

EXCUSES TO *Connect*

MAKING MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS EASIER



INFORMATION SHEET

SPEAKING AND FACILITATION



RICHARD LEE-THAI



SPEAKER

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR

CONNECTOR

EXCUSESTOCONNECT.COM

CONNECTION EXPERT

Richard Lee-Thai

Empowering people with the skills and confidence to make meaningful connections for the rest of their lives.

TEDx Speaker | Founder of Excuses to Connect

Richard presented a TEDx talk entitled [*How to Find Excuses to Connect*](#) which outlines how people can make meaningful connections easier. Having personally struggled with shyness and loneliness, he now regularly speaks to youth, students, and organizations on the importance of connection.

Growing up, we never had classes on social skills. How do you make friends? How do you re-establish your network after moving to a new place? Addressing this lack of education, Richard engages audiences with interactive presentations that leave them feeling more socially confident and equipped with tools to make meaningful connections. He is also an author, podcaster, Connection Consultant for post-secondary institutions, Associate Certified Coach (ACC) with the International Coach Federation, and Adjunct Instructor at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT).

“ **Richard is incredibly well-spoken, down to earth, highly engaging, and relatable.** His words made a positive, life-changing impact on the participants. I truly recommend him as a mentor, speaker and coach to those curious about how to make meaningful connections. ”

Meera Vijayakumaran

Youth Mentoring Facilitator, TNO - The Neighbourhood Organization



SEE RICHARD IN ACTION

TEDX

[Watch it here](#)



SPEAKER REEL

[Watch it here](#)

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY KEYNOTE

[Watch it here](#)

HOW TO CREATE A CAMPUS CULTURE OF CONNECTION



WHY IS CONNECTION IMPORTANT TO ME?

Connection is not something that came naturally to me. Connection was a skill that I needed to intentionally learn, practice, and keep persevering even when there were awkward moments and social faux pas. Moving from my hometown of Calgary to the University of Lethbridge, I had no social support system and needed to start from scratch. It was lonely and I felt like something was "wrong" with me. It was in this context that I started "Humans of ULeth", a photojournalism project where I interviewed students, staff, faculty and even the president to share their stories online and build community:



Interviewing over 70+ people (shown above), I realized that everyone has a story and that I wasn't actually alone in feeling lonely and there wasn't anything wrong with me.

I am uniquely qualified to speak on the topic of connection. Having worked as a Residence Assistant, founding 2 student clubs, and being elected as the Vice President of Student Affairs with the Students' Union, I bring my lived experience as an undergraduate student. After graduating, I developed further expertise in connection research and implementation through becoming a TEDx speaker, completing a consulting contract at ULethbridge, co-authoring a book about connection, and hosting many events and educational programs. **It's my mission to make meaningful connections easier, because you never know how any connection can transform your life!**

SPEAKING TOPICS

How to Connect with Anyone

1 hour Keynote (Virtual or In-Person)

Intended for High School or University Students

Having high-quality connections is one of the key indicators for our happiness and health. Yet, so much can get in the way of making these deep connections. Whether it's our anxiety, the busyness of our schedules, or misconceptions on what it takes to truly build these authentic and nourishing relationships.

We can physically be surrounded by people, but still feel lonely. This loneliness can show up as feeling like our interactions are superficial, feeling there is no one to turn to for help, and feeling like there is something "wrong" with you. However, there are other possibilities. What if making meaningful connections could be easy? Let's focus on how you can make genuine human-to-human connections in a way that is fun and that help you to thrive during your time in school and beyond!

Learning Outcomes

- Go beyond advice like "just put yourself out there more" and get to the root of HOW to make connections through practical skills
- Be equipped with a framework to overcome your fears around connecting regardless of your current level of connection skills
- Understand how to creatively turn connection-building in a daily habit that is fun, easy, and effective

How to Lead with Connection

1.5 hour Workshop (Virtual or In-Person)

Intended for Student Leaders

As a student, you may have personally experienced that making friends can be hard and it's not uncommon to be feeling lonely while in school. While you might be surrounded by people, you might still be feeling out of place and not truly belonging. However, you can be the leader that fosters connection not just for yourself, but for everyone that you interact with on a daily basis.

