



# **Energize Your Workplace**

How to Create and Sustain  
High-Quality Connections  
at Work

Jane E. Dutton

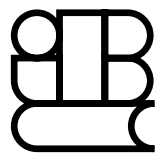


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# Executive Summary



**E**nergy—the sense of being eager to act and capable of action—is a critical, limited, but renewable resource that enables excellence in individuals and organizations. Without effective means for generating and replenishing the energy of individuals in the workplace, no organization can ever be truly great.

Managers and leaders can make a profound difference in activating and renewing energy by building and sustaining high-quality connections with coworkers, bosses, subordinates, customers—anyone with whom they have contact at work. High-quality connections are marked by mutual positive regard, trust, and active engagement. They are connections in which people literally feel more alive and vibrant. They can be created in an instant—in a conversation, an e-mail exchange, or a meeting—and their effects can be powerful and long-lasting. High-quality connections contribute substantially to individuals' well-being and work performance. They also contribute significantly to an organization's capacity for collaboration, coordination, learning, and adaptation, as well as its ability to keep people committed and loyal.

Managers and leaders shape possibilities for energy in connection through two important means: how they interact

with others and how they design and construct the contexts in which others interact. This book guides managers through both possibilities and offers concrete action suggestions for building these vitalizing connections.

Chapter One introduces the idea of connection quality and documents the far-reaching consequences of high- and low-quality connections for both individuals and organizations. The next three chapters each describe a pathway to building high-quality connections. Chapter Two focuses on respectful engagement and identifies a range of strategies for interacting in ways that convey messages of value and worth. Chapter Three focuses on task enabling as a potent set of strategies for taking actions that help another person to succeed and perform effectively. Chapter Four focuses on trust and details how managers build trust both by what they say and do and by what they refrain from saying and doing.

Management of connection quality also involves dealing constructively with low-quality connections that corrode individuals' sense of worth, competence, and value. These corrosive connections are all too prevalent in work organizations, and they leave major damage in their wake both for individuals and for the organization as a whole. Chapter Five identifies a range of strategies for reducing the damage of corrosive connections, and in some cases, transforming them into energy-producing as opposed to energy-depleting connections.

Chapter Six tackles the creation and design of contexts in which high-quality connections flourish. It examines key features of organizational context that influence the quality of connections, from organizational values to the design of physical space. The examination of these features reveals strategies managers and leaders can deploy to improve the climate for high-quality connections in their work group, department, unit, or organization.



Although this book is based squarely on research, it is written to be a practical guide. Each chapter provides abundant examples, detailed descriptions of actions to take, and assessments and other tools to help readers evaluate the quality of the connections in their workplace and take immediate steps to vitalize their work environment through the transformative power of high-quality connections.





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#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Dutton, Jane E.

Energize your workplace: how to create and sustain high-quality connections at work/Jane E. Dutton.—1st ed.

p. cm.—(University of Michigan Business School management series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7879-5622-8 (alk. paper)

1. Reengineering (Management). 2. Communication in organizations.  
3. Organizational change. 4. Management. I. Title. II. Series.

HD58.87.D885 2003

658.4'063—dc21

2003010517

Printed in the United States of America

FIRST EDITION

*HB Printing* 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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To my parents, Kate and George Dutton

# Series Foreword



Welcome to the University of Michigan Business School Management Series. The books in this series address the most urgent problems facing business today. The series is part of a larger initiative at the University of Michigan Business School (UMBS) that ties together a range of efforts to create and share knowledge through conferences, survey research, interactive and distance training, print publications, and news media.

It is just this type of broad-based initiative that sparked my love affair with UMBS in 1984. From the day I arrived I was enamored with the quality of the research, the quality of the MBA program, and the quality of the Executive Education Center. Here was a business school committed to new lines of research, new ways of teaching, and the practical application of ideas. It was a place where innovative thinking could result in tangible outcomes.

