

## Connecting with People

*Presented by Mary Lowman*

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### Day One

One question I am often asked is, “What is the main issue people in the workplace are struggling with today?” I’ve been in this ministry for many years, so I’ve had enough time to observe common issues and note changes in the workplace. But I can tell you one issue remains at the top of most everyone’s list, and that is how to deal successfully with people!

People! It’s people! In some form or another, our relationships—on the job and everywhere else—cause us more frustration, create more conflict, and eat up more of our time than anything else. Of course, relationships also can bring great joy and satisfaction, too.

I want to address this relationship challenge by talking about how we connect successfully with others. You will notice there are some people who seem to have no difficulty forming friendships, generating loyalty, creating community, and getting along with people, while others are woefully lacking in these skills. What makes one person better at connecting with people than others? And if this ability to connect with people does not come naturally to us, is it possible to develop those skills and improve in those areas?

Scripture exhorts us to count others more significant than ourselves (Philippians 2:3), and to exhibit the characteristics of a truly loving attitude toward others. We need to find practical and effective ways to develop these godly characteristics of connecting easily and quickly with other people, whether they are co-workers, managers, employees, or just friends and acquaintances.

One of the first things we have to do to connect with others is to make people feel comfortable in our presence. And we can learn to do that by thinking of ourselves as “hosts” in any situation. A good host takes the initiative to make others feel comfortable. Most people view themselves as “guests” in life, expecting others to take the initiative and make the first move. But if you will just reverse that tendency and think of yourself as the host or hostess, you will become more proactive in initiating conversations, offering to help others, and discovering you are beginning to connect with people much more easily.

I challenge you to be the “host” as you go to work; see yourself as the person who will initiate connections, who will have your antenna up to be aware of others around you and be willing to get out of your comfort zone and make the first move. It is such a simple idea, but I can promise you it will make a difference in how you connect with others.

### Day Two

I’m examining how we can improve our ability to connect with others. I challenged you to see yourself as the host or hostess, the one who is responsible to make others feel comfortable, who takes the initiative to meet their needs and help in any way possible. For some of you, that means moving outside your comfort zone, I’m sure, but it is a way to show love and caring for people around you, which is our calling as believers in Christ.

Another important connection skill is to consider everyone significant, and to take the time to learn their names and call them by name. In your jobs and in your life, you will meet many people. Remember they are all significant to God, and therefore, they should be to you as well. Don't overlook people. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you can do is smile and say hello.

Often people in service jobs wear nametags: waiters, waitresses, cleaning people, doormen. Make it a practice to look for nametags and then call people by name. And if they don't have a nametag, take the time to ask, "What is your name?" In a world that is often cold and uncaring, something as simple as calling a person by name can bring warmth and a touch of love into that relationship, brief as it may be.

Some years ago, we began distributing magnetic nametags to all members and attenders at our church. What a difference that has made in helping us to connect with others at the church. People I've seen for years I now can connect with their name. It is truly amazing to see how much better we connect with each other simply because of those nametags—we can call each other by name.

If you determine to have a mindset that you are the host or hostess, and it is your job to find common ground with others and make them feel at ease, you will discover you talk less about yourself and focus more on others. Paul wrote to the Philippians we should count others more significant than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). How do you do that? Well, you have to be very intentional about it and pray God will give you both the desire and the power to do it.

It won't always be easy. You'll find with some people you have very little in common, but instead of giving up, look for that one thing that could open up a conversation and help you to connect.

### Day Three

I've been challenging you to think of yourself as a host or hostess on your job and elsewhere, in order to connect with people better. To initiate conversations, volunteer help, keep your antenna up for anyone who needs a word of encouragement. This is how we show Christ's love in a world that is starving for kindness and compassion.

I remember someone giving a message challenging us to "leave it better than you found it." Just imagine how much nicer our worlds would be if we all practiced that regularly—leaving everything better than we found it.

Let's take that principle and apply it to our relationships. What if our goal was to make certain every relationship we have of any significant length—like fifteen minutes or more—was to leave that person better than we found him or her? To do something for that person would add value to their lives. It might be a word of advice that we take time to share, or a listening ear, or a book we could recommend, or an invitation to lunch.

You know, people don't remember so much what we do or how well we do it, but they do remember how we made them feel. Have you ever thought about how you make other people feel? I'm sure you've thought about how other people make you feel. But reverse that and ask yourself, "How do I make other people feel?"

