

U Connect



The Art of Making Connections to Resolve Disputes

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<http://collaborativejourneys.com>

Table of Contents

- Table of Contents 2
- Introduction 3
- U as Metaphor 4
- Attitude 5
- Conversations 6
- Making Connections 7
 - Me + We..... 7
 - Us + Them 8
 - Collaboration + Chance 9
 - Positions + Interests..... 10
 - Vision + Values 11
 - Intuition + Analysis..... 12
 - Facts + Stories 13
 - Nature + Nurture..... 14
 - Diversity + Convergence 15
 - Opportunity + Time..... 16
 - Choice + Context 17
 - Emotion + Momentum..... 18
 - Participation + Outcomes 19
 - Creativity + Impasse..... 20
- Agreements..... 21
- The Connector Habit..... 22
- A Few Books Worth Checking Out 23
- Acknowledgements..... 27
- About the Author 28

Introduction

Disputes happen. How do we respond?

One way is to blame “them”. That is the way of judgement.

This e-book is about another way; people working together to make connections, find common ground, and resolve their differences. Core to this collaborative problem-solving approach is making connections, of all sorts.

Making connections, building bridges between people, is an art.

Making connections is part of the dispute resolution journey, a journey that starts with attitude, a mindset of humility, presence and wayfinding. Authentic conversations can then follow. It's conversations that bring us together, and it's through conversation we change, connect and find common ground. Iteratively, we reach agreement on how to move forward in constructive ways.

Mediators love metaphors. Being a mediator, I use the U as a metaphor for visualizing the road to resolution, and to give context for making connections.

This e-book provides 14 types of connections that can be made to facilitate dispute resolution. The basic ideas and concepts in this book can be applied almost anywhere there is a need to bridge differences between people.

Our human brain is wired to connect. Learning to make connections builds on our natural capabilities.

Make connecting a habit. Be a connector.

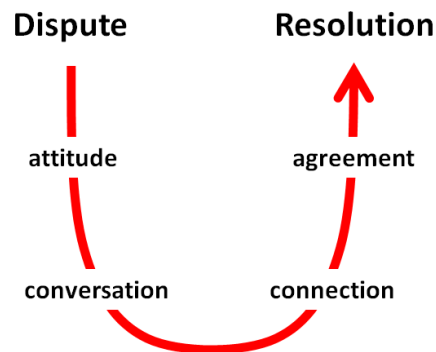
Much success,
Ben

U as Metaphor

“Metaphor is the central process in art, when an artist deliberately creates something to be both itself and something else. When this happens, mapping across domains can occur, and we can see something in an enlightening way.” (Keith Oatley, psychologist)

U is a metaphor for a way to make connections and resolve disputes.

The U metaphor is a composite of ideas, inspired by the works of Peter Senge, Seth Godin, Margaret Wheatley, Stewart Levine, and others.



U is a model, as presented by Peter Senge and his co-authors, in their book Presence, in which U describes the “change” journey, a journey of observation, reflection, sensing new possibilities, and acting swiftly when the decision is made to go forward.

U is an idea, as presented by Seth Godin in his book, The Dip; about results vs. effort... slogging through the dip, relentlessly changing tactics (e.g., to make connections, break impasse), yet never quitting the big idea (resolution), unless of course, it's better to quit and move on!

U is about collaborative learning, as in the University of Learning-As-We-Go.

U is about you and self-determination. “Self-determination is at the root of being.”

I see U everywhere. It represents the opportunity of making connections, a middle way, and appropriate dispute resolution.

The spirit of U resides in all of us. We only have to connect with it.

Attitude

“Look well of today, for it is the Life of Life... for yesterday is but a dream and tomorrow a vision. But today well lived makes every yesterday a dream of happiness, and every tomorrow a vision of hope.”
(Kalidasa, Sanskrit poet-philosopher)

Attitude frames everything.

Great teachers have taught us that there are many paths to resolution. Resolution is an outcome. Getting to resolution is a process.

Making connections and getting to resolution is a creative process. With the non-adversarial approach to dispute resolution, connections are facilitated through positive flow, within a multi-sensory, sometimes chaotic environment.

The connector mindset is to be...

Present in the moment. The connector listens, externally and internally, speaks what is true to them, and remains detached from particular outcomes.

Positive. The connector understands each interaction as an opportunity to bid positively for connection, and shows appreciation, our greatest psychological need.

Humble. The connector places a high value on humility, avoids assumptions, is open to discovery, welcomes surprise and paradox, and knows that the longer we stay in a place of “not knowing”, the more comprehensive our solutions will be.

A Wayfinder. Like the ancient Polynesians whose role was to navigate canoes across the largest expanse of water in the world, the connector applies all their senses, skills and experience to the challenge, learning their way through it.

Conversations

“Alone, I have seen many marvellous things, none of which were true.” (African proverb)

We transform through conversations.

