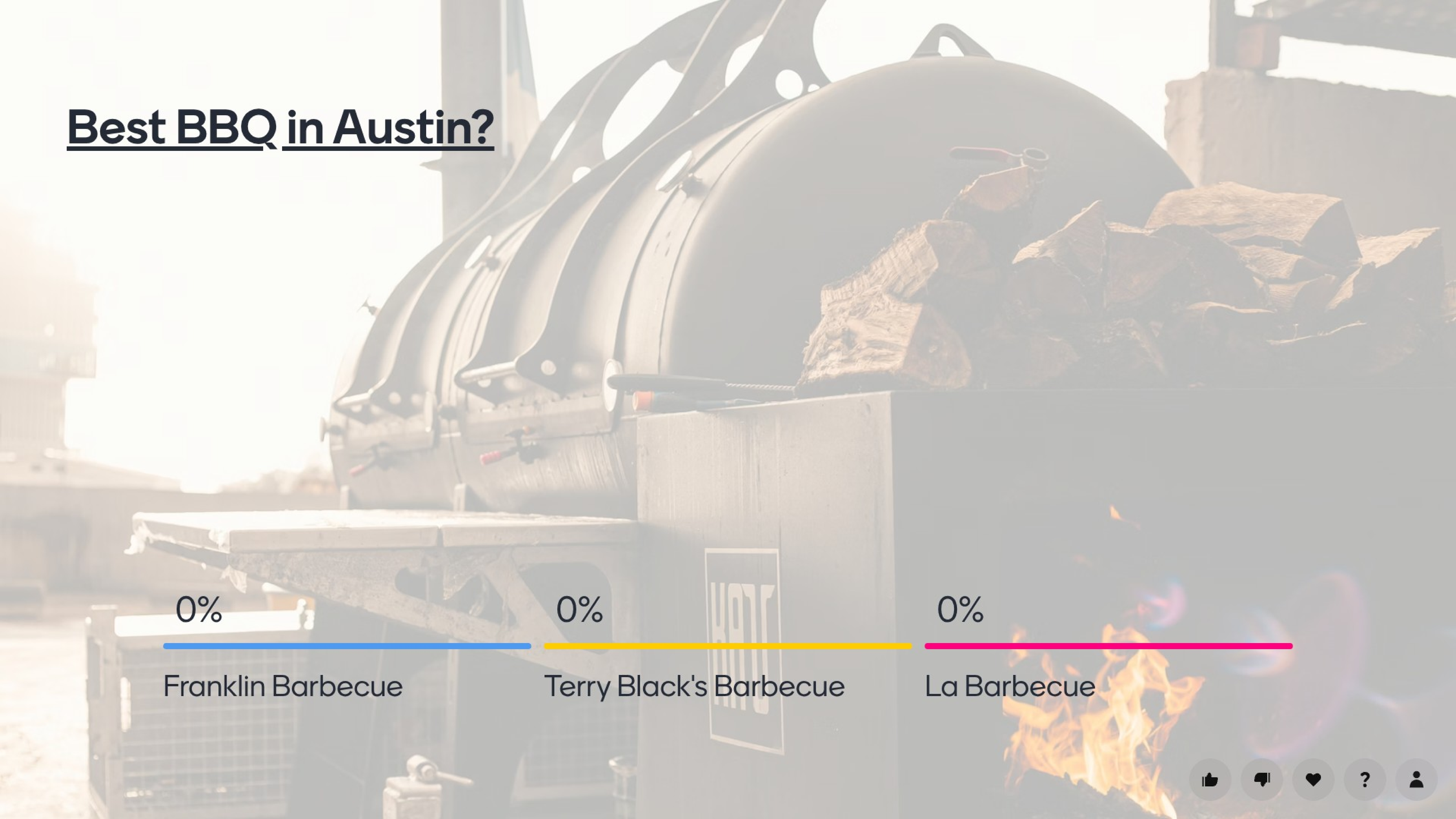
Connected by Design, Powered by People

Turning Strategic Relationships Into Innovation Engines

Trust. Connection. Human Relationship.

