

OUR WHY

[Positive Connection Initiative \(PCI\)](#) explores how inner work, self-awareness, curiosity, and emotional intelligence, strengthen our relationships and our shared humanity. Grounded in the science of human flourishing, these are skills anyone can learn, practice, and pass on. **Connection is a skillset, and it can be taught.**

OUR SIGNATURE WORKSHOPS

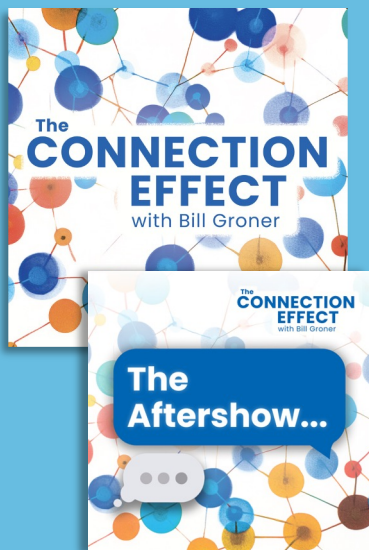
Our workshops explore the power and potential of connection, tailored to the specific culture, context, and goals of the school/organization. Through interactive workshops, participants learn to:

- Build connection through curiosity and deep listening
- Handle conflict and adversity with emotional awareness and regulation
- Practice respectful, effective communication

REACH & GROWTH

- **70+** workshops delivered to **3,000+** participants
- **Measured impact:** *Post-workshop survey of 680 participants*:*
 - **98%** felt more prepared for non-judgmental dialogue
 - **99%** reported increased understanding of curiosity as a dialogue tool
 - **99%** felt better prepared for respectful listening in difficult conversations

EXPANDING THE CONVERSATION



To extend our impact beyond in-person workshops, PCI launched **The Connection Effect** podcast on [Spotify](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), and [YouTube](#) – exploring the science and soul of human connection. Each episode is accompanied by **The Aftershow**, where Bill and friends reflect on the conversation and explore what it means for how we connect to ourselves and others in everyday life.

Through conversations with leading researchers and practitioners, we discuss topics such as polarization, curiosity, emotional regulation, meaning and purpose, self-actualization, peak performance, handling adversity, and radical listening.

The podcast amplifies PCI's mission while inviting a broader public into the work. Join the community and conversation on our [Substack](#).

CONTACT

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**Survey responses measured on a five-point agreement scale:
Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree.*

WHAT MAKES OUR WORKSHOPS DIFFERENT

Participants don't receive a lecture. In groups of three, they generate their own dialogue strategies, then build them through nine rounds of structured practice with real-time peer feedback — moving from warmth to complexity to genuine challenge.

FIVE EXERCISES IN SEQUENCE

Each builds on the last. Challenge and emotional stakes escalate intentionally.

- 1 CROWDSOURCING THE SKILL**
Triads create their own active listening and curiosity strategies before practice begins.
- 2 THE FAVORITE PERSON**
Low-stakes warmth-building: one speaks, one listens, one observes and gives glows & grows. All three roles rotate.
- 3 IMPORTANT SOCIAL ISSUE**
Same triadic structure, now applied to something each participant genuinely cares about. Emotional engagement rises.

- 4 ETHICAL DIALOGUE & PERSPECTIVE SHARING**
Bidirectional conversation with awareness of speaking-to-listening ratio. Emotional regulation introduced here.
 - **Middle school:** Relatable ethics (e.g., Is it okay to lie to protect a friend's feelings?)
 - **High school:** social/civic ethics (e.g., Should schools monitor what students post online?)

- 5 [HIGH SCHOOL OPTION] POLITICAL/ETHICAL DIALOGUE: NUANCE & COMMON GROUND**
More advanced exercise. Same high stakes, new goal: find nuance or shared humanity across difference.

WHY IT WORKS: THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE DESIGN

Every element of this workshop is intentional and grounded in research.

- 1. CROWDSOURCING & PSYCHOLOGICAL OWNERSHIP:** When participants generate the skills themselves, they process them more deeply and feel accountable to the standard they created.
- 2. NEUROPLASTICITY THROUGH REPETITION & FEEDBACK:** Nine rounds of structured rotation, with real-time peer response after every one, convert awareness into lasting behavior change. The brain forms new behavioral pathways through practice with feedback.
- 3. PROGRESSIVE EMOTIONAL SCAFFOLDING:** Early joy-inducing exercises broaden receptivity to new ideas. Later exercises intentionally introduce emotional difficulty; skills practiced under genuine challenge transfer better than skills practiced in comfort. The stable triad structure maintains psychological safety throughout.
- 4. NEUROCHEMICAL ENCODING:** Focused attention combined with moderate emotional arousal triggers the release of neuromodulators that signal the brain to encode new learning more efficiently. This workshop deliberately creates both conditions.
- 5. THE OBSERVER EFFECT:** Every participant rotates into the observer role, analyzing and giving feedback on whether peers applied the skills. The resulting "protégé effect", from evaluating a skill, produces deeper processing and stronger retention than practicing it alone.

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

- *“I need to listen more. I get so focused on ‘I’m right.’ Sometimes I need to take a deep breath, step away, and remember that **it’s okay to disagree.**”*
- *“Friendship is just about respect and loyalty. You don’t have to have the same opinion—you need to be willing to **hear them out.**”*

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

- *“I learned to **focus on what they’re saying** instead of just waiting for them to be done so I can respond.”*
- *“Curiosity helped me to **connect** with people—really understanding where they come from and what they’re thinking.”*

COLLEGE STUDENTS

- *“...incredibly valuable...we spend so much of our time in curated bubbles that the curiosity we’re born with starts to fade. Only through new experiences can we rediscover it, and this workshop did an excellent job at showing us how to **pop those bubbles.**”*
- *“...an excellent experience. It’s not magic or wishful thinking—you can **change the way you think to change the way you speak**—and it will change the way you feel.”*

EDUCATORS

- *“It was **hands-down the most impactful presentation I have heard in my 25 years** as an educator! I sincerely believe Mr. Groner’s approach to developing relationships through connection has the **capability of transforming the education model** that has been stuck in neutral for years.”
— High School Teacher, Former Dean of Students*
- *“This is **the most engaged I have ever, I mean ever, seen our faculty.** Role-playing as students helped us truly see things from their point of view. It was real, it was relevant, and it was unforgettable.”
— High School Teacher*

INSTITUTIONAL LEADERS

- *“PCI’s workshops are authentic and inspiring...**designed to make a lasting impact on the students and on developing critical dialogue and relationship-building skills.** The energy and sincerity PCI’s team conveys stay with students long after their programs finish, and that is wonderful to witness.”
— Brian Rose, Vice President for Student Affairs, Binghamton University*
- *“Spaces like this workshop invite us to slow down, listen with curiosity, and try to inhabit perspectives that differ from our own. Participating in this session allowed me to witness how incoming students, carrying excitement, uncertainty, fears, and hopes, are more than ready for this kind of transformative engagement...**practices of civic dialogue can strengthen not only individuals, but the communities we aspire to build.**” — Leandro Benmergui, Associate Professor of History, Purchase College*