

## Connecting Conversations

*Hint – It's not about the Money!*

Here's an inconvenient business truth for your corporate clients to consider: It doesn't matter how valuable, cutting-edge, or unique an organization's product or service is if its employees can't connect positively and effectively with each other. In fact, this workplace "connectedness" is one of the hallmarks of a great organization with a culture of high performance.

"Best Places to Work companies don't achieve 'connectedness' through grand, expensive gestures," says Dan Prosser, author of *THIRTEENERS: Why Only 13 Percent of Companies Successfully Execute Their Strategy — and How*

---

**"But in companies where there is a high degree of communication, employees hear from management about anything that happens, especially if it impacts the way they do their jobs in a timely manner."**

---

*Yours Can Be One of Them* (Greenleaf Book Group Press, March 2015, \$22.95). "Their success comes down to the conversations that take place every day between employees and their leaders."

Prosser points out that business — actually *all* business — is just a network of interconnected conversations. In too many companies, these conversations are destructive. They spread like a virus and keep people disconnected. Yet in others, conversations create environments where people feel heard, mirrored, and validated.

"A small percentage of companies consistently achieve the kind of authentic dialogue that connects people, allowing them to execute through conflict, chaos, good times, and bad," he says. "These are the THIRTEENERS. They've figured out how to promote conversations that contribute

to employees' feeling connected to each other, to their company's vision, to their common purpose, and to their strategy. [Any] company can promote these kinds of conversations."

Here, Prosser spotlights the 10 connecting conversations (which he calls ConnectionPoints™) happening in successful Best Places to Work companies:

**1. Conversations need to encourage contribution.** Employees invest a huge amount of their time and intellect on your organization's behalf — and they want a return on their investment. But believe it or not, the return they want most is **not** a bigger paycheck. What they want is the chance to make a difference — to contribute something meaningful to the outcome of the organization and be appreciated and acknowledged for it. "When your people don't create this opportunity, your employees leave for what they perceive as a greater opportunity to matter," Prosser explains.

*Tip – Let employees offer solutions:* "When you assign responsibility and allow people to provide solutions that you actually put to use, they'll speak highly of you, and they wouldn't think of leaving. In fact, they'll want to work harder to make you even happier. So be sure to let them know that you want to hear their ideas and suggestions!"



**2. Conversations need to convey acknowledgment and appreciation.** Chances are, many employees were “wounded” in the workplace before they were hired by their current employer. They’ve been passed over for promotions and given insufficient compensation for hard work. They’ve been taken for granted and treated like numbers. (Maybe this has even happened within your own organization.) The good news is, these past wrongs *can* be righted — and to your client’s benefit.

*Tip – Appreciation pays off:* “Your first impression might be that handing out ‘thank you’ and ‘good jobs’ is awkward and might feel clumsy, and your employees may also feel that way at first,” admits Prosser. “However, I promise you that the rewards of your efforts will greatly outweigh your initial discomfort. You’ll be giving employees a gift they’ve never received anywhere else, and they’ll feel a sense of wholeness that they’ve never experienced at work. And as a result, their engagement, loyalty, and productivity will soar.”

**3. Conversations need to encourage alignment.** In Best Places to Work companies, everyone heads in the same direction — not necessarily just by following the leader, but also by making sure that when any strategic element is altered, everyone has an opportunity to contribute to changes that must take place in other areas of the business. Operations in aligned organizations have minimal confusion. There are no territorial disputes, and everyone looks out for everyone else.

“If you’re a CEO or executive leader with final authority, it’s important that you use contribution conversations (ConnectionPoints #1) to allow others to bring ideas *to you*,” Prosser notes. “Your job isn’t to find the holes in their concepts but to be able to say whether you can be aligned with the proposed effort or action. If you can, then you empower others to dig deep into themselves and contribute. If you can’t, then share what’s preventing you from being aligned. That becomes a teaching opportunity.”

*Tip – People need to understand the “bottom line”:* “When [employees] are aligned, they understand the business goals for the year and the role

each goal plays,” Prosser adds. “They recognize there must be alignment for their efforts to affect the bottom-line success of the company.”

**4. Conversations need to build accountability.** When employees are being accountable, they make promises to take action to accomplish goals. Everyone sees everyone else’s promises, and there are no secret deals to undermine the effort to keep them. And, of course, those promises are kept. The results of people’s actions are fully measured, and everyone’s contribution is visible.

*Tip – Hold everyone accountable:* In a culture of accountability, everyone is ‘count-on-able,’” explains Prosser. “And it’s not just leaders who make sure that accountability happens. In a connected organization, everyone holds each other accountable for fulfilling promises. If a person promises to produce a particular result, someone (or a team) holds that person accountable for fulfilling that promise.”

**5. Conversations need to facilitate continuous communication.** Even Best Places to Work companies struggle to shore up communication, Prosser confides. But in companies where there is a high degree of communication, employees hear from management about anything that happens, especially if it impacts the way they do their jobs in a timely manner.

*Tip – Strive for transparency:* “In many organizations, one of the first steps in shoring up the communication gap is ensuring that no one finds out about essential information accidentally or after the fact,” he says. “It doesn’t reach anyone first through gossip or the grapevine. Whenever possible, strive for proactive transparency.”

**6. Conversations need to build relationships.** Prosser calls relatedness “the source of all results.” When there is relatedness, it’s very easy for an employee to talk to his or her direct supervisor, because that supervisor listens. And there is real solidarity among executives, managers, and employees.