#LetsGetToWork!

Best BBQ in Austin?



0%
Franklin Barbecue

0%
Terry Black's Barbecue

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La Barbecue

Hawaiian Pizza

Unapologetically Yes!	When Pigs Fly!	I'm Not Sayin'!
0	0	0

Word Association: I say "INNOVATION," you say _____ ?

Aligned, Present, and Stuck!

- Everyone here?? ✅
- Anything else?? ❌
- All good?? ✅
- Did anything actually happen?? ❌

Alignment without <u>connection</u> produces polite nothingness

Connection Came First

Long before companies, contracts, or conferences, there was **connection**

- Connection wasn't a nice-to-have...
- Connection wasn't a choice...
- Strength, intelligence... didn't much matter

Connection = Survival!

Before Commerce There Was Trust

LONG before humans traded goods...

We traded trust

Trust was the first currency

Trust is timeless, and... priceless

Trust ➡️ Collaboration ➡️ Innovation

- Trust allowed collaboration
- Collaboration allowed specialization
- Specialization allowed progress

Innovation didn't happen from better ideas

Innovation happened because people trusted each other to try something new!

Pulse-check...

On a scale of 1-10, rate the importance of trust and connection with other people

1.0

Not necessary

Essential

Trust ➡️ Trade ➡️ Modern Guilds

We like to think the ERA is a modern, complex ecosystem

At it's core, it's still a human network built on trust and trade

We didn't outgrow trust - we scaled it!...

Modern Guilds ➡️ Industrial Revolution ➡️ Global Scale

...Scale broke trust!

- Speed increased
- Efficiency became the goal
- Volume became the metric
- Things mattered more than people

We stopped making space for <u>connection</u>!

Tools Replaced Touch

Technology was designed to support - not substitute for - connection

- CRMs replaced conversations
- Slack replaced nuance
- Mindless meetings replaced relationships

We were "aligned," but we - you and I - drifted apart

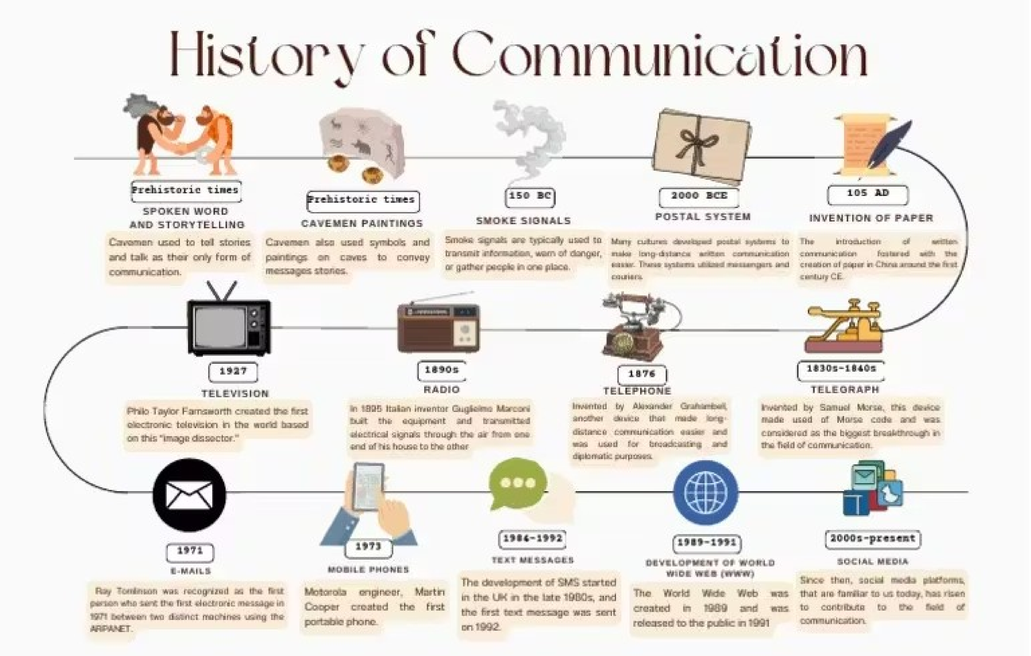
THEY INVENTED MACHINES TO SAVE TIME, BUT NOW THEY USE ALL THEIR TIME STARING AT THE MACHINES.
LOL
HAHAHA
@TRUTHTHEORY

