

Are You *Connected* with Your Co-workers?

In January 2013, Boston Celtics star Rajon Rondo went down with a blown knee, which ended his season. Without their superstar, the team was basically written off. As a Fox Sports columnist decreed, “These Celtics are done!” But then something very unexpected happened – the Celtics won their next six games convincingly and edged their way back into the Eastern Division playoffs! **How could this happen?**



Four years earlier, US Airways Flight 1549 departed LaGuardia Airport and struck a flock of birds disabling both engines. Captain Chesley Sullenberger determined his only option was to ditch in the Hudson River. He initially feared that some of the 146 passengers would panic and create dangerous chaos in the cabin. But then something very unexpected happened – everyone remained silent, braced for impact and were safely evacuated from the aircraft. **How could this happen?**



Social scientists have a possible answer. In the face of a threatening event, individuals are often able to set aside their egos and function at a higher level as a cohesive unit. Suddenly, the shared challenge becomes more important than personal agendas. This is known as achieving **connectivity** and is marked by four observable behaviors:

- **Harmonizing:** It’s easy and all too common to be critical of those who are different. However, connectivity occurs when we seize upon those differences to form a mosaic of competence and strength.
- **Encouraging:** It may be tempting to ignore a teammate who appears to be a little “down” but connectivity occurs when one reaches out to lift that person up. The Flight 1549 passengers reported that several were heard to utter encouraging words to the frightened strangers sitting beside them.
- **Collaborating:** Hiding in one’s silo is easy. Figuring out how to work synergistically with others involves risk. But when connectivity occurs, the outcome typically exceeds anything that one individual could ever achieve.
- **Trusting:** The Celtics were able to look beyond the naysayers and develop confidence in one another’s skills in spite of the loss of their superstar.

Can connectivity be developed in **your** work unit? The answer is obviously yes. If everyone (or most everyone) makes even a small effort to harmonize, encourage, collaborate and trust, the phenomenon known as a “tipping point” may well occur – a situation in which the atmosphere seems noticeably improved. Considering that we spend an average of 2,000 hours per year with our co-workers, it certainly seems worth the effort!