



# Welcome to the **Relationship Age**

Fostering rapport is a key to good leadership

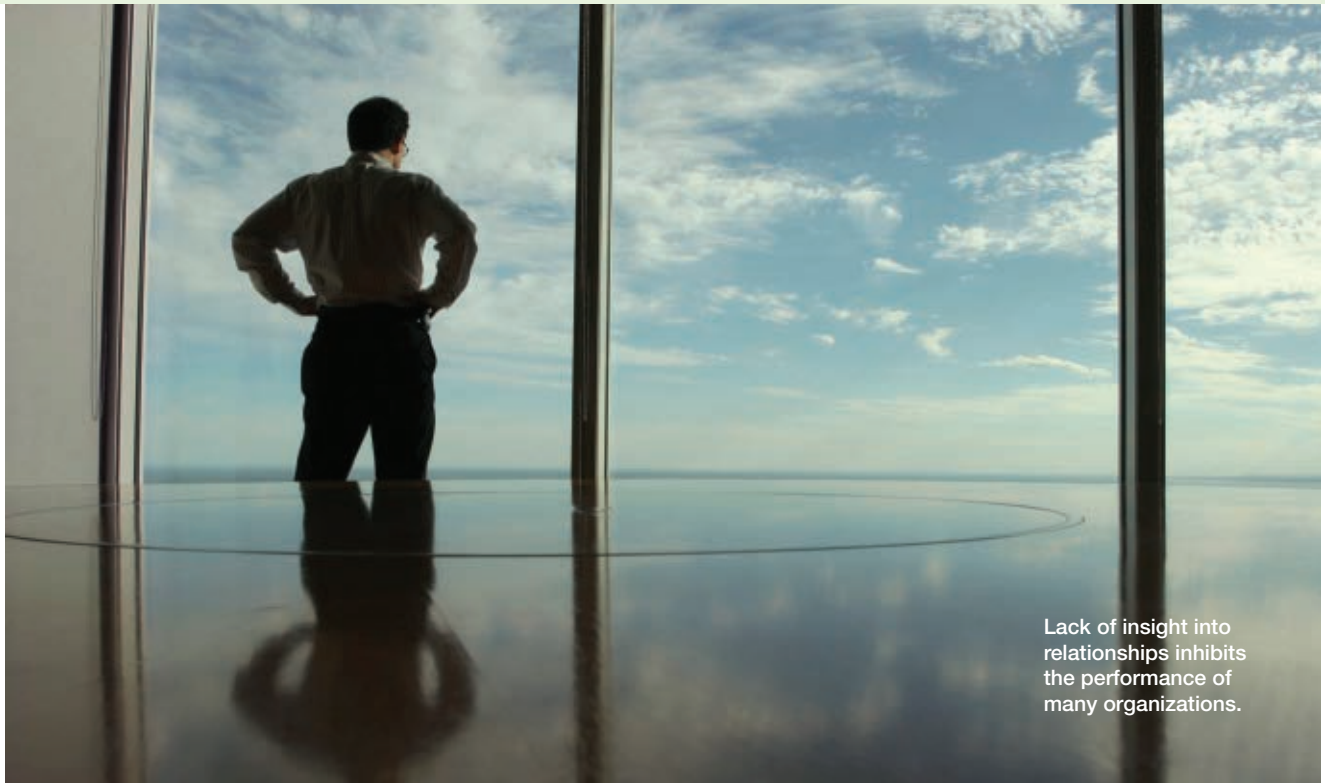
By Greg Bell

**W**e're in a time known as the "information age," but I believe we're now in an age of relationships. It's the right relationships that get you the right information.

But, we often take relationships—both personal and professional—too casually. Most of us are not to blame for this. It's not as if there's a relationship class in high school or college.

Back in school you studied math, science, English, business and played sports. Your horticultural classes involved study in plant identification, physiology and propagation. But when did you take a class on relationships?

Unfortunately, many people in this business get along much better with plants than they do other people.



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### **Walls and barriers**

Lack of insight into relationships inhibits the performance of many organizations. When I consult with companies I see silos within organizations—entire departments that don't talk or listen to each other.

How can a nursery function if sales has a poor relationship with the growers? How does a garden center do business if people on the sales floor don't see eye to eye with their supervisors?

But what if there was a road map to empowering relationships across your organization and with your customers. I designed a "Relationship Map" with the idea of providing my clients with the skills and behaviors necessary to help them build long-lasting, empowering relationships.

Years ago when I practiced law, I noticed most of my clients' issues weren't about legal problems. They were about broken relationships.

People weren't fighting over property or control as much as they were fighting over lack of trust and unmet expectations. Most of the time, the parties involved were good people, but had never learned or practiced the skills necessary for better relationships. Needless to say, I found this frustrating and thought it preventable.

### **Coming together**

I no longer practice law. I now work with leaders and their teams before they need a lawyer. I help them build better relationships for better results—both internally and externally—so they can

be richer, happier and more successful. My role is to help leaders take a naturopathic approach to their relationships. In other words, I help them build relationships and develop strategies to avoid relationship pitfalls.

The horticulture field is filled with multigenerational family businesses. But just because you're working with family you've known all your life, that's no guarantee you have a functional business relationship.

Nurseries, greenhouses and garden centers are often run by co-owners or partners with different views. But these differences can often be overcome by improving the relationships between these partners. If the relationship hurdle isn't overcome, then the business is ultimately doomed.

When an organization calls for help, I go in with this thought: Let's improve the relationships. If they do this, they improve their results.

As a culture, we've fallen into the habit of negativity, hazing and gossiping. This causes unnecessary carnage to the human psyche. Try this painful exercise: Spend the day listening to how people talk to each other and about each other, especially those not present.

What are the people in the propagation house saying about the office staff? What are your cashiers saying about the staff on the sales floor?

A critical step is to improve how members of your team talk to each other, about other teams in your organization and strategic partners.

### Individuals and teams

Improving how individuals and teams relate in your organization won't just make you happier, it will mean your products and services will build communities, and not merely be commodities.

It means you will find transformative relationships, not just transactional ones. It means you will save time because you will not be bogged down in conflicts and unnecessary delays; it means that the chase of the next customer will be easier because it will be based on trust, not luck. This is possible for everyone, but first, you've got to tend to your most important relationships.

I use giant bamboo as a metaphor. When you plant giant bamboo, you have to water and nurture that underground tuber for three years and, seemingly, nothing happens.

Then suddenly shoots emerge from the ground and grow 90 feet in 60 days.

But the most fascinating part is how the bamboo grows underground. Giant timber bamboo roots grow 100 yards—as long as a football field.

Physically, the interlocking roots help prevent mudslides and can stabilize the ground during an earthquake. How does that translate to your business?

Are your relationship roots interconnected, and can they prevent disaster?

What are the invisible connections that might help you change the way you operate? Successful individuals and organizations know the answers to these questions and put them into practice everyday. 🌱

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