The author Scott Adams said: "Remember there's no such thing as a small act of kindness. Every act creates a ripple effect with no logical end." Leadership is not a job title or the charismatic person who is speaking on a podium. Leadership is about regularly creating moments where people feel seen, appreciated, and empowered.

Learning Outcomes

- Learn how to creatively connect with people in a way that leaves a lasting positive impact on others
- Develop confidence in yourself as a leader and how to overcome barriers such as impostor syndrome
- Expand your definition of leadership and realize that everyone has their own style of leadership

The Introvert's Guide to Networking

1 hour Workshop (Virtual or In-Person) *Intended for High School or University Students*

Networking is a crucial skill for career success, but for introverted students, it can often feel like an uphill battle. The traditional approach to networking can be exhausting, uncomfortable, and inauthentic. This workshop is designed to empower introverts with the tools and mindset needed to network effectively while staying true to themselves. Rather than viewing networking as a transactional process, we shift the focus to fostering genuine human-to-human connections.

By the end of this interactive workshop, students will not only have transformed their approach to networking, but will also be equipped with tangible strategies to make networking an authentic and regular part of their academic journey.

Learning Outcomes

- **Embracing Introverted Traits:** Recognize and leverage strengths such as listening, empathy, and deep thinking in networking situations
- **Overcoming Networking Anxiety:** Develop tools to manage anxiety often associated with networking
- **Building Genuine Connections:** Learn how to create authentic, human-to-human connections that go beyond surface-level interactions
- **Strategic Networking:** Understand how to create a networking strategy tailored to your career objectives

Designing a Career that You Love

1 hour Workshop (Virtual or In-Person) *Intended for High School or University Students*

The journey of going from being a student to being out in "the real world" can be both exciting and daunting. This workshop is designed to empower students with the knowledge and tools to craft a career that aligns with their passions, strengths, and sense of purpose.

At the heart of this interactive workshop is the Japanese concept of "Ikigai" which translates to "a reason for being." Ikigai represents the intersection of what one is good at, what the world needs, what one loves to do, and what one can be paid for. By understanding and embracing their personal Ikigai, students can gain a profound sense of direction and motivation in their career pursuits.

Learning Outcomes

- **Embracing Your Unique Path:** Recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all career path and that you have the power to design a career that suits you.
- **Clarity of Purpose:** Clarify your personal mission and values to serve as a guiding light in your career journey.
- **Understanding Ikigai:** Gain a deep understanding of the concept of Ikigai and its significance in finding fun and fulfillment in your career.

How to Create a Culture of Connection

1 hour Workshop (Virtual or In-Person)

Intended for Educators and Student Services Staff

Culture is the accumulation of interactions. On any given day, you will have dozens of interactions with your coworkers and with students. Any of these interactions can cause someone to feel more disconnected, invisible, and discouraged. Or, these interactions can be the catalyst for more connection, so that people feel seen, heard, and empowered. In this workshop, you will be provided with the tools to create a campus culture where everyone feels connected, supported, and energized through your everyday encounters.

Learning Outcomes

- Learn the most common challenges that adults face when making connections and how to overcome them
- Receive low-cost and simple connection strategies that are easy to implement and make a big impact
- Gain insights on how you can create a culture of connection, including how staff and educators can design for connection

Lollipop Moments: The Big Impact of Small Actions

1 hour Workshop (Virtual or In-Person)

Intended for Educators and Student Services Staff

Sometimes you can become burnt out when you are giving so much to others. This feel-good presentation is intended to re-ignite the spark of passion for why staff entered this profession in the first place. Drawing inspiration from Drew Dudley's TEDx talk on lollipop moments, the key message is that everyday interactions can make a profound impact on others. Whether it's a 1-minute conversation that you had in the hallway, the report that you put together, or the student that you met with, it is those cumulative moments that can change peoples' lives.

