

Do I C.A.R.E.?

By Steve Aduddell, Leadership Coach

On a beautiful winter day in Nashville, I found myself sitting in a hotel lobby, enjoying my coffee. This morning was particularly busy with lots of people coming and going. I was taking it all in, a bystander for the most part, just watching, listening and smiling to myself as I observed.

As I made my way over to the counter, a man said, “Morning, Sir.” Looking back and smiling, I responded with, “Good morning. How are you”? He looked pretty disheveled and was wearing a coat heavier than seemed necessary. “Doing fine”, he said. I expected him to ask for a few bucks for breakfast, but instead, our pleasant conversation simply continued.

“Are you from around here?”, I asked. “Born and raised here in Nashville. Lived here all my life,” he proudly said. As we talked, I discovered he had recently been released from prison, was living in government subsidized housing, and was doing day labor. Through that conversation, I was reminded of how important it is to connect, to listen, to provide encouragement...because we often forget just how much people need it. Conversations matter.

Why am I telling you all this, what does it have to do with leadership skills and why does it even matter? It matters because leadership is all about influence, and we express that influence through the ways we connect.

People are drawn to sincerity, to those who care, and are willing to engage in conversations. I know, as I’ve had more than a few significant conversations in my life that have changed the trajectory of my future or have at least given me a reason to get up and get moving again.

Those conversations were meaningful, truthful, vulnerable and took courage to engage in. I’ve come to believe that “changing the world” often happens one conversation, smile or encouragement at a time. The energy expressed when we sincerely care for someone else radiates beyond that personal touch, often from one person to another. It’s truly contagious and magnetic. Conversations really do matter.

Micah, a young Native American woman, told me about her dad abandoning the family when she was a child and how she is now trying to rekindle a fragile relationship with him. She is being courageous in her efforts, and her words and warmth inspired me. Conversations inspire courage.

Matt’s dad was born and still lives in Taiwan. Matt is getting his college education here in the U.S. and will be travelling back to Taiwan. “I would like to introduce you to my dad when he comes for a visit” Matt said to me. “I would love to meet him and would be honored,” I said. He greets me warmly and sincerely by name every time we see each other as we shake hands and hug. Conversations change things.

Xavier, a young bartender, tells me of his struggles with addiction over the course of three conversations. He made an effort to connect with me, to make me feel comfortable, and then showed

up to connect in a vulnerable and honest way. His smile drew me in. His words kept me there. Conversations are powerful.

Chris, a soccer player, encouraged me and asked about my life, my kids, who I am. As I answered his questions, he listened intently. He cared. I noticed. When we saw each other again we both remembered the conversation and immediately re-connected, continuing where we left off. Conversations empower.

Today I had the privilege of driving Willie to his doctor's office. A proud, African American, Vietnam Vet who is valiantly fighting cancer. I observe him as he greets the staff with a smile and responds with, "Blessed." when the staff ask how he is. As we wait, he tells me of growing up in rural Mississippi and moving to Oklahoma as a small boy. We talk of our lives growing up and growing older, with many differences and yet also many similarities. As we listen to each other's stories, we feel a bond that expresses our dedication to one another. Conversations give life.

When we have **C**onversations with **A**nother that are **R**eal and **E**mpowering. We show that we **C.A.R.E.**

Frederick Day is his full name. As we continued talking, he teared up and embraced me in a hug. "Move ahead one step at a time, you can do it. I believe in you. I care for you", I encouraged. We shook hands, looked at each other, smiled and walked away from the hotel coffee shop. That conversation mattered. It reminded me of both our differences and our sameness. Show that you **C.A.R.E** more!