More Connected Than Ever - Less Connected Than Before

We gained speed, we lost depth

- 1980's-1990's - Phone conversations (content rich)
- 2000's - Email dominance (tonality poor)
- 2010's - 2020's - Text-centric (140 characters)

We moved from interruption to autonomy - optimizing for efficiency, not connection



What We Lost

Innovation slowed, not for lack of new ideas

Innovation slowed because trust and connection eroded

- People stopped sharing ideas
- People stopped challenging assumptions
- People stopped saying the quiet part out loud

Then, on November 30, 2022, the *next big thing* happened...

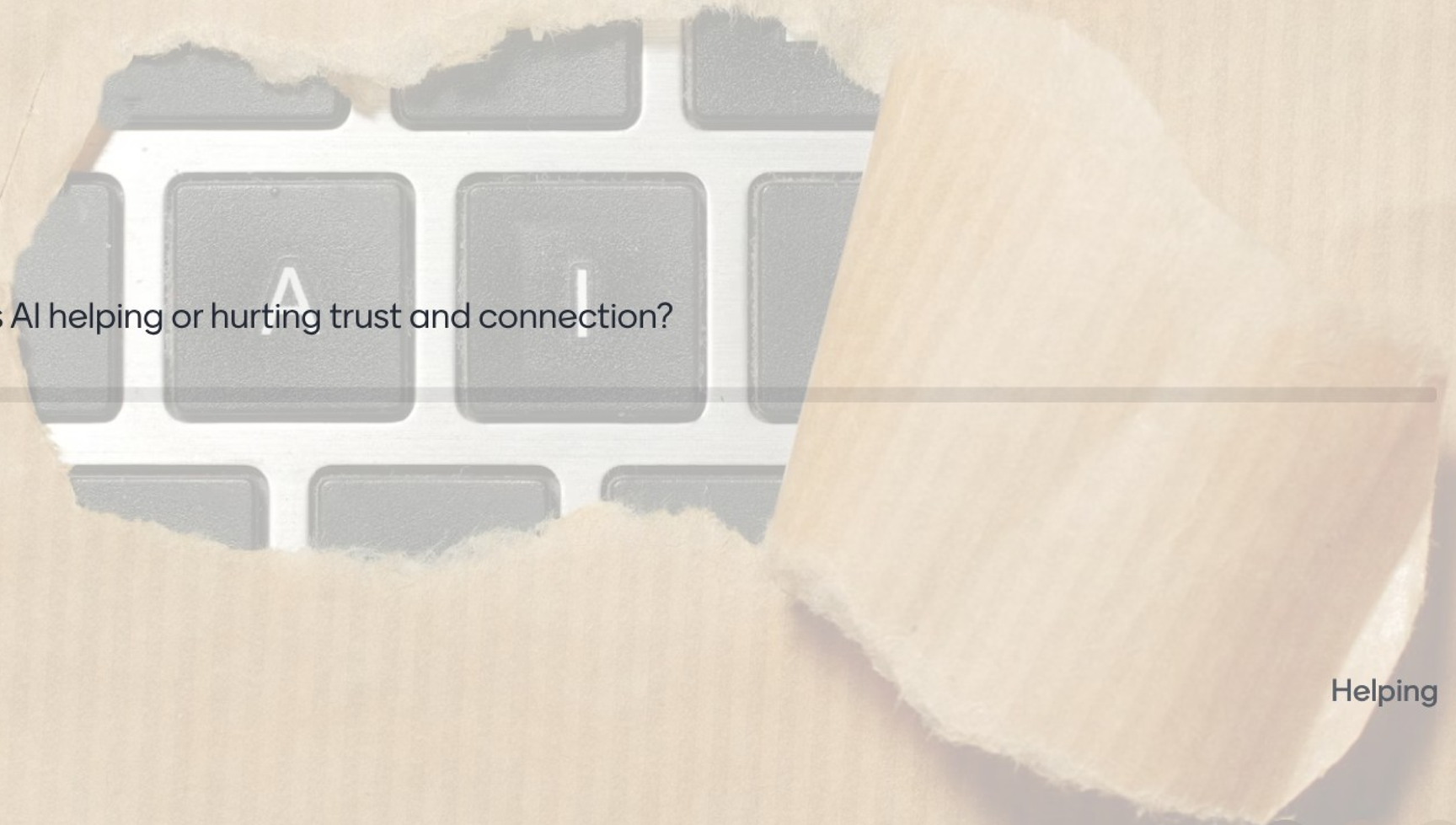