The UMBS Management Series is one very important outcome, and it has an interesting history. It turns out that every year five thousand participants in our executive program fill out a marketing survey in which they write statements indicating



the most important problems they face. One day Lucy Chin, one of our administrators, handed me a document containing all these statements. A content analysis of the data resulted in a list of forty-five pressing problems. The topics ranged from growing a company to managing personal stress. The list covered a wide territory, and I started to see its potential. People in organizations tend to be driven by a very traditional set of problems, but the solutions evolve. I went to my friends at Jossey-Bass to discuss a publishing project. The discussion eventually grew into the University of Michigan Business School Management Series—*Innovative Solutions to the Pressing Problems of Business*.

The books are independent of each other, but collectively they create a comprehensive set of management tools that cut across all the functional areas of business—from strategy to human resources to finance, accounting, and operations. They draw on the interdisciplinary research of the Michigan faculty. Yet each book is written so a serious manager can read it quickly and act immediately. I think you will find that they are books that will make a significant difference to you and your organization.

*Robert E. Quinn, Consulting Editor  
M.E. Tracy Distinguished Professor  
University of Michigan Business School*



# Preface



**M**y colleague Bob Quinn often knows things before I do. He had a strong inkling before I even dreamed of writing a book that I had something to say about energy and organizations. He challenged me to take what I know about building high-quality connections in organizations and use it to crack open a fundamental problem that all businesses face: how can leaders and managers produce energy and vitality as critical and renewable resources that make organizations and the people within them great?

This book is the result of this challenge. Abundant research suggests that a fundamental key to increasing energy in the workplace, and thereby increasing the effectiveness of both individuals and organizations, is the building of high-quality connections—ties between people marked by mutual regard, trust, and active engagement. A focus on high-quality connections and their energy-generating capabilities shows how small actions—such as respectful engagement with another person—can transform the energy possibilities in both people. It also highlights the role of managers like you in serving as role models and in



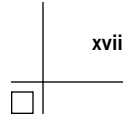
designing contexts that enable these kinds of energy-generating connections to flourish.

The book stands on a solid foundation of research, but it is intended to be practical and useful, applicable to the everyday choices you make about how you interact with others. It offers tools for taking stock of your current connecting practices, and it invites you to consider alternative strategies that will better energize your workplace. It also asks you to consider how key features of the organizational context work to enhance or diminish the likelihood of high-quality connections. A wealth of examples illustrate the profound differences you can make in generating connections that build vitality and energy for yourself and for those you interact with at work—whether those persons are bosses, subordinates, customers, suppliers, or coworkers.

### ■ The Goals of This Book

When I say I am writing a book on energizing your workplace, people resonate. Very often they have a gut level reaction that registers, yes, I have experiences at work all the time that affect my energy and the energy of those around me. However, most of the stories they tell me are of connections that sap and deplete energy. I call these kinds of connections *corrosive*. They are all too prevalent in the workplace. Stories of organizations that drain and deaden are far more frequent than stories about organizations that revitalize and enliven. This reality has inspired me to set four goals for this book.

First, I want managers to seriously consider energy as a critical, limited, but renewable resource that enables excellence in individuals and organizations. Without effective means for generating and replenishing the energy of individuals in the workplace, no organization can ever be truly great. Further, no organization can retain the people it really wants to retain and have them achieve the levels of excellence they desire.



Second, I want managers to take their role as energy creators or energy depleters seriously. I also want them to see new possibilities for enlivening their workplace through building and enabling high-quality connections. This means having a perspective on how their everyday behaviors and their actions in designing the organizational context can create and replenish energy, contributing to all kinds of important outcomes, including employees' physical and psychological health, task engagement, learning, cooperation, coordination, attachment, and overall effectiveness.

Third, I want managers to have better and more abundant strategies for dealing with corrosive connections at work. Although low-quality connections infect most organizations, it's rare for anyone to have training or practice in how to deal with them constructively or coach others to do so.