Learning Outcomes

- Understand how the true impact of student services and education is to empower students who will continue making a positive ripple effect on society
- Reflect and appreciate the key people who have made an impact in your life
- Provide an alternative to self-care and discover the importance of community care
- Be equipped with the "Connection Equation" to foster meaningful connections among your team

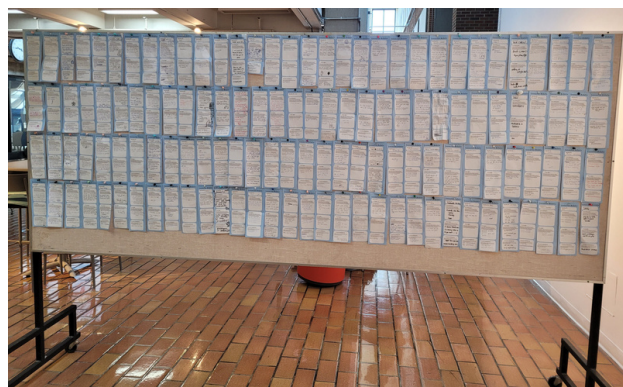
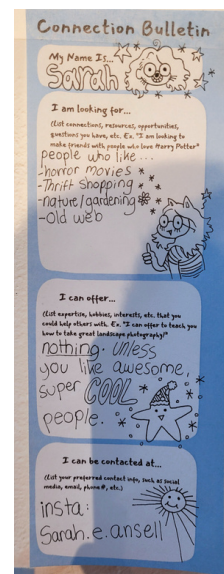
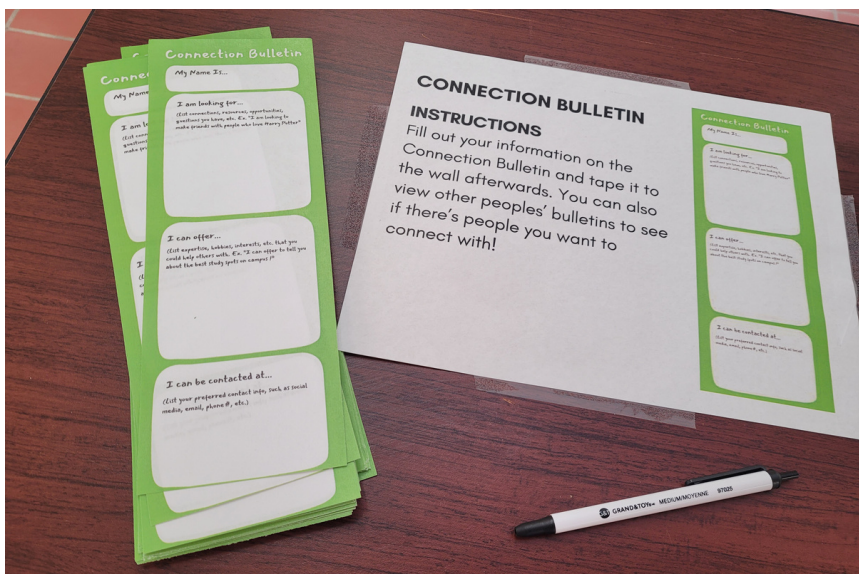
Facilitation

Connection Stations

I am passionate about re-imagining how physical spaces can be intentionally designed in order to make meaningful connections! If you're looking to host a unique in-person experience, I can set up a series of "Connection Stations." These stations include experiential activities so that people can organically spark connections through play. Moreover, the stations are designed to be self-explanatory and self-sufficient, so that it doesn't require any staff to actively monitor it. Therefore, a large volume of students can engage with the stations simultaneously and supplement any other programming or tabling that you might be running. Possible Connection Stations are detailed below - supplies would be provided by me.