The $1M AI Question

With AI rapidly accelerating nearly everything -

- AI writes
- AI analyzes
- AI predicts
- AI optimizes

But, can AI replace human connection?

Pulse-check...



On a scale of 1-10, is AI helping or hurting trust and connection?

1.0

Hurting

Helping

Unleash the AI hounds!

- It accelerates information
- Recognizes patterns
- Increases processing speeds

But innovation requires things AI will never do!

AI will never displace the "meat layer"

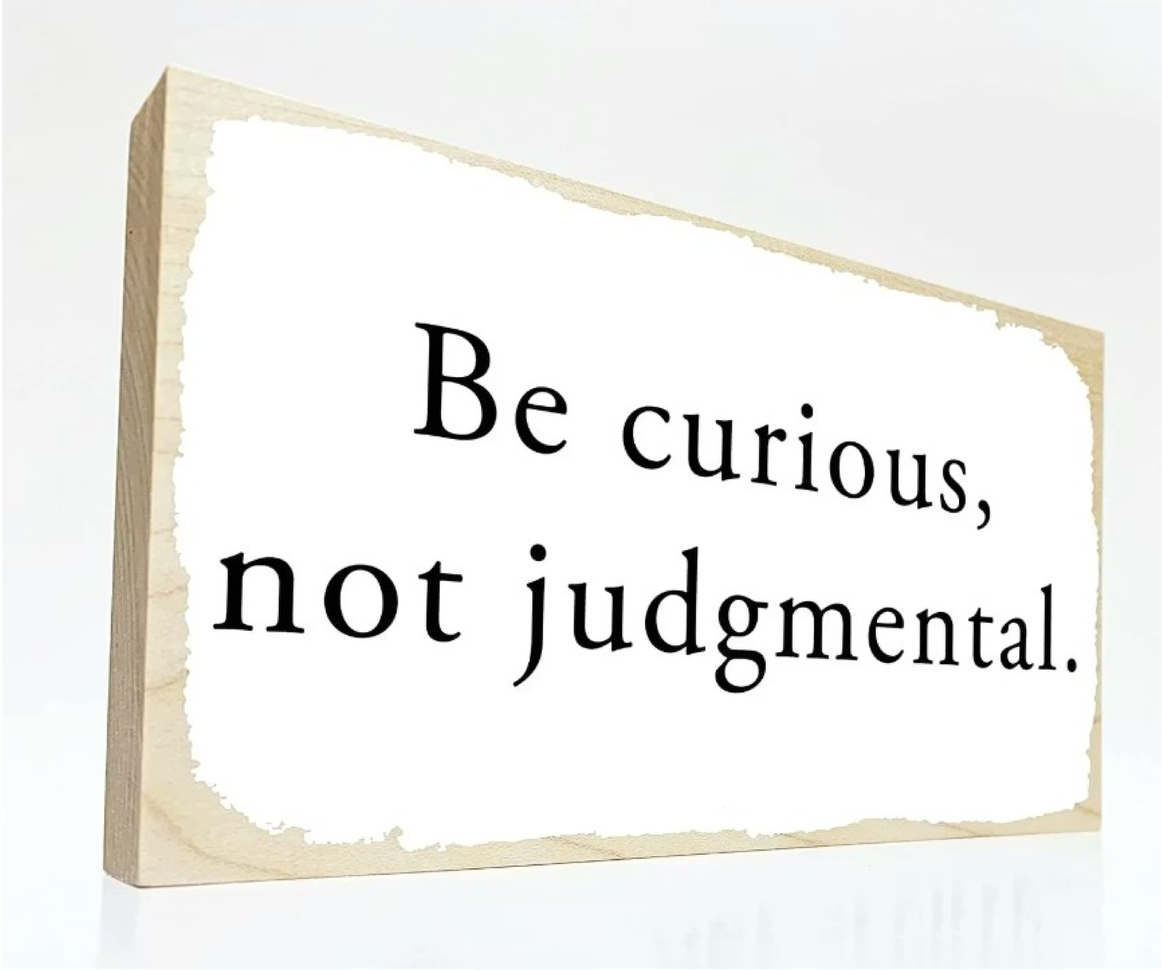
- AI can't take personal risk
- AI can't feel loyalty
- AI can't choose integrity when it costs something