Holding conversations in which participants feel welcomed, safe and supported are the conditions for creative learning and problem-solving.

Before diving into conversation, it is helpful to agree on expectations for the conversation; purpose, process, inclusiveness, accountability, confidentiality, affecting a resolution...

Facilitate connection.

Help individuals, groups and communities understand and connect to their core interests. Facilitate collaborative conversations, in-person and/or virtually. Structure them for the behaviour you want. Create welcoming spaces. Break bread together. Make it safe to fail.

Coach mediation.

Work with individuals involved in the dispute on a one-on-one and/or small group basis. Empower, don't advise. Educate on collaborative conversation and negotiation. Model what you say.

Balance process, emotion, and substance.

Address how we talk, what we talk about, why it is important, and what we are going to do about it. Coordinate and monitor. Juggle. “When the going gets tough, the tough relax. Smile and enjoy the trip!”

Support the conversation. Be like the jazz rhythm section, providing timing and harmony for the soloists, the storytellers in the conversation.

Lead as if you are not in charge.

Making Connections

Me + We

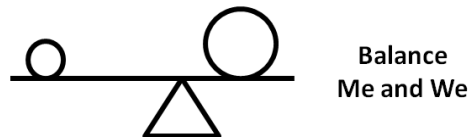
“A preaching point is not a meeting point.” (Mother Teresa)

In our every conversation and negotiation, there exists the opportunity to think of, and make the connection between what I want and need, and what the other party wants and needs.

To make those connections, and discover our common ground, we collaborate.

The collaborative way is to be “unconditionally constructive” (a term coined by Roger Fisher & William Ury in *Getting to Yes*); to do only those things that both are good for me, and the relationship, whether or not the other party reciprocates. Reciprocity is voluntary.

Balance advocacy with enquiry. Assert your own interests, through self-awareness and fluency with “I” language. Appreciatively enquire into their interests; through curiosity, open questions, probing, empathy, clarifying, paraphrasing...



Negotiate common ground through: reframing, fractionalizing, summarizing, power dynamics, solution definition, creative problem solving...

Triangulate, cross-check using multiple sources of information and signals, to locate common points of interest and benefit.

Learn your way. Draw on all your skills, experience and senses, as a wayfinder.

Us + Them

“The essence of sustainability is long-term relationships.” (Stacey Toews, Fair Trade entrepreneur)

Fear of the “other” or “them”, fear and avoidance of people who aren’t like us, inhibits us from working better together, to solve the problems at hand.

There are many ways to build your capacity to get to know and appreciate them. Do something together; talk, work, play... Break bread. In some cultures, the meeting starts with a song or dance. Traditions and rituals connect us.

Seek convergence. What associations and connections can we make for our mutual benefit, and that only we can make?

Turn the world right side up. What does the world look like when you put yourself in their shoes? Our view of them is only one view. Flip your world around. What do you see with their eyes?

Remember our pain AND their pain. Just as we know all about our heroes, how many personal stories do you know about them? Listen. Discover their stories. You can’t hate someone whose story you know.

“What would your grandfather or grandmother say about all this, our inability to work together?” Next time you’re in a circle with them, ask that question. Looking at things through a generational lens can show how we aren’t all that different. Aboriginal wisdom teaches us this.

Risk for Them. As thousands go off to war, how many go off for peace? Give of yourself, in a different way.

Take the “long view”. Move from the single issue to common ground we all share.

Support women. It’s not just coincidence that much of today’s divide has come to be in patriarchal societies. Women and networks. Work with that.

Read good fiction. It’s one way to develop the empathy habit.

Solutions to today’s complex problems demand diverse collaboration. Polarization is the death of creativity.

Take heart, though... Evolution has wired us to care about one another.

Collaboration + Chance

“Chance is an unseen collaborator.” (Twyla Tharp, dance choreographer)

Collaboration is about people working together.

The real success stories of our time are about good collaboration: businesses, sports teams, political campaigns, causes... When we collaborate to resolve a dispute, the outcome of our work together can be greater than our individual capacities; $1 + 1 > 2$.

How do we maximize our collaborative potential?

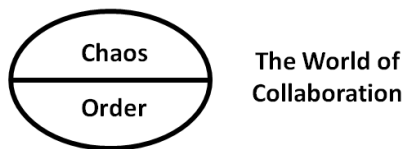
One way is increased collaboration. By adding more voices and perspectives to our work, we are adding facets, multiple dimensions, improving the rigour and sustainability of our resolutions. You never know what will happen on a journey, it is better not to begin unless you can maximize your chances for success.

Increased collaboration is future worth.

A collaboration may not be what it appears. We cannot predict the future. Sometimes things happen unexpectedly, by chance.

