

CHAPTER 9

Creating Relationships

*Locate a resilient kid and you will also find a caring adult—
or several—who has guided him.*

– Invincible Kids, *U.S. News & World Report*

The key to achievement for students from poverty is in creating relationships with them.

The question becomes, How does a formal institution create relationships? Two sources provide some answers to this question. These sources are (1) the recent research in the field of science and (2) the work Stephen Covey has done with personal effectiveness.

Margaret Wheatley, in her book *Leadership and the New Science* (1992), states quite clearly:

Scientists in many different disciplines are questioning whether we can adequately explain how the world works by using the machine imagery created in the 17th century, most notably by Sir Isaac Newton. In the machine model, one must understand parts. Things can be taken apart, dissected literally or representationally ... and then put back together without any significant loss ... The Newtonian model of the world is characterized by materialism and reductionism—a focus on things rather than relationships ... The quantum view of reality strikes against most of our notions of reality. Even to scientists, it is admittedly bizarre. But it is a world where relationship is the key determiner of what is observed and of

how particles manifest themselves . . . Many scientists now work with the concept of fields—invisible forces that structure space or behavior (pp. 8–13).

Wheatley goes on to say that, in the new science of quantum physics, physical reality is not just tangible, it is also intangible. Fields are invisible, yet:

[They are the] substance of the universe . . . In organizations, which is the more important influence on behavior—the system or the individual? The quantum world answered that question: It depends . . . What is critical is the relationship created between the person and the setting. That relationship will always be different, will always evoke different potentialities. It all depends on the players and the moment (pp. 34–35).

Teachers and administrators have always known that relationships, often referred to as “politics,” make a great deal of difference—sometimes all of the difference—in what could or could not happen in a building. But since 1980 we have concentrated our energies in schools on “achievement” and “effective teaching strategies.” We used the Newtonian approach to teaching, dissecting it into parts. Yet the most important part of learning seems to be related to relationship, if we listen to the data and the potent realities in the research emerging from the disciplines of biology and physics.

When students who have been in poverty (and have successfully made it into middle class) are asked how they made the journey, the answer nine times out of 10 has to do with a relationship—a teacher, counselor, or coach who made a suggestion or took an interest in them as individuals.

Covey (1989) uses the notion of an emotional bank account to convey the crucial aspects of relationships. He indicates that in all relationships one makes deposits to and withdrawals from the other individual in that relationship. The chart on the next page lists some of these deposits and withdrawals.

The first step to creating relationships with students and adults is to make the deposits that are the basis of relationships. Relationships always begin as one individual to another. First and foremost in all relationships with students is the relationship between each teacher and student, then between each

DEPOSITS	WITHDRAWALS
Seek first to understand	Seek first to be understood
Keeping promises	Breaking promises
Kindnesses, courtesies	Unkindnesses, discourtesies
Clarifying expectations	Violating expectations
Loyalty to the absent	Disloyalty, duplicity
Apologies	Pride, conceit, arrogance
Open to feedback	Rejecting feedback

Adapted from Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

student and each administrator, and finally, among all of the players, including student-to-student relationships.

What, then, is meant by relationship? (Should students become my personal friends? Should I go out with them?) A successful relationship occurs when emotional deposits are made to the student, emotional withdrawals are avoided, and students are respected. Are there boundaries to the relationship? Absolutely—and that is what is meant by clarifying expectations. But to honor students as human beings worthy of respect and care is to establish a relationship that will provide for enhanced learning.

What are the deposits and withdrawals with regard to students and adults from poverty? (See chart on next page.) By understanding deposits that are valued by students from poverty, the relationship is stronger.

How does an organization or school create—and build—relationships? Through support systems, through caring about students, by promoting student achievement, by being role models, by insisting upon successful behaviors for school. *Support systems are simply networks of relationships.*

Will creating healthy relationships with students make all students successful? No. But if we make a difference for 5% more of our students the

DEPOSITS MADE TO INDIVIDUAL IN POVERTY	WITHDRAWALS MADE FROM INDIVIDUAL IN POVERTY
Appreciation for humor and entertainment provided by the individual	Put-downs or sarcasm about the humor or the individual
Acceptance of what the individual cannot say about a person or situation	Insistence and demands for full explanation about a person or situation
Respect for the demands and priorities of relationships	Insistence on the middle-class view of relationships
Using the adult voice	Using the parent voice
Assisting with goal-setting	Telling the individual his/her goals
Identifying options related to available resources	Making judgments on the value and availability of resources
Understanding the importance of personal freedom, speech, and individual personality	Assigning pejorative character traits to the individual

first year and 5% more each year thereafter, we will have progressed considerably from where we are right now.

In the final analysis, as one looks back on a teaching career, it is the relationships one remembers.

WHAT DOES THIS INFORMATION MEAN IN THE SCHOOL OR WORK SETTING?

- For students and adults from poverty, the primary motivation for their success will be in their relationships.
- If your school or work setting presently affords few opportunities for building relationships, find ways to establish natural connections that will enable this vital resource to take root and grow.