



The Connection Challenge

UNLOCKING THE POWER
OF DIVERSE CONNECTIONS

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The Connection Challenge

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This book is a work of nonfiction based on the author's personal experiences, reflections, and conversations. Names and identifying details of individuals may have been changed to protect their privacy.

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Dedication

To Paul, Logan, Lily, Mona, Maria, and Easton —

My amazing family, who encourages me to show up fully in life,
love me exactly as I am,
and remind me daily what real connection looks and feels like.

This book is also for every person who has ever felt unseen, unheard, or misunderstood.

May we all remember that **connection is always available** —

one question,

one moment,

one conversation at a time.



About the Author

Leigh Kubin

Leigh Kubin is a Master Certified Life Coach and Master Certified Hypnotherapy Practitioner with a passion for helping people break through barriers, rewrite their stories, and live with intention.

Since 2010, Leigh has worked with individuals from all walks of life — guiding them to release what no longer serves them and step fully into who they're meant to be.

Curious, compassionate, and deeply committed to human connection, Leigh believes that understanding one another — even when we disagree — is the key to both healing and growth.

When she's not coaching or writing, Leigh can be found:

- Traveling with her husband, Paul
- Spending time with her family
- Attending community events
- Or simply sharing laughter with friends

She lives her life on purpose — joyfully, gratefully, and always with an open heart

Learn more at: www.leighkubin.com



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Foreword: We Belong to Each Other

There's a quiet ache that lingers in the background of our world today —
A heaviness that seems to press down on our conversations, our communities, even our homes.

It's the ache of disconnection.

Of division.

Of looking around and wondering when we stopped seeing each other as human.

You can feel it in the tension between family members who avoid certain topics at dinner.

You can hear it in the way people talk **at** each other instead of **with** each other.

You can see it in the headlines — each one crafted to provoke a stronger reaction than the last.

But I don't believe we're as far apart as we've been led to believe.

I believe, deeply, that under the noise, there is still shared ground.

That we want many of the same things:

Peace. Safety. Love. Purpose.

That we long to be seen, understood, and respected — even if we don't always know how to ask for it.

And I believe that connection is not only possible —

It's essential.

The Connection Challenge was born out of this belief.

It started as a personal commitment:

To talk to one new person every day for thirty days.

Not just anyone — but someone different from me in a meaningful way.

Someone with a different background.

A different belief system.

A different identity or worldview.

Someone whose presence stirred something in me —

Curiosity, discomfort, awe, maybe even resistance.

My only goal was to understand.

To get beneath the surface.

And so, I asked each person the same five questions:

1. **What experiences or beliefs have shaped your perspective on life the most?**

2. **What brings you the most joy and fulfillment in your daily life?**
3. **How do your beliefs or values guide your approach to challenges or decisions?**
4. **What's one thing you wish more people understood about your culture, beliefs, or lifestyle?**
5. **What's a life lesson you've learned that you think everyone, no matter their background, could benefit from?**

What happened next was more than a conversation.

It was a transformation.

Walls softened.

Stories emerged.

Assumptions fell away.

And I was reminded — again and again — that once you truly see someone, it becomes nearly impossible to reduce them to a label or write them off as “other.”

This book is about those conversations.

It's about what happens when we stop arguing about issues and start connecting over what matters.

It's about noticing the humanity in the person across from you — and the power that comes from simply asking:

“What's your story?”

The first chapter begins with a metaphor that shattered something in me and rebuilt it with clarity.

If you've never heard the Red Ant / Black Ant theory, prepare to see your world a little differently.

Because the question at the heart of this book is not just:

“Why are we so divided?”

But also:

“Who is shaking our jar?”

Let's find out together.

As you read, you may notice something stirring within...

Change Your Mind, Change Your Life is here when you're ready to go deeper —

And there's a link at the end to schedule a quiet 30-minute consultation, if that feels supportive.

Chapter 1: Who is Shaking the Jar?