Chance is often the key to a successful outcome; an outcome precipitated by information revealed, a personal connection, the uncredited collaborator, an external event... To enter into a collaborative relationship is to relinquish individual control over outcomes, to welcome chance as part of the process, and to go with the flow.

In many ways we live in two worlds – order and chaos. In the world of order we plan, reflect, and think about what to do next. In the world of chaos things happen, we get things done, yet unpredictability persists. In one world we like to think we are in control. In the other we mingle with increasing complexity, conflict, and uncertainty.



There is no one way to resolution. We collaborate to resolve our differences. Yet, the true potential of our collaboration, its' ultimate value, only reveals itself with time.

Focus on your future collaboration, now. Serendipity comes to those who have done the work.

[How to Succeed, Since Success is Random](#) (Kare Anderson)

Positions + Interests

“There is more learning in the question itself than the answer.” (Many)

Connect the what with the why.

People in a dispute can have different positions, yet share a common interest.

Our position is “what” we want as an outcome. Our interest is “why” we want that outcome. “I want the car” is a position. I need the car “to maintain my autonomy” is an interest.

Interests are needs. We all have needs. When people are stuck, dealing with unmet needs can help get things moving forward again.

Understanding needs can be like peeling an onion; there are many layers. It may be a bit painful in the peeling, yet good things can happen afterwards.

In the 1940s, Abraham Maslow developed a “hierarchy of needs”, as a way of explaining human motivation. It remains a useful way of thinking about why people say and do certain things. At the bottom rung of the hierarchy are needs such as food, sex, and sleep. Level 2 is safety; of body, employment, property, family... Higher needs include the need to be loved, recognized, and the need to realize our full potential, including creativity and problem-solving.

The hierarchy suggests a relationship between needs, with basic needs the foundation on which other needs are built. If you’re homeless and hungry, you’re probably not thinking to much about workplace creativity.

Being able to unravel and differentiate needs is a gift. Identify the core needs to expand the negotiation pie, address short and long-term issues, and craft sustainable solutions.

Bottom line: Understanding the why offers more resolution opportunity.

Vision + Values

“No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.” (John Donne, 17th century poet)

As long as people are operating in their own silos, your job, resolution, will be next to impossible.

How do you get people on the same page?

To break down the thick walls between silos, build on the things all silos have in common: the sky above – vision, and the ground below – values. Use the silos metaphor as a way to bridge differences.

We need the sky; the big picture, the world of possibilities, the potential of self-actualization, and a future to dream and shoot for! The sky represents potential and possibility, resolution of the dispute, and moving on to better things.

What questions can you ask someone to get them to pause and look up to the sky, to bigger possibilities, to a higher level? “Ask the right question and you’ll find their eyes moving up – a clear sign that their mind is opening up to new possibilities. Cause people to look up and reflect on what you’ve asked them, and when they look back down at you, the conversation will never be the same again.... It’ll be better.” (Mark Goulston in Just Listen)

We also need to be grounded. The ground holds our roots, our core values and beliefs, our “principles”, and it’s from the ground that we grow.

Connect vision and values. Look for consistency between the two. Are we being true to ourselves, aligning our actions with our shared values, and also moving in the direction of our shared vision?

Vision and values give us boundaries. We can still be unique, creative in our own way, as long as we are within the boundaries we agree on.

Vision and value; where we’re going and where we’ve come from.

Intuition + Analysis

“If a place makes you feel bad, don’t keep going back.” (unknown)

As a mediator, I am often faced with a situation where in the heat of conflict, I have to choose between going with my intuition or facilitating further analysis.

A “superstar in the psychology of decision making”, Gerd Gigerenzer, in *Gut Feelings: the Intelligence of the Unconscious* thinks relying on your “gut feelings” (a.k.a. intuition or hunch) may be your best decision; especially when thinking of the future, of things that are difficult to predict, and where there is little information.

On the other hand, Gigerenzer thinks complex analysis may be preferable to intuition when one has to explain the past, the future is highly predictable, and there are large amounts of information available.

“A gut feeling is a judgement that appears quickly in our consciousness, whose underlying reasons we are not fully aware of, and yet, is strong enough to act upon.”

Gut feelings work on simple rules of thumb, hitting on the most important information and ignoring the rest; e.g.:

The Recognition rule of thumb; if you recognize one object but not the other, then infer that the recognized object has a higher value. Think brand name!

The Asset allocation rule of thumb; allocate your assets equally to ‘n’ funds. Survival through diversification!

The Sexual Selection (in birds of paradise) rule of thumb; look over a sample of males, and go for the one with the longest tail!

Rules of thumb take advantage of evolved capacities of the brain; skills that we have developed through practise get hard-wired. Nature gives us a capability, and extended practise turns it into a capacity.

Connect your choice, gut feeling or more analysis, to the situation before you. Know your capacity for decision-making.

Rely on your intuition, sometimes.

Rely on analysis, at other times.

