

Jacqueline Wiener

**The freedom to live  
fully**  
- the power of natural  
leadership

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"I learn to live in complete openness,  
Trusting that I can deal with whatever  
comes my way.  
If I think about this consciously,  
I put my hands in my lap with open  
palms.  
Initially this feels unnatural.  
Now I know for certain: this is how I  
want to live.  
Relaxed and free."

## Connecting with yourself

“Connection is the reason we are here,  
it gives meaning and purpose to our lives.”

**Brené Brown**

## Connecting with yourself

I was 41 and had been working as a communications advisor for about 20 years. My whole life I'd been passionate about internal communication and later I understood why. I focused on the people in the organisation. I was concerned with involving them in policy, creating support and enthusing and motivating them to join the flow together.

Around the same time, I met someone and I told him about my life. He said that I had been working for a long time and would be working for many years to come. I had never thought about the latter, "you will be working for many years to come". It is interesting how sometimes, a sentence or even one word can be the start of a meaningful change in your life.

I became aware that I wanted something different. I wanted to be closer to people, more focused on behaviour, dynamics and culture in organisations. I wanted to understand why someone who understands or knows that something is needed does not do it or cannot do it. I wanted to learn how a leader creates a successful and connected team. I decided to change course and take a coaching course.

That course taught me a lot about the coaching profession and a lot about myself. I discovered my stumbling blocks, and I learned that my response patterns were not always effective. It held up a mirror on how I tried to keep control over my life. What's more, I became aware that my survival mechanisms, which I thought were 'my saving grace', did not always get me to where I wanted to be. As a coach I developed my own intuitive style.

### Connecting with yourself

This growing connection with myself changed my life. I started to gain more insight into my behaviour and my reactions. By gradually looking, reacting and acting differently and staying true to myself, I began to take small steps forward.



**Connecting with yourself.** It's incredible how many people turn their attention almost exclusively outward. As a student you focus on your studies and on your social life. You want to conquer a place in society, you want to belong. As an adult you focus on work and family, parents, friends, sports and perhaps more studying.

"And when do you take time for yourself?" I ask my coachees. "When I exercise, go out with friends and work." It seems that time for yourself is often interpreted as "doing something for yourself or with others that you enjoy or which helps you relax".

But perhaps you lack giving attention to yourself, to what is alive in you, to how you feel and what you need. Maybe you do not automatically connect with this when you work, play sports or go out with friends. How to connect with yourself is not something many of us learn when we are young. Often you are taught values, like supporting others, taking responsibility, finishing what you start and being strong (whatever that means), and these are what drive you consciously and unconsciously. But when you're focused on yourself and don't have room for others, that doesn't necessarily mean you are really connecting with yourself.

Does this mean you have to become self-centred in order to become aware of yourself and connect with yourself? Of course not. I know from experience that quite the opposite is the case. For me, focusing on yourself is the first step in developing your natural leadership. If you are not willing to take time for yourself and don't consider your needs in all your decisions and actions, who are you? If you don't know



## Connecting with yourself

yourself, don't care about how you feel, don't know what you need, and perhaps even ignore yourself, how do you think you can be happy and free? Or able to connect with others?

Head and heart. For many people, the head leads and the heart is much less involved. This will likely cause you to become unbalanced. It is like walking, you do it on two legs. As a natural leader you must be able to connect your head with your heart. Sounds great, but how do you go about that? In order to connect the two, you must above all be able to feel. And that's not always easy. I often hear people say, "I don't know what I'm feeling". That is an interesting contradiction: not *knowing* what you are feeling. There appears to be a tendency to approach feelings from our thoughts. Feeling is inherent in human beings, but sometimes you prefer not to connect with your feelings. Not even if you are angry, feel pressure on your chest or a knot in your stomach.

Natural leadership requires you to dare to reflect on your feelings and to listen to them. That's the tricky thing. Your highly-developed head quickly takes over and that feels familiar.

Many people with a well-developed left hemisphere of the brain may think, "Well, I like to rely on my reasoning. How would I benefit from connecting my feelings with my reasoning?" My answer to those questions is: peace, balance, fun, happiness and maybe much more. When you use reasoning on its own, chances are you will forget to bring yourself. By mainly thinking about or caring for someone else, for example. Or perhaps you are trying to meet other people's expectations or your own?

## Connecting with yourself

If you don't take your own feelings seriously, you may overstep your limitations. Suddenly you discover that you are in a situation that, if you are very honest with yourself, you had "felt" for a long time was not healthy for you.

How does that work, feeling? It's not easy. You need your mind to gain clarity about your feelings. Words like content, restless, sad, stressed or angry help you to express your feelings. As soon as you start to express yourself with a whole sentence or several sentences, you know your head is taking over. If you manage to adequately name your feelings, it helps you to focus on them. You see them and you accept them, without immediately wanting to run away from them. Your feelings provide direction and will teach you how to discover your needs. If you allow your head back in after that, there is connectedness. That connection, the trust in the collaboration of the head and heart, brings peace. And you can be sure that you're not forgetting yourself.

By consciously connecting with yourself, you clear the way to connect with others, on a different and deeper level. Romantic relationships often become closer, at least more genuine. You become closer with friends. And you pave the way in your work for better and more connected collaboration.

Connecting with yourself is an important first step in developing your natural leadership. If you manage to really get to know yourself, what you feel and what you need, you will be giving yourself a great gift.