These days when we hear the word “connected,” most of us think of electronic devices and wireless networks. A few people might think about having advantageous relationships — being well-connected socially or professionally. But when it comes to building trust, connected — along with able, believable and dependable — is one of the four essential qualities a person must develop.


Listen well. When you listen well — repeating what you’ve heard for understanding and clarification — you build a bridge to trust. Author John Maxwell highlights the importance of listening with a story about two hunters who are out in the woods when one of them falls to the ground, unconscious. His fellow hunter grabs his cellphone, calls 911 and says, “My buddy is dead! What can I do?” In a calming voice the dispatcher replies, “Take it easy. I can help you. Let’s first make sure he’s dead.” Before she can instruct the caller how to take his friend’s pulse, the dispatcher hears a loud gunshot. The hunter comes back on the line and says, “OK, now what?” While it’s a facetious story, it brings home the damage that can be done when we don’t listen for understanding.

Praise others’ efforts. Of all the management principles I’ve taught during the past 50 years, if I had to pick out just one it would be: Catch people doing things right. Praise not only motivates people, but also it builds connected, trusting relationships.

Show interest in others. This goes one step beyond mere listening. Showing interest means stepping out of the center of your own universe and becoming actively engaged with the people in your life. Colleen Barrett, president emeritus of Southwest Airlines and co-author of my book “Lead With LUV,” is a master at showing people she cares. During the course of her career she has hand-written tens of thousands of notes to the people of Southwest, acknowledging the milestones in their lives.

Share about yourself. When you open up about yourself, you demonstrate a vulnerability that engenders trust. While you don’t need to reveal highly personal information, a willingness to share hobbies, travels and personal experiences allows people to feel you’re talking with them, not at them. As Barrett often says, “People admire your skills — but they love you for your vulnerabilities.”

Work well with others. It doesn’t matter how hard you work or how brilliant your ideas are, if you don’t appreciate people and show them consideration, they’re not going to connect with you. This can really limit your personal and career life.

No one of us is as smart as all of us.

Working well with others is such a strong value at Southwest that a highly qualified pilot the company had flown down for an interview at its Dallas headquarters was turned away before he’d even met the interviewer. He was rude to the crew on the plane as well as to the receptionist, which was all they needed to know about him to determine that he wasn’t a fit for the company.

Ask for input. No one of us is as smart as all of us. When you open up and solicit others’ good ideas, you not only build trust, but also you get smarter. Seek opinions from a variety of sources, paying particular attention to those with whom you might not ordinarily agree. The broader your base, the more connected you’ll be.

Show empathy for others. Being sensitive to others’ feelings — recognizing ourselves in each other — opens the door to trust. In a 2011 speech at Brigham Young University, Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg stated that empathy was a guiding principle of his company. He believes that the number of Facebook connections symbolizes “empathy developing in the world” that will lead to “a greater understanding of how we are all connected.”

By developing these seven qualities, you’ll experience the joy of being connected. You’ll increase your effectiveness as a leader, but even more important, you’ll open up and embrace life.