

The Top Five Blocks to Connection by Guest Author Julia Menard

In my work with conflict, both personally and professionally as a mediator and conflict coach, I would say what touches my heart the most is the way so many of us want a deeper connection with others, but can't seem to find it.

Bronnie Ware, a palliative care nurse in Australia, wrote a book entitled *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying* based on her experiences listening to people in their last stages of life. One key theme that repeatedly showed up was the importance of connection with others – our relationships. Dr. Kelli Stajduhar, an end-of-life specialist and researcher, found that a key regret was letting anger get in the way of maintaining quality family relationships.



But what is it that gets in the way of keeping relationships intimate, vibrant, and connected?

Well, here is my list of the Top 5 Blocks to Connection with Others :

1. **Blaming the other person for our feelings**, instead of naming our feelings and expressing our deepest needs stimulating that feeling. When we share who we are instead of blaming others – we invite true connection.
2. **Not listening to the other person with an open heart**. When we choose NOT to blame, and instead hear the feelings and the tender needs underneath, we re-establish connection with others.
3. **Confusing a solution with a need**. It is helpful to separate our needs from the WAY we get those needs met. We all have “universal needs” like belonging, love, connection and these are NON-negotiable. But how we get those needs met IS negotiable. Eg. If I want to go to see the game and you don't – it could lead to conflict. Instead when I realise my need is for fun and share that with you, you might realise that your need is for a night in. Now we have truly connected, and we can find solutions that meet BOTH our needs.
4. **Digging in our heels and seeing our own solution as the only solution**. I saw this happen recently – where instead of the individuals sitting down and each discussing their feelings and deeper needs, each person showed up with a solution in mind and imposed that solution to “solve the problem.” Both people were closed and caught up in a power struggle, disconnected from each other – and stuck! Remember that there are always other solutions.
5. **Shutting down our heart towards the other**. I can't quite explain this one as it involves that eternally mysterious place – our heart – but I've noticed people who have conflict between them become numb to each other. The caring doesn't just disappear, though it might seem so to the conscious mind. It's a type of ice, really, and it's as that ice thaws that the connection is re-established. But when we are in the ice age it is easy to forget that we care for the other person deeply.

That brings us full circle back to the regrets of the dying. When we are dying we are at

our most vulnerable. Our layers of toughness and ice can melt away. And we have the opportunity to see the most clearly and most directly from our hearts. It's then we remember what is most important: our friends, our family, those in our lives who have touched us and who we have touched. Our connections with others.

So, who do you want to reconnect with and remember that you love today?

*“Only through our connectedness to others can we really know and enhance the self. And only through working on the self can we begin to enhance our connectedness to others.” **Harriet Lerner***

This article was written by guest author **Julia Menard**, Professional Certified Coach. *Helping Leaders Transform Conflict through Workplace Coaching, Mediation, Training.* To learn more about Julia and her work, please check out her website www.juliamenard.com. The article was selected for publication by Bite-Sized Wisdom at “Life Coach on the Go” <http://lifecoachonthego.com/>