

Character and . . .

Connection

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Mirrors of Meaning

Character and Connection through Theater, Mentorship, and Social Media

Anna Haverland

Connection is not optional; it is how the self unfolds. On a college campus filled with hundreds of people all in some stage of becoming, the way you treat others becomes a reflection of the kind of person you're choosing to be. It does not take long to realize that college is about more than acquiring knowledge. It is also about the continual process of becoming yourself—developing, growing into yourself—and you do that through other people. A college campus is full of mirrors. Not literal ones—not the kind you pass in dorm bathrooms or classroom windows, but human mirrors—reflective moments, conversations, acts of kindness, opportunities that show you who you are and who you might become. Every interaction, whether chosen or accidental, becomes a reflection of yourself and what you still have to learn.



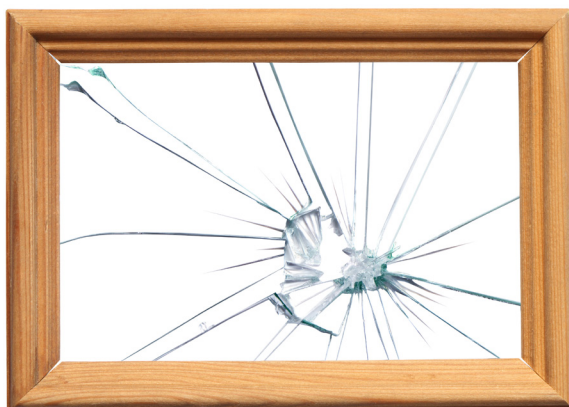
*Every interaction
becomes a reflection
of yourself.*

Connection is the quiet force that shapes character. At first, it is subtle. You may be in a classroom and hear someone speak on a thought you have never quite considered, but it resonates with your values. Sometimes it is found in deep friendships that offer inspiration, accountability, and honesty.

Other times, it's through tension and difficult relationships that stretch your capacity for patience and forgiveness. Or you might have a conflict with a teammate or friend on a group project and discover how quickly you become defensive. These are mirrors. Each of these interactions reveals something about you: a strength, a value, a wound, and sometimes a blind spot in your perspective. In these mirrored moments, you begin to see yourself through the eyes of others and slowly learn how to respond instead of reacting or retreating, with an intention to connect meaningfully.

In this microcosm of society that is a college campus, the people around you become your informal teachers. The classmate who challenges your assumptions without shaming you. The roommate who calls you out when you're being inconsiderate, not to hurt you but to help you grow. The teammate who trusts you with their vulnerability and, just by being honest, teaches you how to be more human. These relationships may not always feel like lessons in the moment, but they are. They teach responsibility, empathy, and humility. Character is more than something you declare. It is something that gets tested, revealed, and refined through the mirror of connection.

This process is not always comfortable. Sometimes what the mirror reflects back is hard to look at. It could be a moment of selfishness, a tendency to withdraw, a habit of speaking before thinking, and hurting those you care for. But growth begins the moment you decide to look anyway; stay present with what you see and let



Reflection is not always comfortable.

it change you. College gives you countless chances to do this not because it is designed that way, but because you are surrounded by others who are also discovering and refining their character. The shared messiness, the overlapping stories, late-night talks, and awkward silences all create the ideal conditions for character formation.

Over time, you come to understand that the version of yourself you leave college with will not be defined just by your degree or your GPA, but by how you treat others, how you handle the uncomfortable moments, and how willing you are to grow when it is easier to shrink. Connection is the thread running through all these interactions. Without connection, character development will stall, but *with* it, you have the potential to be more than when you first arrived on campus. A campus full of these metaphorical mirrors may sound intimidating, but it is a gift, ensuring you are never entirely alone in becoming who you are, who you will be.

More Than a Team: The Power of Compassion, Accountability, Respect, and Excellence

In Anne Funke's article on building a culture of C.A.R.E. with the UD volleyball team, the mirror metaphor shows up in a powerful way, but not in the way you might expect. Instead of holding the mirror up to herself, Funke held it out for the team, steady and intentional, giving them the chance to take an honest look at who



Everyone holds mirrors. Sometimes it's for ourselves, sometimes it's for others.

they were in that moment. And just as importantly, who they were working to become. Funke acknowledged "These young women didn't need me to be another coach. They needed me to be a consistent adult who saw them, believed in them, and held space for growth."¹

She saw a future for the team culture that they could not yet see—not just more competitive, but more united. More self-aware. Stronger in ways that don't show up on stat sheets. Funke was not there to give them all the answers, she was there to ask better questions. To hold space for growth. To help them see that the real win was not just about what happened on the court, but how they showed up for each other when no one was watching.