Exploring the Red Ant / Black Ant Theory and the power of perspective

There's a story I came across that I haven't been able to forget.
It's short, simple — and completely changed the way I see the world.

It goes like this:

Red ants and black ants are placed into a jar.
At first, they coexist peacefully.
No conflict. No chaos. Just ants going about their business.

Then someone shakes the jar.

Suddenly, they attack each other — red against black, black against red.
Enemies.

But here's the thing: the ants aren't the problem.

The shaking is.

The first time I heard this story, I sat in silence.
Not because I was confused — but because something inside me just *clicked*.

Haven't we all felt that shaking?

The shouting on the news.
The polarized posts on social media.
The way we sort people into "us" and "them" — by politics, faith, lifestyle, identity — before we even speak a word.

But what if the problem isn't our differences?
What if the real issue is the shaking?

- The algorithms that divide
- The fear-based headlines
- The voices that benefit when we turn on each other instead of turning toward each other

Once I started seeing it, I couldn't unsee it.

A friend who stopped talking to her sister over a Facebook post.
Coworkers who split after one heated break room conversation.
Neighbors who no longer speak because of how they voted.

But the more I looked, the clearer it became:
They weren't enemies.
They were just reacting to the shaking.

That realization sparked *The Connection Challenge*.

I didn't want to be another voice in the jar, adding to the noise.
I wanted to do something radically simple:

Sit down.
Listen.
Connect.

Not just with people like me — but with people who weren't.
And not to debate — but to understand.

So I set a goal:

- One person a day
- Thirty days
- Same five questions
- No agenda — just curiosity

The results? Incredible.

Some stories cracked me open.
Others challenged what I thought I knew.
Many reminded me just how resilient, layered, and extraordinary people are — especially when they feel safe enough to be seen.

This wasn't about finding agreement.
It was about reconnecting with something deeper:

Our shared humanity.

And that jar we're all in?
It doesn't have to stay shaken.

We can pause.

We can listen.

We can see each other again.

Because once we understand who's shaking the jar,
we gain the power to stop fighting each other —
and start focusing on what really matters.

That's the invitation of this chapter.

That's the heart of the challenge.

That's the beginning of change.

Let's keep going.

Chapter 2: Looking Beyond Assumptions

Challenging stereotypes and seeing others more clearly

When I began *The Connection Challenge*, I was excited — but also nervous.

How do you walk up to someone you barely know — someone different from you — and ask them to talk about their life, their values, and what matters most?

I had to confront a quiet fear:

- What if I say the wrong thing?
- What if they misunderstand me?
- What if I make them uncomfortable?
- What if they make *me* uncomfortable?

It turns out, that fear wasn't a flaw.

It was the threshold.

Discomfort, I learned, is often just unfamiliarity.

And unfamiliarity? It's fertile ground for growth.

The first few conversations tested my courage.

But each one opened a door I didn't expect.

When I explained what I was doing — interviewing one person a day for thirty days to better understand our shared humanity — people were more receptive than I imagined.

There was the woman at the gym, who spoke about growing up in a military family and moving constantly.

She shared what it was like to always be the "new girl," and how it taught her to adapt and empathize. That moment made me realize just how many people walk through life carrying **invisible strengths shaped by hard circumstances**.

Then there was the grocery store cashier.

We'd exchanged hellos before, but never much more.

When I asked her what brings her joy, she told me about the quiet hours after her kids go to sleep — how she knits and watches old sitcoms because they remind her of home.

She also shared what it felt like to arrive in the U.S. as a teenager:
The disorientation.
The loneliness.
The long journey it took to feel truly seen.

And then there was the man walking his dog.

I'd seen him nearly every day.

When I asked if I could talk to him for a few minutes, he hesitated — then said yes.

When I asked what shaped his worldview, he spoke quietly about losing his wife five years earlier.

"You never know what someone's going through," he told me.

"So now, I try to assume the best until I know otherwise."

These stories humbled me.

Connection doesn't require perfect words.