*Tip – Managers and employees can’t be strangers:* “Nothing meaningful happens unless, first, there is a relationship between the two people working



together,” Prosser says. “Two strangers might have a problem starting the conversation necessary to getting the issue handled — even if they work for the same company. But two **colleagues** with an established, positive relationship can get the ball moving quickly and without misunderstandings. This is how connectedness cures a host of ills.”

**7. Conversations need to underscore responsibility.** When most people hear the word “responsible” in a workplace context, they assign a negative context to it in which they assume it has to do with blaming others for what went wrong or for not doing what they said they would. But no Best Places to Work companies practice that. For them, being responsible means taking the initiative to do what is necessary to get the job done.

*Tip – Responsible employees are proactive, not reactive:* “Responsible employees don’t wait for a supervisor to tell them what they need to do before taking action,” Prosser comments. “Make sure your people know that they have permission to take the initiative. Then make sure they have the resources and support to do so.”

**8. Conversations need to encourage integrity.** What does it mean to demonstrate integrity? It begins when management says they are going to do something, and the statement is followed up with authentic action. Their actions are always in step with what they said they would do.

*Tip – Integrity = doing what you say you’re going to do:* “This is not the same [thing] as being honest, decent, or virtuous,” Prosser clarifies. “Integrity is a way of *being* in which management says X is going to happen, and X happens. And it applies beyond management. There is a clear and total match between what people in the organization say and their actions.”

**9. Conversations need to develop a sense of possibility.** When employees can see and understand where the company is going and can feel connected to their company’s plans for the next three to five years —or longer — they will not fear that their job could end suddenly through no fault of their own.

*Tip – Encourage long-term thinking:* “Your job as a leader is to discover possibilities for your

business —both for your workplace and your marketplace,” Prosser instructs. “You must then share those with your employees and let them contribute, as co-creators, to a strategy you can successfully execute together.”

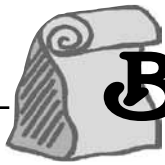
**10. Conversations need to enhance fun, rewards, and gratefulness.** This isn’t a discussion that you can start around a conference table or during a one-on-one meeting with an employee. (Can you picture yourself saying to your team, “*So, how much do you love working here? I feel so grateful to be a part of such a wonderful company, don’t you?*”) Instead, it has to originate—voluntarily—with your employees. The good news is, it will develop naturally once you start implementing the previous conversation points.

*Tip – Connected employees are cheerful and engaged:* “On most days, employees of Best Places to Work companies can’t wait to get to work,” says Prosser. “Yes, really. They say things like ‘This is a great place to work, and I feel grateful to have the opportunity to be here with these great people.’ Often, they say they can’t believe they get to work there. That’s because they feel involved, appreciated, and yes, connected.”

## Summary

“I attribute many of the outcomes in business to the degree of connectedness that exists between people,” concludes Prosser. “Can I prove it? Not scientifically. But there are enough people who accept this view of how the world works to make it worth talking about. Even more, it’s important to implement it in our organizations so that we can realize our potentials and so that our employees can experience a level of relatedness that brings them satisfaction.”

*As CEO of The Prosser Group and BreakthroughSchool.com, Dan Prosser has over 45 years’ experience building his own companies, while for the past 13 years, he has been speaking, teaching, mentoring, and coaching business leaders and entrepreneurs in order to cultivate an uncommon and breakthrough approach to helping people build an extraordinary competitive edge for their businesses. For more information, visit [www.thirteenersbook.com](http://www.thirteenersbook.com).*



## Best Places to Work – 2014

### 1. Bain & Company

*Comment:* “Interesting, impactful work: There is rarely a boring day, much less a boring project.”

### 2. Twitter

*Comment:* “You are surrounded by smart, hard-working people who genuinely care about the company.”

### 3. LinkedIn

*Comment:* “LinkedIn is an absolutely incredible place to work.”

### 4. Eastman Chemical

*Comment:* “Eastman cares about its people through open communication, and training and career opportunities.”

### 5. Facebook

*Comment:* “Awesome people and work environment. Excellent benefits and employee perks – including on-site health care.”

### 6. Guidewire

*Comment:* “Interesting, rewarding and mentally challenging [work]. Smart people, good salary and benefits, fast paced ...”



### 7. Interactive Intelligence

*Comment:* “Outstanding place to build your career. Flexible environment, high-caliber personnel, competitive compensation, strong leadership.”

### 8. Google

*Comment:* “Great company. Lots of smart people, fantastic perks. I have learned more here than anywhere else in my [career].”

### 9. Orbitz Worldwide

*Comment:* “It’s a place where creativity and hard work are rewarded! Great people – smart, friendly and willing to share their knowledge.”

### 10. Nestle Purina PetCare

*Comment:* “Every person is part of a team who wants to do their best. People are smiling, happy, always willing to help lend a hand or share.”

*Source: Glassdoor’s Employees’ Choice Awards 2014. The sixth-annual Employees’ Choice Awards honors the 50 Best Places to Work, and new for 2014, the 50 Best Medium-Sized Companies to Work For. Winners were determined by the people who know these companies best — their employees. For more honorees, visit: [http://www.glassdoor.com/Best-Places-to-Work-2014-LST\\_KQ0,24.htm](http://www.glassdoor.com/Best-Places-to-Work-2014-LST_KQ0,24.htm)*