1) CONNECTION BULLETIN

Slips of paper will be provided so that people can leave their information and self-facilitate connections. The paper is divided into 4 components: "My name is...", "I'm looking for...", "I can offer...", and "I can be connected at..." After filling it out, people can either to tape it to a wall or pin it to a bulletin board. The following instruction sheet would be provided:

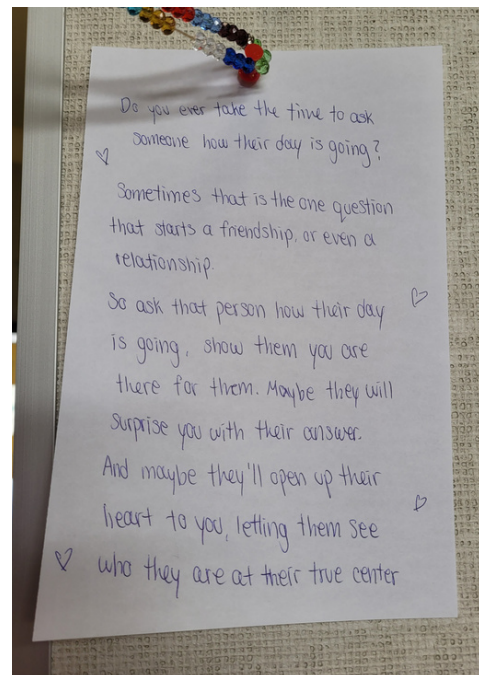
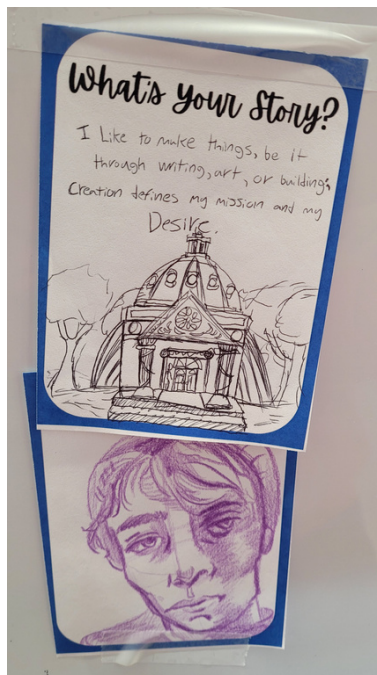
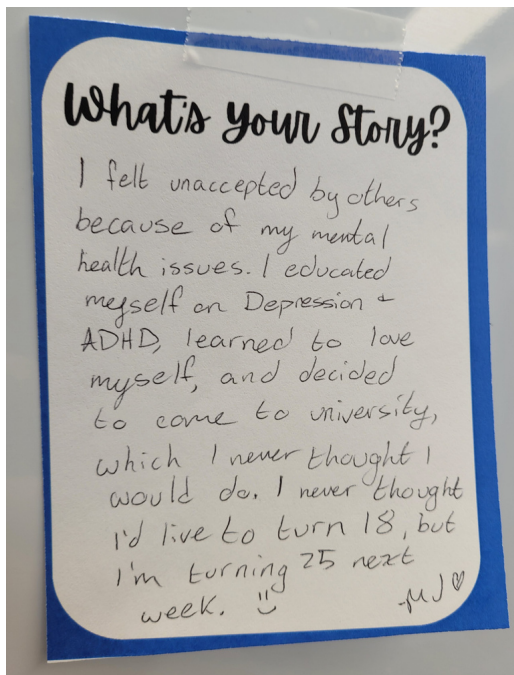
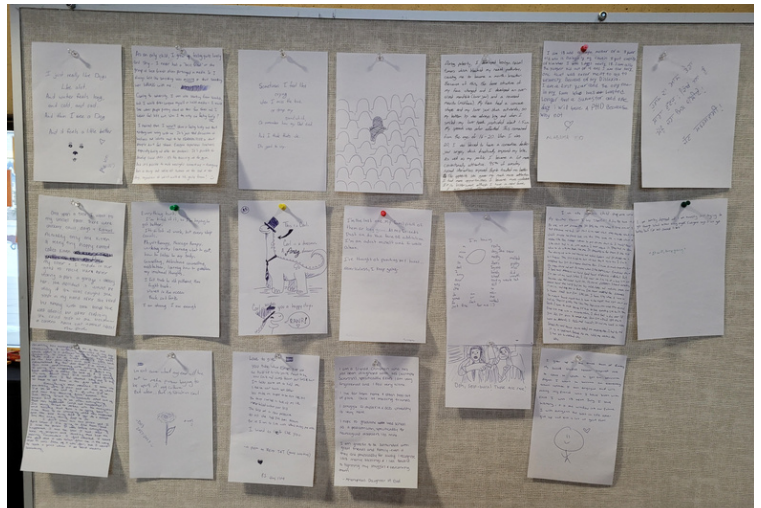
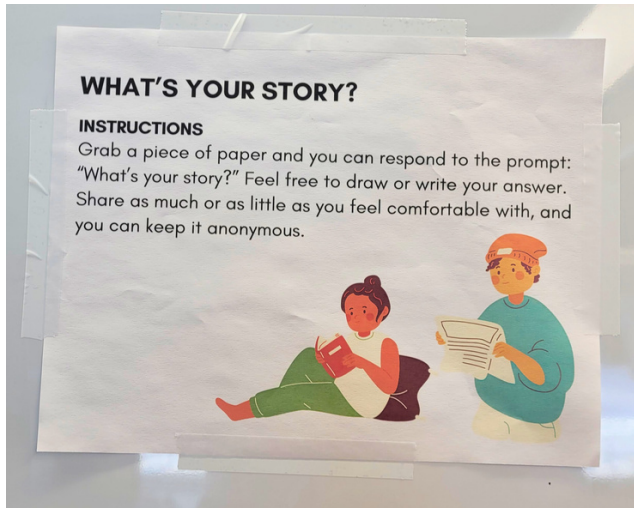


