

April 2005

The Power of Connections

by Ed Dower



Once in a while, I come across a book or article that has such an impact on my life that I can't wait to share it with others. Some books may speak to the financial issues facing our clients and friends who are grappling with the challenge of a life-altering diagnosis or the death of a loved one, and may also be helpful to other professionals who serve these clients. Still others open our minds to the incredible power of the human spirit, which will not be subdued even in the face of the most difficult challenges. These fan the spark of that same spirit within us all.

Periodically, I'll use this newsletter to share some of these resources with you. In addition, we will be creating a space on our Web site for a bibliography, where visitors may find helpful reading on such topics.

Finally, I urge you to drop me an e-mail or letter, to share a book or article that you feel might be helpful or meaningful to members of our community—to both those who suffer loss and those who support them. We'd like to add it to our bibliography or perhaps feature it in a future newsletter.

In June 1975, as I began my doctoral studies, I faced countless hours of collateral reading in the university library. Dr. George Akers, one of my professors, turned those hours of drudgery into life-changing drama for me simply by teaching me to view reading as a conversation with some of the greatest people in the history of mankind. In the intervening years, I have "conversed" with thinkers and shapers of history as well as little-known adventurers who've scaled previously unexplored mountains in the Andes or who have faced challenges in athletics, business, science or some other area of human experience. My life has been enriched, my thinking challenged and my spirit lifted by these "conversations." It is my hope that this periodic sharing of such titles will do the same for you!

A good book to start with is one that came to my attention recently. It's titled *Connect: 12 Vital Ties that Open Your Heart, Lengthen Your Life and Deepen Your Soul*, by psychiatrist and Harvard Medical School senior lecturer Edward Hallowell. In it, Hallowell explores the proven benefits that human connections can bring: benefits such as better health, greater resistance to disease and perhaps even longer life.

Hallowell opens his book by stating: "Life is loss. For all we gain, we also lose--a friend, a day, a chance, finally life itself."

The longer we live, the more painfully true that statement becomes—especially for those facing a life-altering diagnosis or the death of a loved one. But Hallowell prescribes a solution. Well, not a solution, but an understanding of how to cope, and help others cope, with loss, which is backed by an abundance of scientific research. As he says in his book:

"We know we need food, we know we need vitamins and minerals, we know we need water and air, clothing and shelter. Most of us even know we need sunshine. But most people don't know that a major other factor belongs on our list of essentials: one another. This is not a warm-and-fuzzy proclamation. It is as scientifically proven as is our need for vitamin C. Only here the C stands for connection."

In other words, we find meaning in life through the connections we make—connections to family, friends, church or community, our professions, colleagues, places and even pets, though the most important connection is often to something greater than ourselves.

Just as a wheel with twisted or missing spokes is pulled out of round and becomes misshapen, so our lives are thrown out of balance as our connections are bent or broken by life's losses. The solution that Hallowell offers lies in reconnecting, adjusting or adding new connections over time, to restore life's balance and discover new meaning in our lives.

Hallowell backs up his assertions with hard facts throughout the book. Take just one example: the groundbreaking Alameda County Study, conducted by Lisa Berkman, now chair of the Department of Health and Social Behavior at the Harvard School of Public Health. The study followed the lives of approximately 7,000 people for nine years. In it, Berkman found that the most isolated people in the study were three times more likely to die during the period of study than those with stronger social connections.

Connections, Hallowell is careful to point out, don't prevent bad things from happening. But they provide us strength to get through the pain—in a very real, even biological way. It is ironic that in this age of instant communication, we as a society are becoming more and more disconnected from one another. What is missing is what Hallowell calls the "human moment," the simple act of two or more people together, paying attention to one another. He devotes a large part of the book to showing us ways to make time for connections, just as we make time for exercise or eating right to maintain a healthy life. It is a powerful, life-affirming message.

For more information on anything you see in the e-newsletter

you can contact American Eagle Wealth Advisors at

www.aewealthadvisors.com

(916) 858-1111

(888) 558-5518

Ed.dower@awealthadvisors.com

Carla.dower@awealthadvisors.com

Donna.dower@awealthadvisors.com