

Connect Like Your Life Depends On It

by KD5BJ

*Inspired by and taken from Scott Mann's Podcast #3 "Human Connection" aired on January 28, 2025
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAdP6Eyxiq0> and his books "Nobody Comes To Save You," and "Game Changers, Going Local to Defeat Violent Extremists."*

We are social creatures, wired for relationships. Relationship with Almighty God and with our fellow men. But we have lost this skill of making and solidifying relationships and to connect in a powerful way.

This is important for us Lee County ARES to make sure we always keep being connected to each other as a team, to our families and neighbors and to our served agencies, also vis-à-vis on how to prepare and respond to stress during exercises, emergencies, and disasters.

I agree with Scott Mann that we need to build social capital, in a society whose citizens have low trust and high emotions. We need to learn to reconnect again and overcome a climate of increasing distraction, division, and distrust. All this divides us, and will only increase in an emergency or disaster.

This ensemble of disconnection, distraction, division, and distrust, that Scott Mann calls the "churn" is the real enemy, not the person who thinks differently from us, who holds a different point of you.

Americans have been free thinkers since and before the birth of our Country. But we historically managed to make connections, to distinguish reality from opinions, to argue constructively different views, to agree to disagree, and unite on common ground, goals, and needs. This churn, instead, stands between each of us and what we need to do to get things done.

Contexts vary. Each of us deals with personal setbacks, First Responders with their issues, emergency personnel their challenges, and passions, especially generated by stress, when not well managed, can be detrimental in achieving common goals.

This human connection must be built during blue skies, when there is no threat, and in downtime, so that when an emergency or disaster arises, we are able to leverage that connection and overcome any antagonism between each of us and/or others to successfully have "big stuff done," like Ret. Lt. Col. Mann puts it.

How to foster a climate of trust with others, from our own families to co-workers, employers, served agencies, and other fellow Americans?

The short answer is by being humble, slow to anger, slow to speak, but fast to listen. These virtues are vital and sine qua non to establish connection and teamwork.

Listening to other people's stories and finding common ground or common core is paramount. Scott Mann reports that when dealing with an Afghan with a rifle pointed at you, if you do not establish a connection fast enough, you might well end up dead.

For example, Lt. Col. Mann conveyed the story in one of his books of a Green Beret who approached an old tribe patriarch in Afghanistan to make his tribe an American ally.

The old man was weary of foreigners exploiting his land and his people, first the Russians, then the Taliban, and now us Americans. The Green Beret went to visit him unharmed, except for a laptop. The old man was surrounded by his armed militia. Either the American connected with the chief, or he might be killed here and there. First, he made sure he knew Afghan customs and played accordingly.

Secondly, he listened to the old man hostile conversation outpouring his distrust for the American offer of help.

Thirdly the Green Beret opened his laptop and showed, unedited, the footage of our 9/11, with the raw horrors we citizens were never shown. And the connection happened. Common ground was found. The Green Beret with the video, showed our pain, our suffering, and the real reasons we were in his country. He pointed out he, together with the other Americans deployed there, understood what the old man and his followers felt and their resentment, because they experienced the very same horrors, too.

The conversation picked up, the old chief and the Green Beret asked each other questions and shared their life and challenges. They talked for the whole night and when the conversation was over, the dawning of the sun witnessed the dawning of a new, trustful friendship. The old chief adopted that American Special Forces operator as his own son, and this relationship remained strong until the death of the old chief years later.

The Green Beret managed to change an attitude and to build a bridge that connected two wounded warriors, two totally different cultures that until that moment were hostile and unworthy of trust for each other.

If they did it, we as Americans can do it, too.

The Green Beret focused on the person, not the issues. He was careful not to pick up a battle, but looked and found common ground. He stuck to facts and avoided confrontation and repelled the urge to defend his own position, feelings, and his "pride". He showed himself an advocate of the Chief's needs and sorrows, not as an opponent.

He did not play tick for tack, in a competition about who suffered the most. He finally introduced humor, by calling the Chief Sitting Bull after with positive tones he told him about the historical Indian Chief. The whole militia around the Chief laughed and that nickname followed the old man to the grave.

Lessons for all of us is to build relationships before a threat, emergency, or disaster strikes, so we can afterward leverage it. The rules to success are:

1. Don't take comments personally; share your relevant experience; do not let your imagination run wild thinking that if someone acted a certain way or said something in a certain tone, it was direct against you, or was critical of you, especially in texts.
2. Don't make it about you: that person might have problems unrelated to you that might have accidentally transpired. Or might hold a different opinion that does not translate necessarily in opposition.
3. Share your own relevant experience
4. Find common ground
5. Be open to listening and understanding, slow to speak or get angry
6. Ask question to understand a different viewpoint
7. Keep your emotions down and not arouse them in others
8. Avoid confrontational language and/or tone; be respectful, humble, ready to back off
9. Be an advocate rather than an opponent, by maintaining a conversational style and pick and choose your words that might not escalate emotional temperature.
10. Pick up your battle focusing on policy instead of politics, personality, or actions of the other person. Pride and arrogance are deadly, avoid them at all costs.

And net control, reading of these experiences, made me reflect on my own thinking and actions, and how much improvement I need in this area, especially in the late legal and legislative battles to protect our beloved County. I thought Ret. Lt. Colonel Mann had good points that make a good training to share.

I can only imagine in the course of a disaster how difficult it can be working as a team with other very stressed players, such emergency personnel, First Responders etc. whom we have not had the chance yet to work with. This might be our most valuable, yet most elusive and difficult training to practice, and I am certainly open to members and visitors for ideas of how to improve this.

This was training for tonight, this is KD5BJ, back to net control.