

Meaningful Connection: Others' Experiences

Below are some examples of students' reflections from doing this exercise as part of my full [leadership course](#). They wrote these reflections not for the rest of the world, but to share as part of the course's online forum. I consider them an inside view on the learning experience for the course to help guide your practice.

"The process of implementing the leadership skills I've learned throughout this semester and into my everyday life has been so valuable. The exercises, such as: meaningful connections, unwanted beliefs, avoiding imposing values, etc. developed a lot of great networking relationships as well as created opportunities for me to grow as a student."

It was a quick elevator ride, probably about a minute, but it was enough time for us to share a meaningful conversation and so now when I see him I feel like I know him much better, and I hope (think) he feels the same. After that experience, I tried with a few others: two students I sit next to in different classes, a dog walker I see in the park every morning while I'm walking with my dog, and the lady who works at the front desk at my dog's day care. All in all, I definitely think that even though this exercise create some "awkward" or "nervous" emotions, it was totally worth it and extremely telling. I realized that **you can go years of seeing the same person but not really know them. Life is so much more enriching when you make these meaningful connections and learn more about those around you** and vise versa.

"I think that in New York, there is not a lot of meaningful conversation because everyone is in such a hurry. The culture is too fast-paced. People do not stop on the street to ask you how you are or inquire about you. That is just not part of the culture of being a resident of New York City.

This exercise allowed me to stop and reflect on people's passions that they expressed through conversation. When doing this exercise, I enjoyed asking people why they do things because it helped me understand them better and allowed me to create a closer connection to them."

"I was delightfully surprised at how naturally this script was able to flow into a conversation. I found myself at one moment in the middle of a casual conversation with a friend on the subway when I noticed that she had mentioned she was in a play in high school. I tried to slip in the questions/responses from the script and discovered that she has a very strong passion for acting, which turns out to be why she is interested in studying production. [...] I felt like it was a good example of how **even if you think you**

know someone well, you may have missed some key aspects to who they are simply by never asking the right questions.”

“I definitely found the meaningful connection technique to be effective at provoking conversation and at making others feel that they can be honest in what they say to me. I believe that this has a lot to do with the power of the word “passion,” which is used in the script as opposed to “interests” or “hobbies.” Passion implies something that goes deeper than whatever goes on a resume — asking about someone’s passion is akin to asking them about what they care most, and given how infrequently many people discuss such a topic, it catches many people off guard. In performing this task, **I was often surprised by how emotional many people, even my friends, became when I asked my question. Some would remain almost speechless while they tried to contemplate their answer, and their tone and mood clearly changed to something more joyous, hopeful, and inspired.** It often seems like they felt good explaining their passions, and further prompting created interesting and thought-provoking conversations; though seem people were a bit uncomfortable discussing the topic and were more interested in why I would want to know about their passions than anything else. Encounters that became somewhat defensive reminded me of the vulnerability that people can feel when being asked about their passions and what motivates them.”

“This was a great exercise to get me thinking about how to make my daily interacts impactful and memorable. Generally, I just go through the motions of a conversation. **For this exercise, you really have to listen.** That is key in leadership, and I really had to work on my listening skills this week. So much information is constantly being thrown at me that a lot of things tend to go in one ear and out the other. Making meaningful connections forced me to take a step back and digest. In the digital age, we are so wrapped up in para-social connections, and it becomes strenuous to make face-to-face encounters matter. I am usually fine with receiving the bare minimum in a conversation in which you do not get to know the person—more of a surface understanding.

I believe that I got to know a lot of people—even the ones that I am close with—much better this week. The word “passion” sparks a desire in people to talk because it gets to the core of their being. Why are we the way that we are? Also, when you pick up on others’ passions and seem interested, they notice, and it gives them confidence to dive deep into the exercise. Throughout the week, I had to remind myself to not insert my own experiences because that takes away from the purpose of the exercise. **I kind of had to transition from selfish to selfless. This class is no longer about developing myself, but also helping others develop themselves.”**

“When I started following the script I noticed even deeper, stronger connections were being made much faster. [...] this exercise is incredibly valuable and I will continue to practice and master it throughout my life.”

“I had a phone interview on Wednesday for an internship that I am very interested in. For this particular organization, I knew that my interviewer and I would have some similar interests but I wanted to try sticking to the script so that I could add more meaning to our conversation overall. And, I think that it worked! **The interview went really well and we both were excited about what the other was talking about.** [...] This was the perfect week to do this exercise! I am excited to use it in the future.”

“I would often ask people, “What do you care about?”, or, “What do you like to do?”. However, I realized that the wording of my questions didn’t seem to get down to what I really wanted to say which was, “What is your passion?”.

With this exercise, I **realized that it’s incredibly fast and simple to just jump right into a meaningful and insightful conversation without having to go through a series of obligated small talk.** By directly asking people what their passions are, they begin to unfold themselves with their personal stories that usually have a starting point that ends up with their life thus far, usually leading them to project/hope what will happen next.”

“I was so happy to see this as an exercise! **I loved how easy it was to implement this exercise into my everyday life, even while hanging out with friends.** It was really useful to find out what my friends’ dreams and aspirations were based on the script because the wording provides an open ended conversation. I really enjoyed this exercise because not only is this so simple, but it really makes a large difference on how people perceive you. By developing a persona of being really genuine and personable, people treat you differently. I noticed this quickly when I was introduced to mutual friends this past weekend, and I realized that people will open up about their personal lives if they are asked the right questions—even if you just met them. **My conversations were much more unique versus your usual small talk. I think I made a much better impression compared to asking superficial questions by sticking with the script!** Even over the school week when I implemented the exercise while waiting for a professor with some classmates I provided an opportunity for my classmates to get to know each other. I think this is a very important skill, especially when networking and I’m so happy how natural it was for me to follow the script.”

“This is my favorite exercise now. I found it very helpful. Coincidentally, I had a professional networking event on Tuesday night, which was right after our Monday class.”

"I really like the idea of asking people's passions. This does seem to be a very rare question and it often catches everyone by surprise. In fact, most people do not have an answer right away and the question requires them to think about the answer on the spot. This creates a very interesting dynamic and chemistry between us."

"Creating meaningful connections is one of the most important things in building relationships."

Now practice!

Still want to read more? Okay, here are a few testimonials from students about my [online leadership course](#), specifying their results from this exercise.

Testimonials

“This class embodied the perfect balance between in-class work and real-world exercises. I think NYU lacks a great deal in that area! ... As a result of what I learned from the course, I have been able to have wonderful interview experiences and network effortlessly. I use to think that majority of leading involved delegating task, but boy was I wrong. I learned that most of what consist of being a leader was connecting with people, being able to tap in their innate abilities, and get the job the in the best way possible.”

“I’ve realized that even as an intern, I was able to lead my own colleagues and supervisors into helping me land my first out of college job by getting them to offer me a position at the company. Without this course and the techniques/exercises you taught us, I don’t think I would have been able to seize every leadership opportunity and successfully interact with my bosses and colleagues to the point where they actually offered me a job. I really want to thank you for all the knowledge I’ve gained from this course, it turned out to be one of the most useful and meaningful classes I’ve taken at NYU and challenged me to reconsider and re-define my understanding of true leadership.”

“Absolutely. I would recommend this course not just to peers, but anyone interested in leadership. Honestly, even if you don’t care about being a leader, this is the kind of class which can help anyone grow as a person, not only bettering themselves in terms of leadership, but also in terms of self actualization. The social skills you learn in this class have never been taught to me in an academic environment.”