

Forget the Vision, Make the Connections

An executive stepping into a new role tends to have two top priorities: how best to allocate financial resources and how best to allocate human resources. And while that may seem like a logical way for new leaders to make their mark, [Mindy Hall](#) says that mind-set is problematic.

Hall, author of *Leading with Intention: Every Moment Is a Choice*, has spent more than 25 years working with executives and organizations on leadership and team development, so her views are rooted in extensive experience. Executives coming into a new role often focus intently on achieving immediate operational results, she told me in a recent interview, because tangible past performance is what got them the job. An early win or two can help show the boss, peers, and subordinates what they're made of and build confidence. With that credibility established, they expend the next greatest amount of energy on articulating a vision of where the enterprise should head for even greater success in the future. Next, they attend to the task of putting team members in place to carry it out. The stage is set, these executives believe, for great accomplishment.

This approach misses an essential first step, Hall says. New leaders don't spend nearly enough time and effort being intentional about how they show up and how they spend their own time. The effort they devote to forming meaningful connections with the people in the organization is almost an afterthought.

"That's exactly backwards," Hall said. "If you want people to follow you, they must get to know you as a person." Because establishing trust is the foundation of future success, connection must come first. You have to be transparent about what you're trying to achieve. People won't commit to your cause and vision unless they feel they know you well enough to have confidence in you, the first step to establishing trust. "Get connection right, and the rest will flow," she said.

"Ask yourself why you do what you do," Hall advised. "Is it to collect a paycheck? Likely not." Making effective personal connections requires persistent introspection and intention, Hall says. "So ask yourself every day, every hour, and with every interaction, Why am I doing this? You may not feel like you can change the world, but you can change the moment." Hall says that less than a quarter of the leaders she's worked with "start out as truly intentional about their interactions. Even if you are an intuitive leader, becoming more intentional exponentially increases the speed and depth of your impact."

How can you be more intentional? Hall frames intentionality in her own work in eight words that guide each of her interactions: "I want it to matter that we met." And it should matter for both her and the person she is meeting. There is an implied flexibility in the time horizon; it may matter immediately or several years down the road. Challenge yourself: "I want it to matter that I hold this position," or "I want it to matter that I am your boss." How does this affect how you will show up to deliver short-term results and create long-term impact?

Next, she suggests a simple two-plus-two approach to meetings. Show up with two questions you want to ask and two things you want to contribute. Putting these together requires considering who will be there, the context, and the power dynamics. Know your objective in attending the meeting, and what the meeting convener hopes to achieve. Preparing two questions activates a learning mind-set, whereas articulating two contributions ensures that you are prepared to add value. If you come up blank, try harder — or recognize there may be better uses of your time than attending.

Finally, Hall encourages new leaders to actively manage their own narratives. “You know you, but others may not,” she says. For this, she uses a “rule of three”: Have three messages you want out there about you, three people you want to know those messages, and three actions you will take to make this possible. These messages should go beyond what you do, to who you are: your values, how you process information, make decisions, and take actions. Communicating the narrative isn’t all about words, either. Choosing to meet someone in your office versus over coffee in a common area, for example, sends a distinct message. Are you the first to offer your opinion in a meeting, or do you actively encourage others to share their views? Are you open to dissenting opinions, or do you shut them down? You have to take ownership of the contribution you make to each and every dynamic.

Hall says that effective leaders grow over time. Initially, they have a cognitive understanding of self-awareness and intentionality: Who do I hope to be in this new role? Then they begin to integrate their behavior to match that awareness. Next, they take concrete steps to demonstrate what they understand. Finally, when they have built up their mental muscle, it becomes second nature to consistently embody the best of themselves in that role.

Some have criticized Hall’s techniques as manipulative. But, she says, “if your intention is to have the best outcome for all, it is not manipulative. It is a matter of making proactive versus reactive choices.” It is akin to athletes practicing or using visualization techniques. And it isn’t easy. “It takes an adept intellect to both be present and watch yourself in the moment,” she adds. “It’s simply building the habits that let you act the way you want to be.” That is good advice when you are in transition or simply seeking to improve your leadership in your current role.