

THIS LAND OF STRANGERS

The Relationship Crisis That Imperils
Home, Work, Politics, and Faith

ROBERT E. HALL

Discussion Guide

THE PURPOSE OF THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE IS TO facilitate discussion among members of a group who are reading the book. The goal is to deepen your understanding of the content, broaden your insight with new perspectives, and better apply the key messages to your life.

For more information, please visit www.RobertEHall.com, where you can access Robert's blog and get more information about his book, *This Land of Strangers*.

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Introduction

1. In the introduction the author tells the story of how a neighbor, Buzz Newton, co-signed a note that kept his family from losing their ranch. Where in your life or that of your family has a key relationship – family, friend, colleague – saved you from an impending disaster?
2. The author says we cannot build better lives or a stronger society on deteriorating relationships. What does that mean to you? Do you agree? Why?
3. What does it mean to you if broken relationships have a “death grip” on economic growth, political progress, and social development that capitalism, democracy, and social programs have been unable to break? What examples can you point to?
4. The author asserts that we are suffering an unfolding caste system where people with strong relationships “have” and those with deteriorating relationships are destined to “have not.” Where do you see broken relationships that lead to economic, social, or political loss?

Chapter 1

HOME ALONE

1. The chapter begins with the author’s story of the collapse of the elephant culture. How is the decline of the elephant culture relevant to relationships in our own families?
2. Regarding the statistics on the decline of family relationships – rise in divorce, decline in marriage, increase in children raised in single-parent families, and cohabitation, how do you or your loved ones experience their impact?
3. How does the research about the decline in close non-family friends or confidants relate to your own experience over the last few years? To your family, friends, and colleagues? How is it relevant to other groups that are quite different from you – socially, economically, ethnically, and in age?
4. What changes do you see where you live that reflect loss of community and attendant loss of “social capital” – the value flowing from the connection of individuals? What are the effects of those changes?
5. Research finds a dramatic difference in poverty rates for those who finish high school, marry, and refrain from having children before age 20 (8%) vs. those who do not (79%). In your own experiences and those you are close to, where have you seen this poverty effect?



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Chapter 2

NOBODY'S BUSINESS

1. In the organizations you are closest to as a worker, volunteer, and customer, how have your relationships with them changed? What are the implications for those changes?
2. As a customer, what changes have you experienced in trust and loyalty toward the various providers you frequent in recent years? What are the consequences?
3. Why has employee satisfaction with their jobs, co-workers, and boss all declined in recent years? To what extent has your satisfaction changed and what are the effects of that change?
4. The relationship between leaders and their stakeholders (customers, employees, shareholders) have grown increasingly discordant and distrustful according to the research cited. Why is that? Where have you seen this in your life and for those around you?
5. In your view, how has the change in the make-up and the tenure of stockownership changed the relationship between customers, employees, and management? How has this change impacted you?

Chapter 3

A HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF

1. The book outlines a growing partisan divide. Where is the division most obvious in your own life, and how does it impact you and your relationships?
2. Which institutions do you blame most for the partisan animosity between groups? The President, Congress, Supreme Court, Democratic Party, Republican Party, Media including cable television and talk radio, others? Why?
3. How is this partisanship costing us as a society? How does that cost translate into personal relational pain or cost for you?
4. Aside from politicians and large institutions, what has changed at the grassroots levels to increase partisanship and animosity? Why has it changed?



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Chapter 4

RELIGIOUS WAR AND (NO) PEACE

1. Do you view faith more under attack by others or the source of attack on others? Why?
2. When it comes to religious faith and secular belief, on what topic(s) have you had your most animated disagreement? With whom? Why?
3. The chapter talks about the limitations of tolerance and moderation for greater relational understanding. What is your view of tolerance and moderation as tools for healing the divide? Why?
4. According to research, the religious/belief groups that are most oppositional and antagonistic are also the ones growing most rapidly. What are the implications for those groups becoming more dominant? How would that impact you personally? Why?

STATE OF YOUR RELATIONSHIPS QUIZ

At the end of Chapter 4, readers are directed to the State of Your Relationships Quiz. It is recommended you complete the quiz, found at RobertEHall.com, and then discuss your results with the group:

1. How did you score on the quiz compared to the others? What was the group average?
2. Compared to others, what answers pushed your score up? What answers brought it down?
3. Compare your scores by Domain – Home, Work, Politics, Faith – and discuss similarities and differences.
4. What questions caused you to examine relational issues you had not previously considered?
5. What relational strengths are most important to you? What areas of relational development are your highest priorities? Why?

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Chapter 5

THE VALUE OF RELATIONSHIPS

1. Dr. Klausner is quoted, “The most important health-care system in the world is a mother.” What does that mean to you? What does that say about the unique value of relationships?
2. John Gottman describes relationship as the fundamental unit of our society. What does that mean? If it is true that relationships are in a state of decline, what are the implications?
3. If we were “built for relationships” as the author contends, what does that mean for your life – at home, work, in politics, and faith?
4. The book talks about the difference between efforts for clear communication versus building relational attachments. Where in your personal and organizational life is there a need or desire for more relational attachment? What would you have to change to bring that about? What other changes might be required?