It just asks for your willingness to listen.

Discomfort became my compass.

Every time I felt resistance or awkwardness, I realized:

I was on the edge of something real.

Something meaningful.

Something transformative.

And with each passing day, it became easier —

Not because people changed.

But because I did.

Chapter 3: Listening With Curiosity

How presence transforms connection

We all wear labels.

Some are chosen. Others are assigned.

Some we carry with pride. Others we carry like weight.

In today's world, labels are everywhere:

Conservative. Liberal.

Immigrant. Veteran.

Atheist. Evangelical.

Millennial. Boomer. Gen Z.

They give us quick answers.

But they also create distance.

Labels can be helpful shorthand —

But they also flatten the beautiful complexity of who we are.

In one interview, I met a man who identified as far-right politically.

We shared little in terms of ideology.

But when I asked him what brought him the most joy, his eyes lit up as he talked about his grandchildren.

When he shared his fears for the future — they mirrored my own.

Another conversation was with a young woman who identifies as queer, nonreligious, and deeply progressive.

She told me how painful it was to feel dismissed by the people she loved.

Her story wasn't that different from the man I had just spoken with.

Then came the tattooed biker — aloof at first, maybe even intimidating.

But when I asked about a life lesson that shaped him, he spoke quietly about mentoring young men recently released from prison.

He'd once been one of them.

His story held pain — and redemption.

I also met a devoutly religious woman in her 70s, dressed modestly and soft-spoken.

From her appearance, I assumed she'd be reserved.

Instead, she turned out to be one of the most curious, open-minded people I met.

“I’ve lived a long time,” she told me,

“And what I’ve learned is that listening is better than judging.”

Each of these people defied the assumptions I didn’t even realize I was making.

Different beliefs.

Same heart.

The labels hadn’t disappeared.

But the stories behind them had softened me.

The more I listened, the more I realized how dangerous it is to stop at someone’s label.

Labels may categorize — but they never tell the full story.

Go Deeper Into Your Own Story

If these stories have you feeling curious about your own patterns, here’s a free guide to support that journey:

👉 [\[Change Your Mind, Change Your Life – Free Download\]](#)

Chapter 4: Finding Common Ground

Discovering shared values across differences

There's something incredible that happens when you ask someone what brings them joy.

Their body language shifts.

Their eyes brighten.

Their whole energy lifts.

That's one of the reasons I included this question in the challenge:

What brings you the most joy and fulfillment in your daily life?

I wanted to find the common thread — the one that transcends ideology, geography, and experience.

And what I found is that joy often lives in the ordinary:

- The smell of bread baking in the oven
- The sound of a baby's laugh
- Watching a child achieve something they didn't think they could
- Singing loudly in the car
- Praying in silence

In those moments, we stop being strangers.

We become human to each other.

But it wasn't just the joy that brought us closer.

It was the contrast between joy and struggle that made people's stories unforgettable.

I remember one woman who told me she finds joy in tending to her garden every morning.

She described how touching the soil calmed her, how watching something grow gave her hope.

Later, she shared that she had lost her son a few years earlier.

Her grief was still raw — but the garden became the place where joy was allowed to return.

Another man told me he loved playing chess at the local library with strangers.

"It's the only place I feel like I belong," he said.

Then he told me he'd recently lost his job and was struggling with depression.

His joy wasn't performative — it was a life raft.

I spoke to a mother who said her happiest moment each day was hearing her kids giggle when they played together.

But behind her smile was a harder truth:

She had escaped an abusive relationship and started over with almost nothing.

Her joy was fierce — and hard-earned.

These weren't isolated examples.

They became a pattern.

The people who radiated the most joy had also walked through the most pain.

And what they taught me is this:

Joy isn't the absence of struggle.

It's the proof that we're still choosing to show up.

When you pair joy and struggle side by side, you get the full picture.

You stop seeing people as problems to fix —

And start seeing them as stories to honor.

That was the breakthrough.