What she introduced was not some complicated program. It started with a simple idea: C.A.R.E. It stands for Compassion, Accountability, Respect, and Excellence. The idea first came up in a conversation with a few staff members who noticed something was off with the team. The talent was there. The work ethic was there. But something deeper was missing. The relationships were not clicking. The culture felt disconnected. So, Funke offered something different: let's build trust first. Let's build a team that knows each other, not just plays next to each other.

Funke describes mentorship as something more than guidance; it's about modeling. It's about being willing to grow right alongside the people you are trying to help. Funke writes that the more she challenged the team to reflect, the more it pushed her to reflect, too. Her observation captures the

thought that when you are truly invested in helping others grow, you cannot help but grow yourself. And that is the heart of C.A.R.E. It is not about a checklist or a slogan on a locker room wall. It is about doing small things consistently. Listening more intentionally. Owning your mistakes. Being kind even when it feels hard. And showing up for your people in the quiet moments.

This is not just a story about volleyball; it is about what it means to be part of something bigger than yourself. To be seen, challenged, supported, and ultimately transformed by the people around you. That's what happens when a team learns to C.A.R.E. not just about the game, but about each other. Some of the athletes she worked with reflected on the program and said ". . . I strongly believe that what we've accomplished the last two years is because of our connection as a team. . . . I feel better equipped to go out into the world and function with C.A.R.E.!"² This remark shows that when time, effort, and community are reinforced in athletics it can change the entire dynamic of a program.

What's powerful about the C.A.R.E. model is that it's not just for athletes; it's for anyone who is part of a group, a workplace, a family, or even just trying to grow as a person. You don't need to be on a volleyball court to practice compassion, accountability, respect, and excellence. These values are reflected in everyday life through our interactions with coworkers, our presence with friends, our approach to conflict, and our leadership style. At its core, C.A.R.E. is about choosing to invest in people, being honest, and continually growing. Whether you are part of a team or not, everyone holds mirrors, sometimes for ourselves, sometimes for others. In every space you step into, there is a chance to reflect on who you are and who you are trying to become. The culture you create starts with how you C.A.R.E.

Beyond the Script: Finding Ourselves in the Roles We Play

In Joe Klinebriel's article on connection in theatre, he shows how the stage is not just a place to perform but a space where real, meaningful connection happens—not just between characters, but between people. He adds, "I had known the art and act of theater to be powerful and life-changing simply by satisfying one of our strongest and deepest human needs: our desire to connect with others."³ That is what this journal captures so well—theatre creates a mirror, not just to reflect ourselves, but to connect us to each other. When actors step on stage, they are not just delivering lines, they are offering pieces of themselves. And what is powerful is that the audience

often sees something of themselves in those performances, too. Within that shared recognition of joy, fear, grief, hope is where we connect with each other. It is real, and it is raw. And it doesn't require perfection. It just requires presence.

Even outside the theatre, you are stepping into roles every day as students, coworkers, friends, and partners. You are constantly showing different parts of yourself, depending on where you are and who you are with. Those roles are not masks—they are the ways you try to understand yourself and connect more deeply with the people around you. Theatre just makes that process more visible. It shows us how connection is built through listening, reacting, showing vulnerability. The trust between actors, the tension between silence and speech, the shared breath between a cast and their audience—these are all reminders that we are, at our core, wired for connection. And that connection takes effort. It requires being seen and seeing others, not just for the roles they play, but for the humanity they bring to those roles.



Theater helps us reflect on our connections, too.

That is what makes the mirror of theatre so special. It does not just reflect who you are. It reflects how deeply you are capable of relating to another. Klinebriel seconds these thoughts by saying “the purpose of theater might be to let us see our own reflection in the mirror, and, for better or worse, glimpse a representation of the truth of ourselves.”⁴ In those fleeting moments onstage, you get glimpses of what it means to truly understand someone else.