Facts + Stories

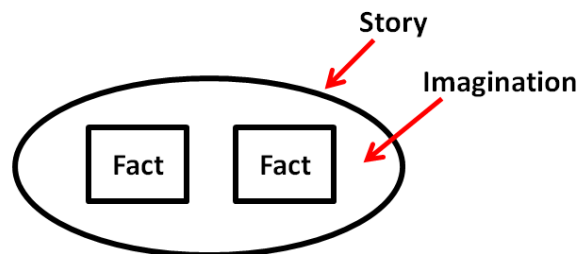
“Forgiveness is simply seeing that what you thought happened, didn’t.” (Byron Katie, “spiritual innovator”)

Your story, your identity, shapes how you live your life. Change your story and you’ll change the way you live your life.

Narrative mediation proposes that people live their lives according to stories. It gives more weight to stories and the meanings within stories, and less weight to facts and causes. A mediator who uses a narrative (story) approach helps the conflicting parties understand how their stories have shaped their views about themselves and the other. Narrative mediation focuses on the importance of building a new story; one built around the common elements of the relationship between the parties.

Stories connect. Stories help us connect the dots, the discrete “facts”, events and experiences into some sort of whole. How I connect the dots is my story. How you connect them is yours. Different stories, with some common touch points?

Scott McCloud in his book *Understanding Comics* talks about the “gutter” in a comic strip, the place between the panels, where you, the reader, are invited to participate, with your imagination. You combine the individual panels with your imagination to create a story.



When we imagine something different; e.g., a positive versus negative image of our situation, our conflict, we are changing our story.

Facts are facts. Stories are how we learn.

Bring people to the conversation fire to let them tell their stories, and find their sweet spot of resolution.

Nature + Nurture

“If you want revenge, dig a grave for two.” (old Chinese proverb)

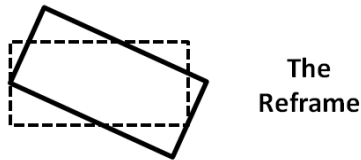
Why can dispute resolution be so hard?

By nature, we are wired for quick response. Our primal “lizard brain” comes preloaded with fight or flight. When we find ourselves in conflict, it’s easily aroused.

At the same time, brain science tells us about the potential of our frontal cortex, to associate, connect, imagine, and simulate; our brain’s mirror neurons, which enable empathy and compassion for others; and our intuitive and kinaesthetic right brain, where “peace is only a thought away”.

Our character, who we are, is variable. It runs on a continuum. It’s often a fine line between saint and sinner.

So much of who we are, and can be, seems to be a paradox. We hold the capacity to be both: uncaring and caring, self-interested and appreciative of others, and resistant to change and open to learning new things. Some ways of framing conflict lead to an adversarial climate and destructive outcomes, others lead to collaboration and dispute resolution.



Like attracts like. Like begets like. Pay it forward. Nurture the positive. Negative interactions have far more clout than positive interactions. It is not a balanced equation. Bid for positive connection with the other. Reframe.

The neuroplasticity of our brain means that what we pay attention to becomes more of us, be it Marlboro Man or Gandhi.

Diversity + Convergence

“It’s frequently at the edges of things that we learn most about the middle... ice and steam can reveal more about the nature of water than water alone ever could.” (Walter Murch, film editor)

Diversity is the hallmark of innovative teams.

When we collaborate to resolve a dispute we are working as a team and in our own way we are innovating, we are creating something new, an agreement, and a resolution to our dispute.

Recognizing diversity is to acknowledge each of our contributions, our viewpoints and uniqueness, and that “not everyone sees things the way I do”. People are legitimized. Accepting others is part of consensus building.

Our contributions are gifts to the resolution process. They add value, expand the negotiation asset pie. The group solution gets the benefit of our individual gifts.

Diversity brings with it multiple issues, perspectives, and potential points of intersection. From this variety we converge to develop richer solutions.

Convergence is about moving from single issues to see the common ground where multiple problems can be solved.

Convergence can be fleeting, yet it supplies order. Order is a gift, too. It helps us frame agreement and resolution.

“The survival of the fittest is the business case for diversity.”

What skills, background, gender, geography, race, religion, culture, do you need so your resolution gene pool is well mixed for the future?

Convergence is where the new leaders of the 21st century will come from.

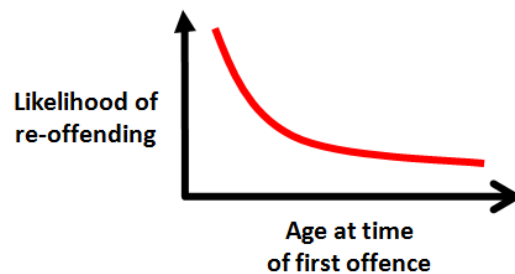
Opportunity + Time

“Everything costs so much more than we think.” (Raj Patel, economist and activist)

The cost of conflict increases with time.