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2) SHARE YOUR STORY

People are given the prompt: "What's your story?" Utilizing blank pieces of paper, they can write and/or draw their story and tape it to the wall or pin it to a bulletin. The stories are meant to be anonymous and students don't have to write down their name. The objective is to highlight the diverse range of experiences that people go through, as well as see how we're all similar and different as humans.



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3) LEGO

A pile of Lego blocks can be set up on a table for people to play with!



4) CONVERSATION CARDS

I have card games with questions on them, meant to facilitate connections. These can be set up on various tables. The games include We're Not Really Strangers, SPARK, I Am Just Like U, & Holstee Reflection Cards.

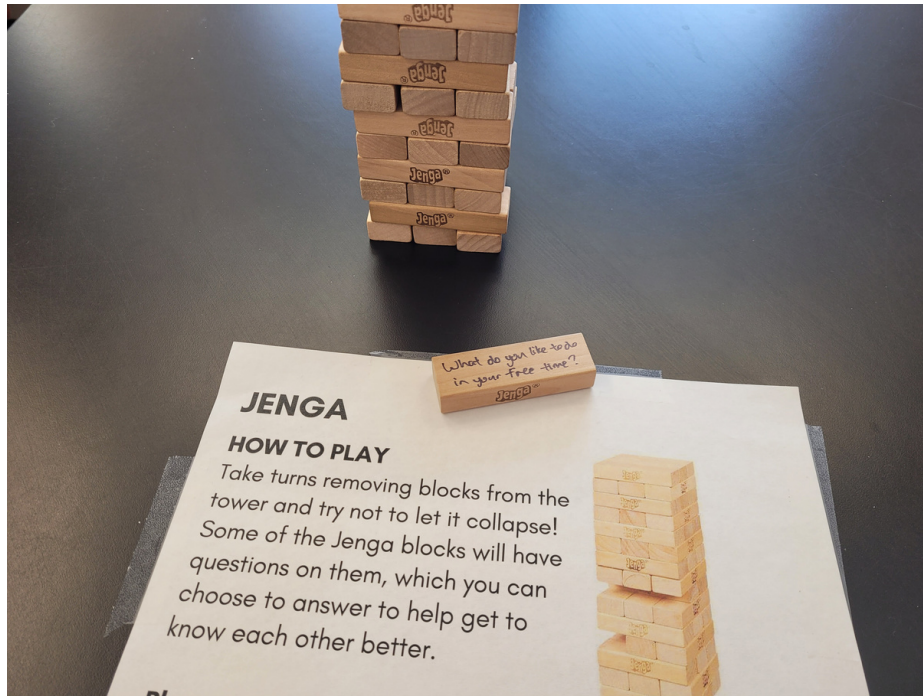


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5) JENGA (WITH QUESTIONS)

A Jenga tower will be set up on a table and some of the blocks will have questions on them. When a player takes out that block, they will answer that question as a way to get to know each other better.



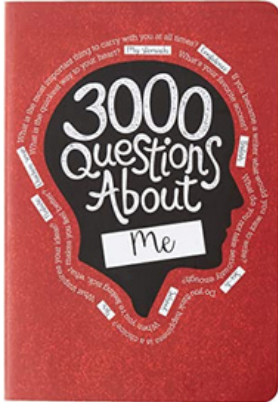
6) 3000 QUESTIONS

I have a book called "3000 Questions About Me" and the following instruction sheet would be placed by the book:

3000 QUESTIONS

HOW TO PLAY

Pick a number from 1 to 3000, and flip through the book until you find the corresponding question. Take turns discussing the question. Repeat by picking another number from 1 to 3000.



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7) LOLLIPOP MOMENTS

There will be a box of lollipops with positive notes attached to them. The instruction at the table will be to: "Treat yourself to one, and give one to someone else to sweeten their day!"



8) CONVERSATION MENUS

I have a series of "Conversation Menus" that have questions meant to stimulate meaningful conversations while sharing a meal together:



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Spoken at 100+ Events,
Experiences, and Trainings

Over 3000 People Impacted



PAST AUDIENCES



TESTIMONIALS

His presentation was impactful and relevant for the student population as they navigate social challenges through post secondary. If you are looking for someone to demonstrate the **magical impact of genuine connection** and the importance of incorporating thoughtfulness and fun into everyday life, Richard is your guy.

Samantha Cooley-Morrison | Mental Health Education Coordinator, Red Deer Polytechnic

Thank you for providing a fun, educational, relatable, and impactful workshop! You've enriched the lives and futures of all the students that attended, not to mention the value that I also received! I appreciate your passion and love for connection.

Jessica Neil | Event Coordinator, Rhodes Wellness College

SPEAKER SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR CONNECTOR

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TESTIMONIALS



Richard provided a fabulous keynote for our annual UFlourish event series! When we identified “Connection” as a central theme, Richard was the perfect choice, with his knowledge of UCalgary and the post-secondary context. We very much appreciated not only the expertise Richard brought to the table but also his inquisitive and thoughtful interest in our community's unique needs. **His talk resonated for our full community** – students, staff, faculty and alumni and, in particular, his practical approach prepared folks to take the information that he shared immediately into their daily lives.



Richard is very authentic and passionate about this topic, which was felt by those in this sessions, and made his speaking very engaging. **He is very professional and made the booking and planning process seamless, with meticulous organization.** We also appreciated Richard’s flexibility when we requested an online session for a typically “in-person” topic. He took on the challenge, with ease, and had a huge amount of participation from audience members on Zoom. We would happily welcome Richard back to UCalgary to share his passion for connection.

Michele Moon | Team Lead - Wellbeing and Worklife, University of Calgary



THANK YOU AND I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH YOU!

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 [Richard Lee-Thai](#)

