

CHAPTER

FRANCE



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to give sense & awareness
to your professional life

Manager, do you want to be more connected with your teams?

« Hey, how are you? » « I'm fine, thanks and you? » « I'm fine as well... I wanted to talk to you about....»

How many discussions have you started this way? What were you expecting as an answer? How do you move from this ritual to an authentic connection with your team?

In our mainly remote world -over the last 18 months-, **this connection has become both important and more complex to establish and maintain.**

It is more important to establish because it strengthens a trust bond and gives meaning and awareness to your professional interpersonal relationships. This authentic connection seems to me to be a seed of your team's well-being and performance. It facilitates as well to identify employees facing difficulties and to set up the right solutions quickly.

- More complex to establish because, due to the hybrid work model, you meet less often your reports at the coffee machine in an informal way; you do not see them arriving in the morning at the office with a smile or a closed face. All of those non-verbal clues that you subconsciously use are toned down. All these informal moments that left more openness to discuss their feelings are less numerous.

So how do you meet this challenge of connecting with your team?

For some, connecting with others is a natural talent; for others, it is necessary to practice! The good news is that you can learn it, and you can train your relational intelligence with these simple, day-to-day tips:

1. Clearly communicate your intention to your team.

Do you want to strengthen the link with your team employees? It is a laudable intention, and to be understood by all, you will have to explain it. Indeed, imagine that your immediate superior suddenly starts asking more in-depth questions about you at work without specifying his intention ... what will you think? Will you feel confident?

Ø Explain to your employees that you want to regularly review their professional situation, their current feelings to check in with each of them!

Agree on a frequency for this discussion. Or even bring up this subject at each of your points or make it a more informal meeting around a coffee in person or remotely!

2. Embody the famous « Hey, how are you !? »

When you ask « Hey, how are you ? » to an employee, ask yourself the question: what answer do you expect? Is it just a courtesy ritual or an authentic wish to connect with that person?

If you want to know how the person is doing:

Ø Prefer an open and personalized question whose answer is other than « Fine, thanks! »:

"How have you been since our last discussions? »

Ø Show your interlocutor that you care about him: be available to listen to his response, pay attention to non-verbal signs (see tip 3)

Ø Take the time to listen to his answer and pause for a moment!

Your collaborator eludes the answer and does not want to expand on the topic? Ask yourself the reason and check with him that he has understood your intention (cf tip 1). Note as well that some people can be uncomfortable in sharing their emotions at work. Please don't force them, be a role model to them and observe how your exchanges evolve!

3. Practice active listening

« Savoir écouter, ça s'apprend » (Listen to can be trained) *, as evoked by the book by Christel Petitcollin!

Indeed, active listening represents the total listening that you demonstrate by opening all your information receivers: your ears, eyes, and feelings. You will thus receive verbal information with the words used and non-verbal communication (voice tone, breathing, speaking pace, facial expressions, body posture). All these pieces of information are processed automatically by our brain, which allows us to interpret the words used by the person.

When you practice active listening, you pay more attention to this non-verbal information to check, especially, emotional state of your interlocutor and alignment between words and non-verbal signs.

Here are some keys to practicing active listening:

Ø Practice silences and breathe

Ø Look at the body language of the other person. Here are some examples of observation you can figure out: chest out (pride, confidence), shifty eyes (uncomfortable, lack of confidence), legs and arms crossed (in disagreement, in the protection of what he hears)...

Ø Give return receipt and signs of interest to your interlocutor: « OK » or even a simple nod of the head.

Ø Rephrase to make sure you have understood and help your interlocutor to deepen his thought: "If I understood correctly, you think that..."

Ø Ask open-ended questions to clarify the thought of your interlocutor: What ?, How ?, For what ?, Who ?, In what context?...

Ø Differ your preconceived ideas and your judgments

4. Create a connection within your team

You already know simple ways to initiate this connection: informal moments like sharing a meal, a break, a breakfast are a good start. Still, they are less easy to organize in the current circumstances.

So how do we go one step further?

- Insert a simple people weather forecast to go around the table during your weekly meeting while specifying your intention: many formats exist, for example, use weather pictograms or even fun formats like this Sheep Scale ([Link](#))
- Organize moments of sharing around one or two questions that you prepare: everyone is invited to express themselves, to share their feelings and expectations, you included! This exchange is good for everyone and relieves you as manager by giving you back your humanity and getting you out of your high posture towards your team. For example, a question I used a lot recently was, « What did you learn the past year with mostly remote work? »
- Get help from facilitation professionals to supervise this type of exchange (HRs, Professional coaches, Trainers): creating the right framework for dialogue can be learned! As a professional coach, creating a connection of trust with our clients is a base for successful coaching.

You're now equipped to start experiencing these simple tips!

One last thing is important to take into account: YOU !

Marshall Rosenberg, the founder of non-violent communication **, taught us that connecting to yourself and your own needs is necessary before being available to listen to others. Indeed, listening to others puts yourself aside a little to suspend judgment and fully accept what the other will tell you. And if you started to connect to you?

* 'Listen, it can be learned', Christel Petitcollin

** 'Words Are Windows (or They're Walls)', Marshall Rosenberg