Not just that we're alike —

But that our joys and struggles bind us more deeply than any belief system ever could.

Chapter 5: Changing the Lens

Shifting perspective to create understanding

I used to think I was a good listener.
But this challenge taught me something different:

Listening isn't just hearing — it's holding space.

There were days I sat across from someone and felt the urge to respond.
To share my perspective.
To fill the silence.

But I practiced restraint.
I reminded myself:

Just listen.

One of the most powerful interviews I did was with a woman named Teresa, who had lost her daughter to cancer.

She was hesitant at first — wary of yet another conversation that might leave her explaining or justifying her grief.

But I promised her:
All I wanted was to hear her story.

She talked about her daughter's laugh.
Her stubborn spirit.
Her love for animals.

She told me how every room felt quieter since her passing.
How holidays still felt hollow.

I didn't interrupt.
I didn't try to comfort her with platitudes.
I just sat with her.

I listened with my whole heart.

When she finished, she looked at me with tears in her eyes and said:

"That's the first time I've said all that out loud without someone trying to change the subject.
Thank you for letting me remember her without rushing me."

That moment changed me.

I stopped listening to reply.

I started listening to receive.

When we do that — when we listen with the heart —
we give people the rare gift of being seen.

Not corrected.

Not redirected.

Just seen.

And that, more than anything,
is the root of connection.

Chapter 6: Everyday Connection

Finding meaning in small, intentional moments

There's a hidden cost to disconnection.

When we don't take the time to understand each other, we fill in the blanks with assumptions.

And assumptions lead to fear.

Fear leads to judgment.

And judgment leads to pain.

I met a man named David who had been misunderstood because of the way he looked.

He was tall, heavily tattooed, with a deep voice and a quiet demeanor.

Most people assumed he was angry or intimidating.

But when I sat down and asked him about his values, he told me about his volunteer work mentoring troubled teens.

"People cross the street when they see me," he said.

"But if they knew me, they'd know I've spent the last ten years trying to keep kids out of jail."

Then there was Lina — a woman who changed how she dressed because she was tired of being stereotyped at work.

She used to wear colorful clothes that reflected her culture.

But after a colleague joked about her being "too ethnic," she started blending in.

"It's like I'm hiding in plain sight," she told me.

"And it hurts more than people realize."

I also spoke to Marcus — a high school senior labeled "lazy" because of his grades.

When I asked what shaped his decisions, he shared how his mom worked two jobs and he stayed up late caring for his younger siblings.

"No one ever asked," he said.

"They just assumed I didn't care."

The pain of being misunderstood runs deep.

It shapes how we show up.

How we trust.

How we love.

But asking someone their story — genuinely, with care — can change everything.

It doesn't erase the pain.

But it gives it a place to be held.

Connection, I realized, is not just about understanding.

It's about repair.

Still Feeling the Echo of These Stories?

You're not alone. Many readers feel something stir deeply in these pages.

That's why I created a resource to support your inner transformation:

 [\[Download: Change Your Mind, Change Your Life\]](#)

Chapter 7: The Power of a Story

How storytelling builds empathy and bridges

By the time I reached the end of the challenge, I noticed something beautiful:

Connection had become a habit.

I found myself lingering in conversations.

Making more eye contact.

Asking better questions.

The challenge no longer felt like a task.

It felt like a way of living.

And that's the real invitation of this project —

Not just to talk to thirty people.

But to truly **see** people.

To ask questions that matter.

To listen with presence.

To live with intention.

Connection isn't about adding something to your to-do list.

It's about shifting how you do what you already do.

Here are a few simple practices I found helpful in building meaningful connections into everyday life:

- **Practice intentional greetings.**

Make eye contact. Smile. Greet people by name when possible.

It sounds simple, but it creates instant warmth.

- **Ask deeper follow-up questions.**

Instead of just, "How are you?" try:

"What's been lighting you up lately?"

or

"What's something you're excited about right now?"