Resolution expert Stewart Levine categorizes conflict costs as follows... There are the direct costs, the fees of lawyers and other professionals. There is a productivity cost, value of lost time. There is a continuity cost, loss of ongoing relationships, including the community they embody. There is an emotional cost, the pain of focusing on and being held hostage by our emotions.

Better to resolve sooner than later. See the “long tail” of conflict prevention; the ROI for early intervention. What holds for young offenders applies in many dispute contexts.



The “Law of Diminishing Returns” tell us the longer you wait to seize the opportunity, the smaller the return. Its cousin, “Parkinson’s Law”, reminds us that work expands so as to fill the time available for completion.

Given time, a minor dispute can escalate into a major conflict, with costly outcomes. The future is a wild card. Seize the opportunity for early, appropriate dispute resolution.

Advocate for more, not less, control over the dispute resolution process; self-assessment and negotiations ahead of rulings and juries.

Don’t wait for someone else to pass judgement on your dispute.

Choice + Context

“We don’t remember isolated facts; we remember things in context.” (Joshua Foer, US memory champion)

In each conversation about our differences, we make choices; choices related to feeling, listening, talking...

By choosing one thing we let go of others.

From a decision-making perspective, the paradox of choice may be “less is more”, fewer choices help us make better decisions. Yet, sometimes, what we've chosen not to share, to feel, hear, say... may be the key to resolution.

Whether formally acknowledged or not, choices are made in context.

The context of our dispute is the interrelated set of conditions in which our dispute exists. To think context, is to think systems.

Systems’ thinking is a belief that the component parts of a system can best be understood in the context of relationships with each other, and with other systems, rather than in isolation.

Complex problems require systems thinking and collaborative solutions. A maxim for collaborative family law is "It takes a system to change a system".

To help parties put their choices in context, we can ask questions such as:

“What mutual past or future interaction, transaction, event... have you not mentioned in our conversation?”

“How has the dispute impacted your relationship?”

“How does the broader community; family, colleagues, stakeholders... view your dispute?”

“What is being said offline that isn’t being said online?”

We want to expand our understanding of the situation, and potential areas for exploration and resolution.

To add context is to give opportunity; for empathy, knowledge sharing, more facts, learning, storytelling...

To add context is to introduce multiple perspectives; critical for complex problem-solving.

Putting choices in context enables better resolutions.

Emotion + Momentum

“Art is the exploration of emotions.” (Robin Collingwood, philosopher and historian)

Emotions are powerful and always present.

In negotiations, emotions can give or take away momentum from the conversation. “In business, momentum is everything.”

Whatever emotion you feel most intently about tends to dictate your next thoughts and action. When you feel listened to, appreciated, respected... your response is sure to be different than if you feel ignored, trivialized, berated...

Use emotions to build affiliation, and turn an adversary into a colleague. Use emotions to foster collaboration, creative thinking and problem-solving. Mirror neurons in our brain make emotions and behaviours contagious.

In difficult conversations, emotions such as anger can be especially hard to handle. When they do, “step to the balcony”. Lower your “inner thermostat”. Act emotionally intelligent. Address the concern, not the emotion. Seek consistency between the “feel”, “think” and “say” feedback loop.

Connect negative emotions to an opportunity to reframe, to shift momentum. With a positive mindset, our brains are freed to do amazing things; recognize patterns, make new connections and associations, simulate a better future...

In many ways, emotions are the story, good or bad.

Participation + Outcomes

“Community is in our DNA.” (Kay Pranis, restorative justice pioneer)

Give voice to all those effected.

A good collaborative practise is to consult with “them” before deciding on matters that affect them. Involve those affected throughout the conversations and decision-making process.

Who needs to participate in the conversation? In participatory processes, it may be who ever shows up.

Who all are involved in this dispute?

Do you have authority to resolve this dispute on their behalf?

Who will be affected by the outcome of this mediation?

These types of questions speak to the relationship between individuals present in the conversation, and others, not present, yet who are connected, in one way or another, to the dispute and/or outcome.

If the disputing party is an individual, do they have authority to settle the dispute, or must they first consult with a spouse, partner, manager...?

If the disputing party is not an individual, are they the duly authorized representative, with authority to settle the dispute, on behalf of the family, company, association... ?

And to what extent does the broader “community” need to be included in the conversation?

Moving beyond our western interest-based negotiation ways... Japan, Indonesia, China, Afghanistan, Philippines, Arab nations, Hawaii, Latin America, indigenous cultures... each approach conflict in different ways.

In some places, dispute resolution is not just about individuals, it’s about restoring and honouring community. Settlement options may build on doing community good, not just who owes what. Resolution may mean reconciliation, and restoration of right relations; especially true in aboriginal and indigenous traditions.

