

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE BUSINESSES

by Ned Hallowell

Nonprofits and socially responsible businesses contend with many disadvantages and obstacles as they work to survive and prosper in today's world. They can claim one distinct advantage, however: the trust of the general public.

Today many citizens have lost respect for Wall Street and Big Business, and deep cynicism has set in as citizens watch such economic debacles as Enron and the near collapse of the financial system. Many feel too large a percentage of wealth has accrued to those who do not deserve it, while those who add value to this world work for comparatively low wages in an increasingly insecure environment.

This climate of mistrust has created an opportunity for nonprofits and socially responsible businesses to attract talent they previously may have lost. They have the opportunity to leverage the power not of capital but of connection.

In my new book, *Shine: Using Brain Science to Bring Out the Best in Your People* (Harvard Business School Press), I define and discuss the unsurpassed power of connection to bring out the best in people at work. By connection I do not mean access to the Internet. I mean the feeling of being an integral part of something larger than oneself, the feeling of collectively pursuing a worthwhile goal and doing work that surpasses personal gain.

While the power of connection has always fueled superior performance, in today's world it is more important than ever to recognize and capture it. We live in a paradox: although we are more connected electronically than ever before, we grow more disconnected interpersonally each day. In the workplace, what I call the "human moment"—face-to-face interaction—has given way to a wide variety of electronic moments. Our electronic communications certainly bless us with unprecedented advantages, but they carry hidden risks, not the least of which is the loss of the force of connection, of personal involvement, of loyalty, devotion, inspiration, and dedication to the team and the mission. In my practice as a psychiatrist and in my work

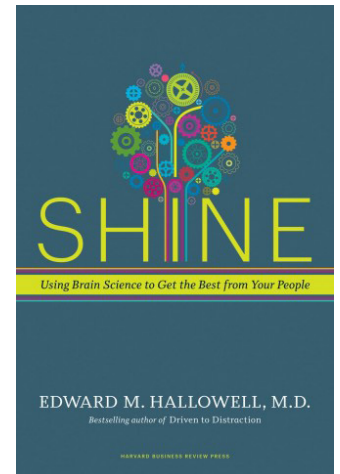
as a consultant to businesses, I hear many people complain of the pressures of being asked to do more with less, the pressures of overloaded circuits, the pressures imposed by economic uncertainty and constant change. People are looking for a mooring, some point of connection by which they can stabilize their work lives and find the extra energy to go the extra miles.

The best source of such stability and energy is the force of connection. When people buy into a mission, they catapult themselves into another realm of action. They access parts of their brains that otherwise lie dormant. They bring into the workplace the force of positive emotion, fed by the deeper centers of the brain. In disconnected work environments, these parts of the brain either show low activity or they light up in fear and anger and shanghai the higher, creative centers in the cerebral cortex. I devote much of my book to describing how the enlightened manager can create a positively connected atmosphere that fosters superior performance.

Given the myriad obstacles modern organizations face, creating such an atmosphere is often difficult. Nonprofits and socially responsible businesses, however, share an advantage in that they expressly commit to a mission. This is far from trivial, far from singing "Kumbayah." As companies like SAS and Google have proven, creating a positively connected environment can lead to enormous profit and growth. If this is true in the for-profit sector, how much truer is it in the nonprofit one?

Taking advantage of the power of connection requires only a commitment to do so. Emotional connection is infinite in supply and free of charge. Yes, setting it up takes some money, but far less money than replacing the people who leave because it is missing.

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