and everybody was healthy. John wasn't unhappy, but he wasn't finding much joy.

Once a month, John met Mark, his college roommate and long-time friend, to grab coffee and walk. Same coffee shop, same park every time. When Mark commented that John seemed quieter than usual, John admitted he'd been feeling off. Mark asked what he had been up to, and John said, "You know, the usual...nothing new." After an hour of talking and walking, Mark said, "Maybe that's the problem, nothing's new."

That got John thinking. A few weeks later, he signed up for a fly-fishing lesson. He had fished since he was a boy, but hadn't tried fly-casting. He'd always wanted to, but never made the time. Something always came up. After his first lesson, John came home beaming, kissed his wife, and told her what a natural caster he was. Maria knew he had found a new passion. John said, "Mark was right, I needed to shake it up."

Has someone in your life ever identified a solution before you even knew you had a problem? Who's your Mark? Who challenges you? Helps you to think outside the box? Asks good questions? Who serves as your sounding board? When life stales just a little, as it did for John, who urges you to try new things, stretch or reframe your thinking, meet people and expand your network?

It's tough to *really* change, to break a habit, reflect, or find fulfillment when you go it alone. Even if you enjoy re-charging on your own, don't you usually put the icing on the experience by telling at least one person how nice it was to get a little solitude?

Connecting moves us forward and expands our social context.

Be mindful that connecting is never a one-way street. A critical dimension of the experience is reciprocating. When relationships are balanced, they're rewarding and can endure time and distance. So consider how much you give and receive, and strive for balance. Above all, practice connecting. Invest in learning more about how to build and sustain relationships. Both parties will benefit.

Connection puts energy into life. Connection is why we're here. It gives us purpose and meaning; without it we are at a loss when we most need encouragement.

Life Reimagined thought leader Rich Feller, Ph.D. teaches at Colorado State University. He is a licensed counselor and certified coach with scores of publications in academic journals and awards.


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