

# Isolation to Connection: A Challenge For Any High Performing Team

I have always been a people watcher, and in the last half of my life have worked to improve my capacity to connect with others. I can easily play the hermit and go into isolation, be there for days without concern. I did a 10-day Vipassana meditation retreat, one of the most challenging things I have done in my life, but it was a physical challenge for me whereas many others reported silence, not talking and not connecting with others, as really difficult. I could have maintained the silence and my own space much longer. Yet, I do like people. It takes me time to engage with others. So I write this piece with a strong understanding of the enjoyment and importance, for some, of having and maintaining personal space.

For some time I have held a heightened awareness of the generally isolationist ways of people travelling to work on buses, ferries, or walking, and the different sense of what is going on for them. Of course, much of this is my fantasy of what is happening, albeit tempered by a lifetime of experience.

I am sitting near the front of the morning commuter bus, facing the back, and I notice the steely expressionless faces of my fellow passengers. Some stare ahead, eyes fixed, blank, hardly a movement. Others have ear pieces and are likely listening to something, eyes closed. One or two may catch my gaze as I look around the bus.



*Team connecting productively with each other*

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## Abstract

*For a team to be high-performing, the individuals need to overcome a natural desire for isolation, and connect and engage with other team members in a trusting environment. This requires us to recognise and attend to the process of “warm up” that occurs between people.*

## Keywords

Connection, engagement, isolation, team coaching, team development, warm up

## First Published

30 October 2015

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Eyes may meet but there is rarely acknowledgement or warmth.

I am walking along the sidewalk as people pass me going the other way to catch the ferry. I greet with a friendly (in my world) “Hello” or “Giddyay”. Many maintain their disconnection, their minds somewhere else, or at least refusing to be where I am. Some appear wary of, even annoyed at, the stranger intruding on their space. There are a few that respond, some even warmly.

I liked the movie “Patch Adams” from the moment I first watched it. One of my favourite parts is where Patch is performing a social experiment, finding novel and exuberant ways of inserting himself into the space of others, all with the intent of eliciting a smile and some warmth and connection. I am not attempting to emulate Patch. His experiment does highlight what is a fairly significant aspect of the human condition, the isolating and detached way we spend much of our time.

Imagine how different the world would be if connection and warmth were the norm. Trust would be the underpinning basis when meeting others. Warmth and generosity of soul would be abundant. Perhaps you have noticed that when you truly connect with someone else there is joy, satisfaction and a sense of fulfilment. It would be fantastic living in a world where such richness were more readily available.

Irrespective of your reaction to the above “wondering”, this isolationist phenomena has real impact on how we work and function in different social settings, including within teams. Whenever a group comes together there is a necessary process of “warming up” individually and as a group, to enable us to become available to ourselves and those around us. There is a necessary unpacking of the distrusts or intrusions we experience as we engage with others, unwrapping our protections. It is as this process is addressed that the real work of being together advances. In fact, the “real work” of the group often is about establishing and working in meaningful connection. Attending to the culture or way of being together as a group assists the capacity of the group

to come together effectively. Common understanding of the way in which decisions are made, conflict will be resolved, specific responsibilities, all assist ongoing capacity of the group to come together as a team. The more fully the culture is addressed and consistently honoured, the easier it is for those within the team to arrive and engage, trust they will be safe and allow themselves to express themselves and contribute fully.

In my work as a group facilitator I know I must address the warm up of the group so the intended work can move forward. As a project manager I know my team will coalesce and function more effectively if they collectively understand and adopt a team culture that makes sense to them, and they see it lived and honoured. As a team coach, this is one of the areas I look for as part of ensuring a team is able to be high performing.

The challenge is to transform all these people on buses, ferries, private cars and however else they travel in isolation into connected, trusting and generous group participants and team members, ready and able to contribute fully. This includes ourselves. Are you up for that challenge?

[Contact Stephen](#) if you'd like support in developing the performance of your team.

***For more information related to themes in this article, refer to chapter 2 (Life is a Journey ... Enjoy It) of: Harrison, S. G. (2012). [Appreciate the Fog: Embrace Change with Power and Purpose](#). Auckland, New Zealand: Xlibris Corporation.***

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