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# Your Role in Teamwork – Connection

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**T**o jumpstart 2020, I wrote an article titled "Your Role in Teamwork," published in the February ABODE, that featured four key elements as a benchmark for establishing effective teams – trust, commitment, communication and connection. This article focuses on connection.

The essence of connection has never been more important, especially as people across the globe have been practicing social distancing, experiencing anxiety and a dealing with a sense of uneasiness at unprecedented levels. We're all navigating this new normal together, and in the process, we're creating new ways to stay connected to each other while maintaining social distancing.

Connection can be defined in many ways. Before the pandemic, we would have most commonly associated connection with our smartphones or Wi-Fi. Connection might also have been associated with networking events, conferences or happy hours. Staying connected to your loved ones before often meant seeing them in person, spending time with them or hugging them. Now, we have to be creative about connection. Connection goes much deeper today.

Before the coronavirus crisis, many bemoaned that technology and social media were creating disconnection between humans, but today we're using technology and social media to maintain connection with each other during a social distant time. FaceTime, Skype and Zoom are all platforms that existed before the pandemic, but people are using these video conferencing or videotelephony tools more than ever to stay connected.

According to a survey prepared by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 50% of people in the United States consider themselves as acutely lonely. It's not a pandemic, but it's certainly an epidemic. An epidemic that was present before we started social distancing. Matthew Lieberman, a distinguished social psychologist and neuroscientist, drew on psychology and neuroscience research to confirm that just as human beings have a basic need for food and water, we also have a basic need for connection. We can understand why it's so important for people to stay connected with their loved ones.

## Connection Equals Employee Engagement

Research shows that when employees have a best friend at work, they are seven times as likely to be engaged in their job. Today's successful organizations understand the importance of connection, trust and teambuilding. Many companies make a point to build social activities into the company culture to allow team members to get to know each other on a more personal level. Other results-oriented Western cultures tend to only allow for small talk between meetings when time permits. I've often referred to leadership styles being either transformational or transactional. A distinct characteristic that differentiates the two styles lies primarily in the power of connection.

As we have shifted our communication methods in response to COVID-19, how we connect with others has evolved as well. I would venture to say this pandemic has even magnified the importance of connection. While we are physically apart and social distancing, our social connections have become more profound, more meaningful and intentional. It has been encouraging to see the outpouring of generosity and creativity demonstrated in uncommon ways. From virtual reunions and team meetings to one-on-one Skype conversations and virtual happy hours, people are finding ways to connect in extraordinary ways.

As the world recalibrates, researchers will undoubtedly have access to unique data to identify the methods and meaning of connection. It is proven that employee engagement is at its highest when people are connected to the mission and values of the

company. Many multifamily owners and operators have already stated that they have made plans to continue to support virtual collaboration to maximize efficiencies and to increase engagement with their teams, residents and other stakeholders.

If connection inspires heightened engagement, here are some ways to seek out connections with your teams, even during a socially distant time:

### 1. What's your why?

Where there is purpose, there is passion. The stronger your motivation, the deeper your connection. Think of the lengths we go to as parents or pet owners to take care of our loved ones. At work, we all promote and protect the highly engaged employees who go the extra mile. We're more likely to give them the benefit of the doubt and to support their recommendations.

### 2. Where there's a will, there's a way.

Apartment professionals have proven this theory by taking care of their residents. Whether it's being on the frontlines, responding to service requests, renewing leases or offering virtual tours, everyone steps up to the plate. Creativity is the new currency and connection is the bridge that makes success happen. The resiliency of the industry and its professionals has never shined more brightly.

### 3. It's the who, not the what.

There's power in simple gestures. Many people think that connection is time-consuming and laborious. It's more about the person and the bond you share than the

project on which you are working. A short phone call to check in on someone goes a long way in solidifying a relationship. Before jumping right into business, check on the person's emotional well-being first. When things seem complicated, simplify.

### 4. Be in it to win it.

Surround yourself with "A" players who commit to the long haul so that you can be together for the second mile. Almost anyone can easily go the first mile. When you are committed to someone or something, you create opportunities to get to know one another at a deeper level.

I have always believed that connections make our lives richer. I have been privileged to work in the housing industry for over 30 years. While I may not remember every property I've worked with, I'll never forget the people and causes that sparked joy in my life. There is power in connection, both physically and virtually, and that's what keeps me fully charged. 🙌



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