Innovation comes from courage

Courage is always relational

Courage is rooted in curiosity

"Barbecue sauce"



Innovation dies in judgment - it grows in curiosity

Judgment creates distance

Curiosity creates connection

Be curious long enough, and connection happens

Be judgmental too quickly, and it never will

Connection is intentional

Our best partnerships aren't (generally) from luck

- Someone chooses to invest
- Someone showed-up consistently
- Someone leaned-in when it mattered

Connection isn't a personality trait

Connection is a design choice

Introducing the Innovation Engine

C.O.N.N.E.C.T.

C. CARE

People trust intent before competence

People make decisions about you in 0.1 seconds!

People don't remember what you sold them

They remember how you made them feel - safe and trustworthy - when you sold it to them

Do you CARE?

#CareCreatesTrust

O. OBSERVE

Connection starts before conversation

Friend or foe trustworthiness = survival

- Energy
- Body language
- Tone

OBSERVE to understand, not just long enough to reload

#ObservationOverAssumption

N. NAME

Name what's unspoken

- People relax
- Defensiveness drops
- Collaboration starts

When we feel understood, when others NAME "it," we innovate

#NameItToFreeIt

N. NURTURE

Relationships don't break from conflict

Relationships break from neglect

And when they die, they don't die dramatically

They die politely… in someone's inbox

If the person matters, NURTURE the relationship

#NurtureBeforeNumbers

E. ELEVATE

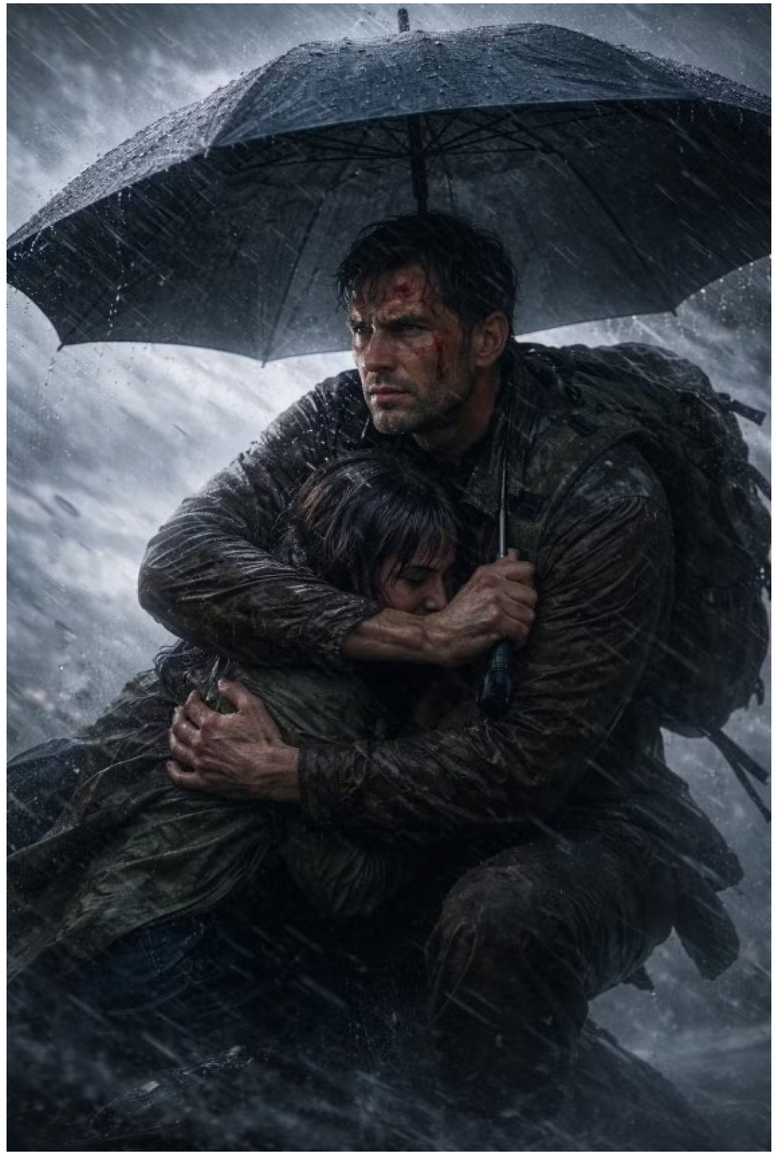
Trust gives permission to challenge

If you can't challenge each other, you're not partners, you're just friendly

The best partnerships make each other better - not busier

ELEVATE, champion each other

#ExcellenceElevates



C. COMMIT

Trust isn't built when it's convenient

Trust is built when it costs something

Trust is built when it would be easier not to

Trust is built when protecting the relationship matters

Innovation happens when we COMMIT to the relationship

#CommitBeyondComfort

T. TRANSFER

The goal isn't to be the connector

The goal is to build a culture that connects people to other people without you

If connection lives only with you, it dies with you

Innovation happens when trust TRANSFERS beyond two people

#TrustTriggersInnovation

Innovation Has a Precondition