Some people make us feel insignificant. Others intimidate us. Some people make us feel like failures. No doubt you can think of people in your life who give you those kinds of negative feelings. They may not intend to give off those vibes, but something in their manner or the way they treat you gives you that impression. Stop and ask yourself: Do I do that to others?

I have learned I can send negative messages to others because of my tendency to be very project oriented and very focused on getting a job done. In the process, if I'm not careful, I can miss opportunities to recognize people along the way and send them an unintended message that they

aren't important to me. I'm working hard to change those bad habits, but I have to be very intentional about it and remember to catch myself and connect with all those people.

What kind of messages do you send to others? Do they sense you are a caring person; do you exude an attitude of acceptance and warmth? Obviously, I'm aware we can't please everyone, and people can choose to misinterpret us unfairly. But we also have a responsibility, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, to take pains to do what is right, not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of men (2 Corinthians 8:21).

## Day Four

Do you approach your relationships as a host or a guest? The attitude that helps is to think of yourself as the host or hostess rather than the guest. Or, in more biblical terms, as one who serves rather than one who is served.

Think about your daily interactions with other people—at work, at home, or church, wherever. Are you a host or a guest? For example, do you initiate the phone call that needs to be made or do you wait for the other person to call? When you're in a group, do you introduce yourself to someone new or wait for them to introduce themselves first? When someone seems puzzled or confused, do you offer to help?

Maybe you're thinking you can't be the host or hostess because you're shy or introverted. I want to encourage you to give it a try. It may take you out of your comfort zone temporarily, but once you take that first step to "host" your relationships, you'll see that it really isn't that scary, and before long you will be comfortable doing it. It will surprise you to see the positive reactions you receive, and you'll feel very good about connecting with others in more meaningful ways.

One of the reasons we hesitate to take the role of host or hostess in relationships is because we fear what others will think of us. I find when I am more concerned about how I will appear to others than I am about trying to connect with them, it's because I am far too self-focused. I have to stop and remind myself it's not all about me. I can assure you if you reach out to others in an attempt to connect in a better, more loving way, you will rarely make a fool of yourself. And what if you do? Does the world stop revolving? Does God stop loving you? We just have to get over our intense self-absorption.

Another obstacle to connecting with others is our pride. How often do you hesitate to initiate a connection with someone new because you feel they should make the first move? If you find yourself thinking, "They should come to me," it could be the indication of a proud attitude.

Or maybe some of us hesitate to connect with others because it just takes too much effort. True, it does take effort and time, but the fruit of that effort is very rewarding.

I hope you'll consider your responsibility to be a host or hostess with the people in your life, rather than playing the role of the guest. It makes life so much richer and fulfills our God-given responsibility to do unto others as we would want them to do to us.

## Day Five

I've been examining how we can do a better job connecting with people. First Peter 4:9 exhorts us to *offer hospitality to one another without grumbling*. How do we show hospitality to one another?

Well, there are myriads of ways to do that, but it means you will have to see yourself as the host or hostess rather than the guest. Someone who shows hospitality takes on the responsibility to make others comfortable, to serve their needs, to initiate a welcoming environment, to make the first move. That could be in any situation—at home, at work, at church, while shopping or traveling, etc. Show hospitality to others.

Sometimes it simply means taking time to recognize someone and greet them, calling them by name if possible. Sometimes it means interrupting your own plans to help someone out. It could mean inviting people to your home for a meal or taking time to listen to someone's problem. It will require a servant attitude, a willingness to put others first, and truly connect with them.

Peter says we are to show hospitality without grumbling. That tells me showing hospitality is not always easy to do. Putting others first requires an attitude that has to come from God's power in us, not from our own selves. It's possible to be hospitable with the wrong spirit—with a grumbling spirit.

If you're serious about connecting with others and fulfilling this hospitality challenge, you'll need to pray about it. Pray God will give you both the desire and the power to want to connect with others, to expend the energy, time, and resources that will be required to put others first and die to your own selfish desires.

Here's the good news: When you learn to do this, you reap wonderful benefits. You discover dying to yourself brings new life, as Jesus promised. When we get ourselves out of the way and make it a daily practice to put others first, we move into that abundant life Jesus came to give us. It's one of the paradoxes of the Christian life—that if we want to be the greatest, we must be a servant. By God's grace and for his glory, that can become a reality in our lives.