Connect the richness of outcome to inclusive and authentic participation in the process.

It’s good karma.

Creativity + Impasse

"I can't take this shit anymore!' he said, mistakenly." (Hugh MacLeod, cartoonist)

At some point in the negotiations, the parties may feel that resolution is not possible. Impasse has arrived. This is when creative thinking is most needed.

Creativity expert Michael Michalko says three character traits of a creative thinker are 1) the intention and desire to be creative, 2) consciously cultivating positive speaking and thinking patterns and 3) to act like a creative thinker and go through the motions of being creative every day.

The essence of creative thinking is the ability to make connections and associations between dissimilar subjects, concepts, ideas...

See things from a different perspective. Walt Disney always critiqued his own work from three perspectives; the dreamer, the realist, the critic.

When impasse arrives, what new dimension can you introduce to the conversation?

Would a "reality check" be helpful now, or maybe now is a good time for silent reflection and/or to dream about the potential of resolution? Or, is now the time for one of the many other pattern interrupt approaches; food break, a game, "call a friend", silly hypothetical... Introduction of these random stimuli can act as a trigger to making associations and connections.

Allow bits of information and thoughts from different universes, compartments in your brain, to freely intermingle and combine. Our associative mind will recombine, and shoot forth the answer, as if by magic. Imagining different combinations is what Einstein called "combinatory play".

Common communication techniques such as reframes, metaphors, and paradox can be creative levers as they too operate on our brain's associative capacities.

Shift gears. Give your brain a rest. Let that idea incubate. "We are like perennials" - we need some downtime before re-generating.

Intentionally connect creativity and the capacity to problem-solve and break impasse. This is something the legends of innovation have all done. Leonardo da Vinci called this thinking strategy "saper vedere", "knowing how to see".

Agreements

Agreements keep us focused on our goals.

Although one never knows what will happen on the dispute resolution journey, it is better not to begin unless you can maximize your chances for success.

Navigate from the future. Manifest your desired results. Craft agreements with implementation in mind.

An effective agreement clarifies intent and vision, roles, promises, time and value, satisfaction metrics, concerns and risks, conflict resolution...

An effective agreement details how the issues are to be dealt with; payment terms, other terms for which no amount of liquidated damages are specified, enforcement or interpretation measures, whether the agreement is signed in “good faith” and/or legally binding...

An effective agreement is clear about what the consequences are if we don't honour our commitments. Use the format, “if that happens, then we do this”. The paradox of agreements is that implementation is not a done deal. The future is uncertain, even with an agreement in hand. How will you address that uncertainty when it arrives?

Base results on collaborative agreement. Minimize protection-oriented legalistic ways. Build an agreement that we trust, that we are comfortable moving forward with, a “meeting of the hearts”.

Value the relationship over the agreement. If the agreement isn't crafted with relationship in mind, is it not an Us vs. Them?

Create practical, vital agreements, based on relationship.

The Connector Habit

“Neurons that fire together, wire together” (Nicholas Carr)

We are creatures of habit.

To change patterns, re-wire yourself. Take advantage of the brain’s neuroplasticity.

Leo Babauta, author of the popular Zen Habits blog, suggests 3 simple steps, as core to changing habits; “write down your plan, identify your triggers and replacement habit, and focus on doing the replacement habits every single time the triggers happen, for about 30 days.”

It takes between 3 and 4 weeks for a new behaviour to become a habit, and it takes about 6 months for that habit to become second nature.

Bill Isaacs, author of “The Art of Thinking Together” says the “trick is awareness, not so much trying to stomp out that habit, which doesn’t work anyway. If you start to notice and befriend these tendencies (negative habits) you’ll gradually dissolve and eliminate them.”
Be patient with yourself.

The daily effort need not be huge. We learn some of the most important lessons in our lives in very short moments.

Over-learning can lead to mastery. Yet, mindless repetition, even if 10,000 hours, rarely works. Space your learning. Our attention works in bursts. Stay focused.

Connecting is a craft. Study, and learn from, the masters; e.g., if you’re mediator, Mediate.com has a wonderful video library of interviews with master mediators. Learn in all 12 keys. Learn the new patterns.

Foster connection habits; collaboration, being “gift centred” - seeing the half full in everyone, healthy relationships, conflict resolution, coaching, facilitation, creativity, convening, “just enough” social media... Take a chance.

Creative problem-solving requires your attention. If distraction is an issue, simplify your external world to amplify your internal world.

As your new habits shape your experience, share your knowledge in your communities of practise. That, too, is a habit worth nurturing.

A Few Books Worth Checking Out

I enjoy reading. Here's a selection of recent reads. Each book gave me a different insight into making connections. The reviews are mine.

