



The Art of Connection

Ty Francis PhD



MOVING IMAGES



'Authentic filming is based on authentic relating. This requires self-acceptance, truthfulness, courage and vulnerability. The camera has to cooperate with the human heart.'

We live with only the illusion of real connectedness. One of the painful paradoxes of our time, is that we have unprecedented global connectivity, facilitated by technology, yet most of the social ills we experience have their roots in feelings of disconnectedness. One telling study in the journal, *Science*¹, showed that lack of social connection is a greater detriment to health than obesity, smoking and high blood pressure. Eat your greens and exercise, but don't forget to connect!

Emojis, texting, tweeting, FaceBook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Messenger, SnapChat, and other apps are important forms of social connection. Yet, it is also interesting how antisocial we are becoming as a society... Recently, I watched a lovely young couple with their baby in a buggy, sitting by the river in the city where I live. It was a sunny afternoon, and the baby was crying softly. Mum and dad were on the cellphones, not even talking to or touching one another, and apparently oblivious of their snuffling infant...

Government research shows that suicide rates are rising despite the numbers of FaceBook friends people have. The internet connects us to vast knowledge repositories, yet we lose touch with the wisdom traditions of our own cultures. Satellites guide us down unknown roads and across unsailed oceans, yet we lose touch with our own inner guidance and we feel out of step with ourselves. Organisational teams hold virtual meetings across different geographies and time zones, yet the people in those teams never meet in person – it is as though team performance has nothing to do with personal care for one another.

We are often so busy, distracted and pressured, that we become disconnected from who we truly are, from what matters to us deeply, and from one other. It will never stop being deeply beautiful, deeply confusing and deeply sad that moments of real connection – to ourselves, to one another and to the world in which we live – are so rare and fleeting.

How film supports connection

The answer is not necessarily to live like the Amish. How do we embrace technology and explore its potential for affording us deeper and more enriching forms of human connection?

Film is a unique in this respect, because it can be a powerfully creative medium, combining visual richness with the emotive power of storytelling. Yet the solution is not just about film technology alone! Corporations and governments have spent too long being 'groomed' for TV, and the results are glossy corporate videos that no-one watches or believes, with the CEO reading prepared notes from an autocue; and political debate where our elected representatives have learned to deflect difficult questions and to speak in soundbites rather than to speak from the heart. Used in these ways, film becomes simply another medium of false connection.

Authentic filming is based on authentic relating. Film-making can only support authentic connection when it is combined with the vital skills of human interaction – paying close attention, trusting, active listening, empathy, dialogue, and more. This requires self-acceptance, truthfulness, courage, and vulnerability from us. Yet the results can be transformational.



'Our work begins with a space; a camera; and a story to unfold...'

The art of connection

At meus, our film-based facilitation work is based on *The Art of Connection*.

There are many types of connections between people – emotional, intellectual, physical, sexual, practical, spiritual... Yet always, real connection involves wise risk-taking. Connection is about taking off the mask and letting yourself be seen, with your imperfections intact.

This does not mean that it is wise to open up to everyone, or to open up to people who have proved to be unsafe. Practised with discrimination and trust, however, the payoffs can be immense – not just in terms of our physical and emotional health. Connection is also linked to a sense of belonging, and to loyalty. Engagement and influence require finding points of connection with others. Leadership without a felt sense of connection to followers, is cold and authoritarian.

So what fosters connection? How do we create the conditions where people are free to see and be seen in all their raw beauty and simplicity?

The Art of Connection that we have mastered, and which we practise as film-makers and facilitators, rests on 6 principles:

1. Holding the Space

We create spaces where people can connect with what matters to them. These are not just physical spaces (where we ensure that the environment is sufficiently quiet, light, spacious, comfortable and sympathetic to the purpose of the film); they are also relational spaces (where we establish credibility, reliability, trust and sufficient intimacy) so that people comfortable to have a meaningful conversation. Often, we meet and film in inspirational spaces that ignite the imagination and offer new possibilities for connecting.



2. Respecting the Camera

The camera is more than a piece of technology – it is a 'significant other' in the conversation, it has presence and brings presence. It changes something for people. It is a completely unblinking, observant, gentle witness that captures every nuance of expression without preference. Rather than making people self-conscious, the camera sharpens our clients' focus.