Fourth, I hope this book convinces managers of the important connection between the quality of the connections they have at work and their overall well-being. The fact is that most of us spend a good percentage of our waking hours at our workplaces. In those places, we either are enlivened or deadened through the quality of the connections that we have with others. In the short run, these effects show up in performance and other organizationally relevant outcomes. In the long run, they leave lasting traces on our bodies and health. My greatest hope is that the managers who read this book will practice new ways of infusing vitality into the workplace by not only reducing corrosive connections but also increasing the frequency and vibrancy of high-quality connections. Their own lives depend on it.

## ■ Acknowledgments

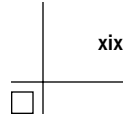
I thank Bob Quinn for his initial challenge and the opportunity to meet the challenge through the writing of this book. Bob sees possibilities that other people do not dare to imagine, and he



makes them happen. The UMBS Management Series is the end product of his vision in partnership with the Jossey-Bass team. I have benefited greatly from their creative vision and from the enabling and fine editing from John Bergez. I thank them all for their wonderful support in making this book happen.

No book is ever done alone. This book, in particular, was conceived jointly with Robert Holmes at the University of Michigan, who lives the content of this book on a daily basis. I benefited greatly from his mentorship and partnership in the initial structuring and writing. I hope he is pleased with the final product. Other University of Michigan staff members have also been instrumental in supporting the creation of this book. I would like to thank Maureen Burns, Mary Ceccanese, Dianne Haft, Sally Johnson, Paula Kopka, and Cynthia Shaw for their inspiration and instrumental help.

Many colleagues and both former and current students were invaluable in the book's creation. Jean Bartunek, Joyce Fletcher, Peter Frost, Christine Pearson, and Steve Stumpf read various drafts and offered wonderful insights and suggestions. Peter Frost provided significant encouragement through the entire journey of writing this book. Susan Bernstein and Laura Atlantis are two former MBA students who left lasting positive imprints on the book's content and structure. Steve Mondry, a former undergraduate student also provided useful feedback and examples. My faculty colleagues at the University of Michigan—Sue Ashford, Wayne Baker, Kim Cameron, Paula Caproni, Michael Cohen, Martha Feldman, Jane Hassinger, Maggie Lampert, Kim Leary, Bob Quinn, Gretchen Spreitzer, Kathie Sutcliffe, Jim Walsh, Karl Weick, Janet Weiss, Mayer Zald—are treasures who continuously enrich my work. My more distant colleagues—David Cooperrider, Kenneth Gergen, Connie Gersick, Jody Hoffer Gittel, Mary Ann Glynn, Karen Golden-Biddle, Hermi Ibarra, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Sharon Lobel, Sally Maitlis, Joshua Margolis, Joanne Martin, Debra



Meyerson, Leslie Perlow, Anat Rafaeli, Huggy Rao, Brian Uzzi, Joe White—were also important inspirations. Former and current doctoral students contributed immensely to this book. The research done with Gelaye Debebe and Amy Wrzesniewski inspired the book's core thesis. For insightful discussions about high quality connections that gave me confidence to write from this perspective, I thank Caroline Bartel, Emily Heaphy, Jason Kanov, Katherine Lawrence, Jacoba Lilius, Regina O'Neill, Sandy Piderit, Ryan Quinn, Seung-Yoon Rhee, Laura Morgan Roberts, Nancy Rothbard, Markus Vodosek, Tim Vogus, Michele Williams, Monica Worline, and Joana Young. Cheryl Baker, Claudia Cohen, Anne Dutton Keesor, Alisa Miller, and Amy Saunders are friends and family who generously helped along the way. The MBA students in my "Managing Professional Relationships" class brought these ideas to life.

I also want to express my appreciation to the William Russell Kelly Chair, which has provided important financial support for me and my work, and to the University of Michigan Business School, which has proved to be a great learning, teaching, and researching environment.

To my husband, Lloyd (Lance) Sandelands, and to my daughters, Cara and Emily Sandelands: you three help me to know fully the meaning and significance of high-quality connections. Thank you for your unwavering support and inspiration during the writing of this book.

*May 2003*  
*Ann Arbor, Michigan*

Jane E. Dutton



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