And offstage? Those lessons stay with us. Whether you are rehearsing lines or just navigating life, the same questions arise: Am I showing up as myself? Am I open to others? Am I really seeing the people in front of me?

Theatre teaches us that connection is not always loud or obvious. It can exist subtly, quietly, even awkwardly. But it all matters. And if you are willing to stay present, to lean in instead of look away, you just might find that the roles you play can lead you back to something real.

The Distorted Mirror: Ghosting, Social Media, and the Illusion of Connection

In contrast, Nick Elder’s article on ghosting and social media holds up a much more unsettling kind of mirror. It is not the clean, reflective kind. It is distorted, like one of those funhouse mirrors at a carnival. But instead of stretching your body, it bends the way in which you connect with others. Elder does an exceptional job of portraying the prevalence of ghosting throughout history. He presents the idea that ghosting refers not just to avoiding someone, but pretending the connection never existed at all.

What we avoid reveals us.

Ghosting might feel like control or self-protection in the moment, but what it often reveals is fear. Fear of rejection. Fear of conflict. Fear of having to see yourself reflected in the other person’s hurt. Real connection is not always easy. Sometimes it’s messy, awkward, and even painful. But when you ghost someone or vanish from a



Sometimes our reflections can be distorted.

relationship without a word, you do not just end the connection; you erase the space where healing could have happened. And the silence on both sides of the story speaks volumes.

Social media, too, creates this strange illusion of closeness. We are constantly posting, liking, watching each other’s lives unfold in carefully edited pieces. It feels like we are connected, but more often, we are performing the act of connection instead of actually living it. We scroll past people we once cared about. We send heart emojis instead of checking in. We watch someone’s story and convince ourselves we know how they are doing. But real presence, real connection takes so much more than that.

What makes this kind of mirror so tricky is that it does not show us lies, it shows us pieces of the truth. A highlight reel here, a funny tweet there, a thoughtful caption that might have taken hours to write. It is not fake, but it is incomplete. And when we forget that, we start to believe the image is the whole story. You see yourself, but only in the light you choose. And worse, you see others through that same limited lens.

Elder makes an exceptional point: “There is power to accountability.”⁵ When do we choose not to respond? When do we disappear? Our character is shaped in what we leave unsaid, in who we stop showing up for. It is morally right for us to own our actions, but how often do we take real accountability? That is a hard truth, especially in a world that makes it so easy to walk away without a word. But here is the thing: the mirror of social media may be distorted but that doesn’t mean we can’t find clarity. We just have to lean in closer, look at the details. Ask ourselves who we are really connecting with. Who are we avoiding? Who deserves more than a silent exit? Even though it is far easier to hide behind a screen, the kind of connection that shapes character and integrity cannot be built on silence.

And maybe that is the challenge this journal leaves us with: Be more intentional. Choose presence over performance. Face the hard conversations instead of ghosting them. Because even in a digital world, what we choose to engage with and what we walk away from says more about our character than anything else.

Conclusion

These mirrors—court, stage, screen—offer a profound reflection on character and connection. Emotional truth takes center stage through performance. The teammate-to-teammate relationship exemplifies moral growth through how we demonstrate care and our responsibility to others. Social media and the act of ghosting reflect our character and how we choose to communicate (or not) behind our screens. Genuine connection provides the best reflection of ourselves throughout our lifetime, when, in both good and bad moments we can choose to be vulnerable and accountable for how we communicate, behave towards others, and show up for ourselves. In each of the articles, connection is what illuminates the mirror, allowing us to see clearly. It may be uncomfortable to look at but it is necessary for our growth.

Throughout our lives, character is not something we possess on its own. Rather, it is revealed over time during experiences. When we are on a stage, on a team of any kind, or staring at our screen, we are always standing in front of a mirror. Some are clear, others cracked, others distorted by what we haven’t taken the time to repair. Through these mirrors our reflections tell a story about who we are and how we have grown to engage with the world. Every connection we make with others is an opportunity to reveal ourselves holistically, to act with integrity, and to choose compassion. The

challenge is to choose the mirror that reflects goodness and to stand in front of it long enough to recognize ourselves.

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Notes

1. Funke, "A Culture of C.A.R.E.," 29
2. Funke, 32
3. Klinebriel, "A Community Connection," 38
4. Klinebriel, 42
5. Elder, "Ghosting and Graffiti," 77

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