3. Co-creative Dialogues, not Interviews

We never 'interview' our clients. Interviews have prepared and predictable questions and are usually met with prepared and tired answers. Instead, we unlock the conversation through dialogue. In dialogue, we respond to our curiosity; we work with emergence with no set agenda and nowhere to 'get' to; we are open to explore our own experience as film-makers alongside our clients; we explore the unknown and think together...

4. Using 'Breakthrough' Questions

Conversations for connection often start with a 'breakthrough question'. A breakthrough question addresses a big theme, and is a catalyst to new thinking and inspires creative connections in thinking. It has an effect similar to a Zen koan – it is ultimately unanswerable! Some examples of breakthrough questions that have appeared in our films, include 'What is your uniqueness?'; 'What matters?'; 'How much work:love balance do you have in your life?'

5. Spotting 'moments that matter'

Deep connection relies on deep attunement between people. Therefore, we pay a lot of attention to being present. Working 'in the here and now' means that we can spot 'the obvious unseens' – the micro-moments when something significant seems to shift or come alive in our clients. These moments can often pass unnoticed, but are moving, arresting or striking in some quiet way. These 'moments that matter' are pregnant with possibilities, and deeply engaging on film.

6. Bringing out beauty

This is not about doing anything cosmetic, but about bringing out the uniqueness of each client by sympathetic framing on camera before we begin; by the careful use of light and shadow; by judicious editing, that reveals angles and shows important gestures, and by the selective use of music, drop-in shots and sound effects that enhance the pleasure of the viewer's experience. The beauty is also in the truth of what is uttered – which is as much a creative editorial decision as it is about the limits of a client's openness.


The two domains of transformation

These principles guide and guard our work. They relate not only to the facilitated film-making environment (creating a context where transformational new insights and shifts in self-acceptance are possible for our clients). They also relate to the ways in which the quality of connection achieved on camera can be communicated virally to those people who watch our finished films.

We talk about the two domains of transformation that are possible through facilitated film-making; the first domain is the transformational experience the client has in being filmed; the second domain is the transformation of perception that is possible for those (including the client) who view the edited 'moving images'.

The principles that comprise The Art of Connection find their highest-order expression in the skill of powerful storytelling. By creating authentic connection, we establish the conditions by which our clients can connect to themselves more honestly, and dare to tell 'an untold story'. This is not only gripping in its own right; but in the editing process, we can select, re-sequence and re-present the material from the dialogue in ways that enhance its potency.

The power of a story well-told can generate questions, ignite conversations, and transform our relationships and our world.



'The power of a story well-told can transform our relationships and our world.'

References

¹House, J.S., Landis, K.R., Umberson, D. (1988) 'Social Relationships and Health', Science, July, Volume 241, Issue 4865, pp 540 – 545.

About meus

meus creates, captures
and communicates moments
of connection.

We pioneer the art of 'filmed facilitation' to explore and share moments that connect us more fully to ourselves and to one another. Our films are unique 'products' that arise from our encounters with individuals and organisational teams and community groups. They not only represent a 'living record' of our various conversations for connection – but also, through sharing our films virally, unknown others can also experience the transformational power of connection.

Our practice is derived from a unique synthesis of leadership and organisational development, creative process, systems thinking and doctoral research.

We work on projects that:

- Capture people reflecting on what matters to them and what it is like to be them
- Address bigger issues about how to relate at work and in the world
- Explore how leaders in both organisations and communities can engage more authentically

About Dr Ty Francis

As a social psychologist whose PhD explored 'transformation', Ty has a deep interest in creativity and in the experience of 'breakthrough'. He uses his skills as a coach to connect with people, and as storyteller to elicit the essence of our human experience.

About Jon Riley

As an executive coach and facilitator with an abiding interest in technology, Jon combines the skills of drawing out people's inner, emotional experiences and portraying them sensitively on film. He uses his technical skills creatively, in post-production editing.



Contact us if you'd like to explore a project through filmed facilitation or co-created documentary-making. We would love to connect with you!

hello@meus.co.uk
meus.co.uk



MOVING IMAGES