



Stanford eCorner

How Proximity Affects Relationships

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Proximity plays a major role in helping individuals to form instant connections with others, says bestselling author Ori Brafman. In this clip, Brafman reveals how distance affects the building of relationships, citing an interesting study of college dormitory residents at MIT. He also demonstrates the power of proximity on team dynamics with an interactive demonstration of behavior in a meeting environment.



Transcript

And there's this weird thing going on this MIT dorm. This isn't the actual dorm but it was shaped like this. They tore it down; it was a U-shape dorm. And here is the mystery. Their residents throughout the dorm, they asked them, "How many people are you really friendly with?" And the residents in the middle have a ton of friends, and the residents living in the edge of the dorm had no friends whatsoever. So the first guess, you'd say, "Well, why is that?" It might be pretty simple, right? If you're kind of a loner, you live at the edge of the dorm. Well, the housing assignments were actually random. So they really sat and said, "Well, what could it actually be?" And what it came down to was how physically close you live to people. And specifically when they ask people, "Who is your best friend in the school, at MIT? Forty percent of the people said that it was their next door neighbor. And their next door neighbor, the place between two doors was distance of 19 feet.

And something really weird happens when you go to the person who lives the next door down. Thirty eight feet - all of a sudden, the chances of people hitting it off, of making the connection, goes down by half. You go down another 19 feet, it goes down by half again. It's exponential. It's not linear. Researchers of Bell Lab asked a company-it was a research company-about who you're most likely to collaborate with, regardless of interest in the field or anything like that or education. And in scientific environment, people are much more likely to collaborate with people who work exactly right next to them, 10.3%. When you went down to the other side of the hallway, it could be the same department, it could be people working in the exact same project, the likelihood of them collaborating is 1.9%. You go down to another floor and it's fraction of a percent. You go to different building and is almost no chance of people collaborating.

And think of the implications of that, of when you're having a meeting, do you show up? When you're having a conversation, do you have a virtual conversation or do you do something in person? A study about work meetings found out that the vast majority of the meetings, of what was useful about the meetings, actually happen before and after. Not during because that's when people were able to develop a little bit of trust with each other. So this is a really interesting crowd. Why don't we have a very brief meeting right here. I need six volunteers. This is going to be fun and exciting, I promise. Just either stand up or come on down and I need six people. One, yay. Two, three, four, five, and I think we have six. I want you guys each to grab one of these...

Chair is what they called. And I just want you to sit in a circle. Actually no, sit right here, if you don't mind. Sorry, there's more space. Just actually form a circle. Great, great, great. Perfect. Let's give them an amount of applause. That was fantastic circle, fantastic circle. I'm not going to make you guys actually have a boring meeting because we've been enough of those but I want you to do something.

I want you to lift your arms and about try to touch other person's shoulder. And see they're about, you had to adjust a little

bit but most of you literally sat about arms linked apart. And that's how we sit, like this is a very cultural thing. You can let your arms down. So that's how we sit in United States. Now I want you to do another thing and this is going to feel a weird but it's going to be weird but it's going to be good. I promise. Are you up for it? Yup. So maybe just say, just go around right now and just say your names. Hi, my name is...

Hi, my name is Lauren. Hi, my name is Johnson. I'm Alex. My name is Jay. I'm Hendrick. My name is Gabriel. And why don't I get you guys to literally sit knee to knee, like touching knees. And what I want you to do now, again, very simple. Just tell me what you ate for breakfast today if you had breakfast at all. A banana.

Eggs I don't have breakfast. An apple. Eggs. I had Coco Pops. A question for you guys, how does it feel sitting knee to knee? Other than weird and everyone's breath smells great. It's fun. It's fun? We feel closer and connected to everyone. Really? Yeah. We're friends, right? I don't know if you can see them from here. I don't know if you can see their faces.

There's a little bit of... They're smiling more. And notice, and I'm going to pick on you, notice his body language now as it was before. You're kind of leaning in to each other. And thank you. This is the meeting. You did a fantastic job. Thank you. These last few feet really make a difference but these last few inches make a whole lot of difference.