

*"If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten we belong to each other." – Mother Theresa*

### 4 Ways to Make Meaningful Human Connections with Colleagues

By Dawn Ellison, MD, CPC

"I cannot do one more thing."

I hear this from many of my colleagues as well as coaching clients. We were overscheduled, taking care of everyone except ourselves before COVID happened and now have even more piled on our plates. Now we are also juggling distant learning, remote visits, concerns for our own health and a need to make sure the vulnerable in our community stay safe and connected.



When I coach clients they never start with, "I need to learn how to take care of myself." They describe the stresses at work, then the stresses at home and when I ask how they are doing with self-care, they laugh. "What self-care?" is a common response. We are probably the most resilient 'tribe' on the planet. Like the ship at sea in the storm, perfectly designed to float; we are perfectly trained to care for patients in this pandemic AND, like the ship, there are things we need to do to stay afloat! This pandemic has opened many people's eyes to the fact that even 'we' need others sometimes.

But who understands what we are going through? Who understands what it is like to need to wear PPE and lose the connection created with smiles? Who understands the anxiety of not knowing who could be infected with the virus and pass it on to you? Who understands the concern you have of passing it on to your family? Who understands how frustrating it is to see unmasked shoppers at the grocery store? Who understands what it is like to see patients sick with coronavirus that you cannot save? Who understands the ambiguity you feel about isolating yourself from the ones you love? Who understands how lonely it can be on the frontline? Who understands what it is to be the forgotten heroes?

#### Your colleagues understand.

Vivek Murthy, former surgeon general, in his book, "Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World<sup>1</sup>" makes the argument that human connection is as important as vaccines and ventilators are to recovery. He has four suggestions:

- 1. Spend time each day with the people you love.** Be intentional about connecting daily with the people you love. Your support of them will feed you. Compassion lights up the pleasure center in our brains. Call, text, use apps such as Facetime, Zoom, Facebook, or Marco Polo, or whatever communication method works for you. Work to maintain these important connections.
- 2. Be fully attentive with people.** Meet other people where they are and listen to understand. Active listening helps both you and them connect on a deeper level. Learn to be better together and together better.
- 3. Embrace solitude.** When you are alone, enjoy your own company. Use a mindset of gratitude, compassion, acceptance, meaning and forgiveness to occupy your thoughts rather than let your default mode fill you with concerns and anxieties. Do what brings you joy.

**4. Help and be helped.** Connect with your colleagues who understand what you are going through. Be vulnerable, compassionate and deepen the relationships with those who you spend so many of your waking hours. Acts of kindness are a great way to connect with those around you.

It is imperative that we connect with each other during these stressful times and advances in technology have made it easier to do so.

- Reflect and ask yourself: Who do you know who would benefit from your connecting with them today? Who cares about you that you would like to hear from?
- Take action: Call them. Could you start a virtual social hour? Set up a virtual coffee time chat? Book Club? Journal Club?

Commit to connect today and thrive beyond the pandemic.

## We Can Help

As part of your Well Being Resources from VITAL WorkLife, you have access to peer coaching, face-to-face or virtual counseling and in-the-moment behavioral health support. These powerful, confidential resources can offer you a place and sense of connection. Trained counselors and coaches can work with you to build strategies to make meaningful connections in your daily life.

Peer Coaches are trained medical professionals and certified coaches who come from a variety of specialty areas so they truly understand your experiences and what you are going through.

Get started today by contacting VITAL WorkLife at **877.731.3949** or through the **VITAL WorkLife App**.

### Dawn Ellison, MD

Dr. Dawn Ellison has been a Physician Peer Coach with VITAL WorkLife since 2011. She draws from her 26 plus years of Emergency Medicine practice leading teams in critical situations and finessing outstanding care for patients in a complex medical climate to help healthcare providers and executives practice and lead thoughtfully, transparently and deliberately. For more information on Dr. Ellison, visit her website:

<https://www.influencinghealthcare.com/>



Sources:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.amazon.com/Together-Connection-Performance-Greater-Happiness/dp/0062913298>