- **Put your phone down.**

Even five minutes of distraction-free conversation can change how someone feels seen.

- **Make space for silence.**

Let pauses breathe. Sometimes, the best connections happen *just after* the silence.

- **Reflect and respond.**

Repeat a small part of what someone said to show you were really listening.

A simple, “That sounds really meaningful,” goes a long way.

The point isn’t perfection.

The point is presence.

You don’t have to change the world.

You just have to change how you move through it.

One connection at a time.

Chapter 8: Bridging Differences

Tools and takeaways from 30 days of deep conversation

This challenge didn't just change how I see others.

It changed how I see myself.

I've become more grounded.

More present.

More open.

The more I connected with others, the more I found myself.

And isn't that what connection is?

A mirror.

A reminder.

A return.

Some of the people I met stayed with me — not just as memories, but as guides.

There was **Hannah**, the retired schoolteacher, who told me she felt invisible since leaving the classroom.

"I used to feel like I mattered," she said.

But when she described the books she loved, the students she mentored — I saw her light up. I told her I saw it.

Weeks later, she emailed to say she had signed up to volunteer with a literacy nonprofit.

"Someone reminded me I still have something to give," she wrote.

Then there was **James**, who worked in manufacturing.

We talked about faith, loss, and resilience.

He said something that cracked me open:

"Most people think you have to talk big to be heard.

I think you just have to mean it."

That line replays in my mind every time I second-guess the power of showing up quietly and sincerely.

And then there was **Priya**, a nurse who told me about carrying other people's pain all day.

“Sometimes I don’t even know what my feelings are anymore,” she said.

But when she talked about painting — how she rediscovered it during COVID — her face softened.

And I thought: *Art is how she reconnects with herself.*

Maybe that’s what we all need more of.

These weren’t just interviews.

They were teachings.

Each one handed me a piece of wisdom I didn’t know I needed.

The lesson I’ll carry forever is this:

- You don’t have to agree with someone to love them.
- You don’t have to understand someone fully to honor their story.
- You don’t have to change anyone to change the world.

You just have to show up —

With a question, a heart, and a willingness to connect.

Chapter 9: The Path Forward

Reflections, ripple effects, and starting your own challenge

When I started this challenge, my question was:

Who is shaking the jar?

But now, I ask something different:

What can I do today to open a door instead of closing one?

This book is my open door.

It's an invitation to begin again —

With your neighbor.

Your co-worker.

Your family.

Your community.

Ask someone something real.

Listen with your heart.

Let them know they matter.

Not long after I finished the challenge, a friend of mine — someone who had watched quietly from the sidelines — reached out.

She told me she had started doing something similar.

Every week, she picks one person she knows only vaguely, or not at all, and invites them to coffee.

She uses the five questions from this book.

She calls it her **“Monday Morning Connection.”**

A few weeks later, she shared a story with me:

“I met a woman I’ve worked next to for over a year and had never really spoken to.

We ended up crying together at that coffee shop.

She thought no one saw her.

Now we talk every day.”

That’s what this is about.

Not the thirty days —

But the **one moment** that becomes something more.

Here are the five questions once more.

Use them. Or make your own.

Let them guide you:

1. **What experiences or beliefs have shaped your perspective on life the most?**
2. **What brings you the most joy and fulfillment in your daily life?**
3. **How do your beliefs or values guide your approach to challenges or decisions?**
4. **What's one thing you wish more people understood about your culture, beliefs, or lifestyle?**
5. **What's a life lesson you've learned that you think everyone, no matter their background, could benefit from?**

You don't need a program.

You don't need a platform.

You just need a moment —

And a willingness to begin.

Let this be your beginning.

Because the world doesn't need more opinions.

It needs more connection.

And connection starts with you.

XXOO,

Leigh

Ready to Take the Next Step?

If something moved in you, I'd be honored to support you.



[*\[Book Your Free 30-Minute Session Here\]*](#)



[*\[Change Your Mind, Change Your Life – Free Download\]*](#)