Dispute Resolution

Collaborative Practice: Deepening the Dialogue (Nancy Cameron)

The author, a British-Columbia based mediator/lawyer, gives the lowdown on the practice of collaborative law. An excellent resource, it touches on the process and roles of the professionals typically involved in a collaborative law; e.g., lawyers, financial specialists, child specialists, and divorce coaches. This book is accessible (to the layperson) and engaging.

Conflict Management Coaching: The CINERGY Model (Cinnie Noble)

From a pioneer in the development of conflict management coaching, the author walks us through her practical model for coaching conflict, integrating and building on the fields of coaching, mediation, and neuroscience. Processes, case examples, numerous templates and supporting templates are provided. This book is thorough, well organized and practical, and puts the role of coach in context, as part of a larger community-of-practice, and in relation to other helping professions such as mediation and counselling.

Just Listen: Discover the Secret to Getting Through to Absolutely Anyone (Mark Goulston, Keith Ferrazzi)

This book gives advice on how to truly show you care for the person you're having a conversation with, no matter the context, by making people feel interesting, important, and "heard". The writing style is honest, engaging, accessible, seamlessly bridges personal and professional spheres, great examples... One of the best books you'll ever read about the most important of all dispute resolution skills, listening.

Mary Parker Follett: Prophet of Management (Pauline Graham)

Mary Parker Follett died in 1933. It was Peter Drucker, who decades later (after he discovered her writings and influence) coined the term Prophet of Management in the introduction to this book. Follett's insights reflected a brilliant mind, systems thinking, and in retrospect, are visionary. The book contains selected writings of hers from the 1920s, my favourites being on "constructive conflict" and "circular thinking". If you want a refreshing way to think and act on today's problems, read this book - her choice of words and thoughts will win you over.

Rework (Jason Fried, David Heinemeier Hansson)

This is a wonderful little book. Written by the authors of the 37signals suite of software products, it offers maxims for getting things done in a product/project, deliverable-oriented, team environment. This book is written with few words, yet with maxim insights, and in a most engaging way; writ not dry. The lessons in this book can be applied to a dispute resolution context.

The Book of Agreement: 10 Essential Elements for Getting the Results You Want (Stewart Levine)

Practical, authentic & wise, Levine gives the 10 essential elements for just about any type of agreement. In fact, he offers up 30 different model agreements; for business, community, professional, personal... Levine believes in "results based on agreement" vs. the protection-oriented legalistic way agreements are typically drawn up. Levine's approach is based on relationships. In fact, he sees relationships as being more important than the agreement itself. Novel!

Creativity

Creative Thinkering: Putting Your Imagination to Work (Michael Michalko)

A superb, totally accessible, book by a global figure in the field of creative thinking. Ideas covered include: the core idea of conceptual blending (making connections and associations between dissimilar concepts), the pattern recognition nature of our brain, idea incubation, intention boards, the need for multiple perspectives, importance of random stimuli, human traits of a creative thinker, and more. The concepts and diverse case examples are supplemented with nifty thought experiments. This book is a great resource for understanding the elements of creative problem-solving.

In the Blink of an Eye (Walter Murch)

Walter Murch has edited and/or mixed many a movie classic, including American Graffiti, the Godfather movies, The Unbearable Lightness of Being, Julia, and The English Patient. This book is a collection of his insights and wisdom, on cinema and life, including; the Rule of 6 (what to cut when you have to - note: emotion and story are the last things one should edit out), the physiology of the "blink" and its role in interpersonal communication (loved this one), the power of collaboration, technological change, our unchanging human need for stories in the dark... All brilliant stuff, and written in a totally accessible way.

The Department of Mad Scientists: How DARPA Is Remaking Our World, from the Internet to Artificial Limbs (Michael Belfiore)

DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) has for 50 years been at the forefront of technology innovation for the US military. This is the story of that (naturally secretive) organization, an organization where innovation is so prized that one DARPA executive's 3 hiring questions, of a potential new hire, are: 1) What is your dream? (to ascertain level of passion), 2) Do you feel lucky? (looking for people keen on creating their own luck and opportunities), and 3) How many speeding tickets have you had? (filter out those who are too risk averse). This book shares past innovations, and what's on the horizon - it might surprise you.

The Wayfinders: Why Ancient Wisdom Matters in the Modern World (Wade Davis)

This is a brilliant series of essays by National Geographic's Explorer-in-Residence. It is a tour-de-force that flips on its' head that "traditional" cultures/people are less complex and skilled. We have much to learn. The essays were initially delivered as part of the Canadian National Broadcasting (CBC) annual Massey Lecture series.

The workings of the brain

Gut Feelings: The Intelligence of the Unconscious (Gerd Gigerenzer)

From a "superstar in the psychology of decision-making", great insight into why are gut feelings are usually right, and not only that but that we should be respecting and relying on them more than we do. This practical book communicates better than any other, IMHO, on the differences and trade-off between intuition and analysis. is my favourite book on the trade-off between intuition and analysis.