- Innovation requires risk
- Risk requires safety
- Safety requires trust
- Trust requires connection

This is the part we skip - we think innovation is about ideas - it's about emotional permission

Connection is Innovation Infrastructure

Innovation is not an event.

Innovation is an ecosystem

Connection determines

- How fast ideas surface
- How boldly people speak
- How quickly teams move
- How much friction exists in execution

The most innovative organizations aren't the smartest - they're the most connected

Design It. Or Drift.

If connection is left to personality ➡️ Drift

If connection is left to tools ➡️ Drift

If connection is left to culture vibes ➡️ Drift

When connection is designed:

- Collaboration compounds
- Innovation accelerates

Connection by design is a choice… choose wisely

In a word, what does CONNECTION mean to you now?

The Connection Audit

Take a moment...

- Personally
- Internally
- With partners
- With customers

Where is connection strong?

Where is connection assumed?

Where might innovation be waiting on a conversation that hasn't happened yet?

The Hard Truth

If innovation is stalled, it's rarely about capability

It's usually about trust

And you probably already know exactly where

The Challenge

Before you go to sleep tonight -

Before this conference ends -

Before you get on a plane -

Make one decision

One relationship

One conversation

One intentional redesign

Connection is not an accident

The "Tomorrow Tool"

1. What important EVENT is happening?
2. What is the desired OUTCOME?
3. What CONNECTION(S) is required to unlock the best RESPONSE to this EVENT to realize the desired OUTCOME?

E + R = O

Innovation Powered by People

We live in a world with unlimited access to technology and information

No amount of intelligence will ever replace trust

The future won't be won by the most advanced systems

The future will be won with the innovation created by the most connected people

#LetsGetToWork!

One FINAL question before you go!

On a scale of 0–10, how likely are you to recommend this breakout session to a colleague or peer?

0.0

Not at all likely

Extremely likely

FOCUS 3

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LEADERS -> create the **CULTURE** -> that drives the **BEHAVIOR** -> that produces **RESULTS**

CONNECTION is the accelerant to the **RESULTS!**