Chapter 6

RELATIONSHIP MATH

1. To what extent do you agree with the author’s contention that “Relationship capital has surpassed financial capital as the scarce, crucial resource that now dictates whether societies advance or regress.”? If it is true, what are the implications?
2. This chapter cites numerous stats on the value of strong customer and employee relationships. In your own experience where have you seen examples of these relationships deliver extraordinary value?
3. In the discussion on the social economics, numerous examples are given of how relationships impact economic outcomes. In your own life, where have relationships (strong, weak, or broken) had a significant economic impact? What have you learned from those experiences?
4. The author says that “care” can only be delivered by someone who is in relationship. How might education, healthcare, and other social services be designed to deliver more relationship-centered care?



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Chapter 7

EXTREME CONSUMERISM

1. The author says there is a growing risk that we become relationally selfish and enslaved in a way that deprives us socially, emotionally, and economically. What evidence do you see of that? How does it impact you in your circle of family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues?
2. This chapter discusses how we have altered relationships for convenience. Where have you seen desire for convenience damage or erode relationships?
3. Abandonment is discussed as the most extreme form of relational separation. Where have you seen relational abandonment (individually or organizationally) extract a high cost?
4. In what part of your life has focus on yourself been your big problem? How has it impacted you and others around you?

Chapter 8

EXTREME COMMERCIALISM

1. The author states that the unintended consequences of extreme commercialism threaten the very source of commercial gain – relationships. How is extreme commercialism bad for business? Examples?
2. In your opinion, where have extreme commercial forces promoted values, habits, and cultural norms that are most destructive? What do they destroy?
3. The author cites research that shows that “false” is the term most closely associated with advertising. Why is that? What are the longer term implications?
4. The chapter concludes by stating that unlike any other time in history, the void created by our distrust has stimulated a demand for trusting relationships where reputations are not for sale. What is your assessment of that statement? If true, what are the longer-term implications?



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Chapter 9

WORSHIPPING AT THE ALTAR OF HIGH TECH

1. The chapter begins with a quote “the scariest thing...wasn’t that computers started to act like people but that people started to act like computers.” What evidence do you see that people are acting more like computers? What are the costs and consequences?
2. The author points to technology and how its use can exacerbate generational differences. To what extent have you seen that? What are the implications?
3. The power of technology to provide greater control over our lives can also have a downside, the power to corrupt. In your life, where has technology been a positive for relationships, and where has it been negative? Why?
4. The chapter ends by stating that we must be very intentional about translating the ways of relationship building into technology. What does that mean? What would be three ways to do that in your own life?

Chapter 10

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF RELATIONSHIPS

1. This claim appears early in this chapter, “As the world is increasingly ruled by institutions growing larger and more powerful, this loss of mission and relational serving sucks the life out of relationships; it institutionalizes them.” What is it about large institutions that suck the life out of relationships? Where have you experienced it?
2. Regarding the quote: “One of the tests of a country is whether more people are trying to get in or get out.” Why are more people trying to get out of our institutions – marriage, large corporations, political parties, religious organization – than are trying to get in? What institutions are you seeking to avoid and why?
3. The author concludes we are moving from an information-based economy to a relationship economy where our connections and ability to work together constructively will make or break us. Where do you see those trends in your own life?
4. What changes must be made to enhance institutional relationships? What can you do to support that?



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Chapter 11

REVALUING RELATIONSHIPS

1. The book asserts that in many cases, we have attempted to structure our lives to reduce our dependence on relationships. Why? How has this played out in your life?
2. Developing human capital will require enhanced relational capacity. How do you do that? Why is it important? Where have you seen examples of it?
3. The book discusses relationship goals and metrics that help us focus our relationship efforts. What are three goals that would help reallocate your efforts and reinforce accountability for making relationships a higher priority at home? At work or other key places in your life? How might you measure your progress?
4. The chapter concludes by discussing mounting evidence of a new age – the Age of Relationship – where relationships are becoming a higher priority. What signs do you see across our society and in your own life that confirm this trend? Where do you see this evidence denied and by whom?

Chapter 12

RECLAIMING SMALL AND LOCAL THAT IS BIGGER AND BETTER

1. In the first part of the chapter it is stated: “The spirit of small and local is an invisible, relational force that breathes life, animation, and energy within and among us.” What is it about small and local that breathes life into us? Where have you experienced this? Why?
2. The author asserts a resurgence of small and local. What evidence do you see across society and in your own local community that affirms that? Why is it occurring?
3. How does community foster learning and innovation? What examples from your own life are good examples of this? Why is it so powerful?
4. Where are there productive opportunities in your own life to foster small and local? What must you do to make it happen?



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Chapter 13

EMBRACING RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP

1. The author opens this chapter by talking about the importance of culture as a means to make the change to a more relational society. Why is culture so important?
2. This chapter states that we need a specific form of leadership – relational leadership – that reinvigorates our culture with productive relationships. What is relational leadership? What kind of leadership would it replace? Why is it so important?
3. Relational leadership invites and engages other stakeholders in a way that builds commitment. Why is that important? Where have you seen the best examples?
4. Coaching and mentoring are important tools for a strong relational environment. Why are they necessary? Where do you have opportunities to coach and mentor in a way that builds stronger, more productive relationships?
5. As a result of these discussions, what is the number one take-away for relational change in your life?

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