Hamlet's Blackberry: Building a Good Life in the Digital Age (William Powers)

This book explains why depth of experience/thought matters, and how balance is needed. The author advocates for a personal philosophy that strikes a balance between our human need to connect outward and answer the call of the crowd, and our opposite need, for time and space apart. This book

explores how our digital busyness, building on the latest screen technologies, compares with previous eras and times, and how leading figures of those times dealt with technology advances; e.g., Socrates, Cicero (Roman), Gutenberg, Shakespeare, Franklin, Walden, and McLuhan. A very engaging read.

Mirroring People: The New Science of How We Connect with Others (Marco Iacoboni)

Our brains can simulate the intention in others, and our brains can do this almost effortlessly using mirror neurons. The author is a neurologist & neuroscientist and a director of brain mapping, at the UCLA school of medicine. His research is interdisciplinary, involves international collaboration, and uses the latest in high-tech equipment. A fascinating book that touches on our innate ability to empathize and connect with others, especially if the other is doing something we have experience with ourselves.

My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey (Jill Bolte Taylor)

The author was a neuroanatomist, a brain scientist who at age of 37 (in 1996) suffered a massive stroke on the left side of her brain. This book is her experience, beginning with her fascinating account of the first few hours of the stroke, through to her full recovery almost a decade later. Her big stroke of insight? Without a fully-functioning left hemisphere, the author discovered that her intuitive and kinaesthetic right brain was a place of well-being and peace. "Peace is only a thought away, and all we have to do to access it and silence the voice of our dominating left mind." This book speaks to the need for more "right mind" thinking, and its application.

Out of Character: Surprising Truths About the Liar, Cheat, Sinner (and Saint) Lurking in All of Us (David DeSteno, Piercarlo Valdesolo)

Two psychology profs/academics conducted extensive research into one's "character" and found that it's not as fixed as we once thought; e.g., it's not simply who we are, like it or not. Rather it's a variable state, swayed by internal and external forces that we are often not aware of. The battle between satisfying our personal immediate, short-term, desires and our long-term needs for species survival never ends. Well researched, the theory builds on fascinating, subtle experiments. At the end of the day, a key message I took away is that character is on a continuum, just like the color spectrum. It is often a fine line between sinner and saint. Yet, this flexibility in our character can also help us, to take advantage of opportunities, navigate our social world, find the sweet spot for realizing our goals... This book also has merit as a relationship guide. Who doesn't need that?!

The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less (Barry Schwartz)

Do you make choices decisively and quickly or is every decision a major project? Having many options and opportunities to choose from may not be a good thing. This engaging book has many a nugget; when to "choose" vs. "pick", objective vs. subjective quality of decision making, the emotional impact of losses vs. gains, expectations and choice...

On Community Connection

Connected: The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives -- How Your Friends' Friends' Friends Affect Everything You Feel, Think, and Do (Nicholas Christakis, James Fowler)

This book is essential reading if you want to know more about the structure and function of social networks, and how they impact one/us. There are tons of ideas, rules, concepts, insights, examples... This book is both inspiring and overwhelming. It's world-leading research. "Humans don't just live in groups, we live in networks"... and we have, for a long time!

The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods (John McKnight, Peter Block)

From two gurus of community development, this book shows how neighbourhoods are the primary source of our health, in all forms, economic, environmental, and social. By connecting in-person, sharing our gifts, associating around common interests, self-organizing, making even the outsider feel welcome... we can build strong local places "where the citizen is empowered, and the influence of institutions is diminished". Yes!

THE SPIRIT LEVEL: WHY MORE EQUAL SOCIETIES ALMOST ALWAYS DO BETTER (Kate Pickett, Richard Wilkinson)

The authors of this book collected internationally comparable data on health, and as many social problems as they could find reliable data for, from 23 of the world's wealthiest democracies. What they found was that health and social problems are extraordinarily related to income inequality, with unequal societies having from 3 to 10 times the number of "large" problems, crossing the whole population. The authors present a convincing picture of what ails.... They also offer a number of NOT mutually-exclusive solutions. This book is prescient, to say the least.

Walk Out Walk On: A Learning Journey into Communities Daring to Live the Future Now (Margaret Wheatley, Deborah Frieze)

A book about community building with others who have "walked out" of failing systems & situations and "walked on" to new, inclusive and innovative community models. Co-founder of the Berkana Institute, the author(s) take us on a journey to seven different, culturally-diverse countries, and communities that have made the transition from new types of communities, ones that have transitioned: from scaling up to scaling across, from power to play, from problem to place, from efficiency to resilience... Many of the stories have an "edge" to them. The book has a multi-dimensional feel; through a combination of narrative, pictures, diagrams, poetry... all to the good. This type of book will appeal to anyone interested in creating sustainable communities, in an increasingly divided world.

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Ben

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