



CHOREOGRAPHED CONNECTIONS™

Why Connection, Why Now

People are carrying more than we can see. Burnout is at an all-time high, engagement is at 2014 levels, manager engagement is down, and what researchers are calling "quiet cracking" is often not quiet at all. It is visible. We are just not asking.

Connection is not a nice-to-have, it is the foundational work of organizational life. When people feel genuinely connected, to themselves, to the people they work with, and to the organization they are part of, everything works better: work feels more meaningful, teams function more effectively, and people stay. When connection is absent, everything is harder. And no initiative, program, or policy fills that gap.

At DFA, we believe culture lives at the intersection of intentions and interactions. Intentions are the values and commitments that define who an organization says it is. Interactions are the everyday behaviors that shape how people experience it. Every person in an organization is a culture carrier, every interaction adds to the culture that others experience, and connection is the thread that runs through all of it.

Connection can happen organically. But connection is too important to leave to chance alone. When we are intentional about facilitating it and design for it, we create the conditions for it to reach more people, more consistently and more meaningfully.

This is the premise behind Choreographed Connections™, DFA's methodology for building intentional human connection across individuals, teams, and organizations. It operates at three levels: the inner work of connection, the relational work of connection, and the systems work of connection. When all three are present and aligned, connection stops being something that happens by accident and becomes something people can count on.

The Inner Work of Connection

You cannot pour from an empty cup. It is very difficult to connect with others if you have lost connection with yourself. When people feel depleted or cut off from their own sense of purpose, it shows up in how they communicate, how they make decisions, and how they show up in relationships. The inner work of connection rests on three anchors:

- **Presence** is about being honest with yourself about your current state, what you are carrying, what is draining you, and what is giving you energy. Ask yourself: How am I feeling right now? What is draining me? What is fueling me? Where is the imbalance? Sometimes we spend more time thinking about something than it would take to address it. The drains and fuels exercise is a simple way to reconnect with where you are, surface what is within your control, and reclaim micro moments of fuel that may only take minutes.

- **Purpose** is about reconnecting with what makes the work meaningful, especially when the pace of work makes it easy to lose sight of why any of it matters. Ask yourself: Why does the work I do matter? Why do the relationships I am in matter? Why does the way I show up matter? Stepping back to reconnect with purpose, even briefly, can bring us back to a sense of direction and remind us that what we are doing makes a difference.
- **Perspective** is about noticing the story you are telling yourself and choosing to interrupt it when that story is making things harder than they need to be. Ask yourself: What story am I telling myself? Our minds naturally pull toward what is wrong, what is missing, and what could go badly. That is not weakness, it is simply how we are wired. But we can choose to interrupt that pull. Something as simple as listing what has gone well in the past 30 days can shift how we see our situation and reconnect us with something steadier inside ourselves.

When people feel grounded in presence, purpose, and perspective, they show up with more clarity and intention. That internal connection creates the conditions for stronger relationships with others.

The Relational Work of Connection

At the team level, connection is built through everyday interactions. It grows through the ways people acknowledge one another, respond to challenges, and make room for different perspectives. And it is nearly always in the small moments, not the big gestures, that people feel it.

Choreographed Connections™ offers four movements that help teams build and sustain relational connection. Each one is a practice, not a program.

- **Open It.** Creating space for connection is about the environment a team builds together. It is the shared understanding that people matter beyond their tasks and that there is room in this team for the whole person, not just the work product. When that environment exists, connection becomes possible. When it does not, even the best intentions go nowhere. Opening space is not about any single gesture or meeting ritual. It is about the tone a team sets and the norms it builds over time around how people show up for one another.
- **Sustain It.** Making connection a daily practice is about what each person does to keep connection alive in the in-between moments, the ordinary Tuesday, the back-to-back week, the stretch of time when nothing big is happening but everything is quietly being built or quietly eroding. Consistency is what separates teams where connection thrives from teams where it fades. A daily practice of grounding in purpose, reaching out to someone, offering a specific and named recognition, or simply checking in without an agenda, are the small rhythms that accumulate into something people can feel and count on.
- **Expand It.** Making sure connection reaches everyone is about the equity of access within a team and across an organization. In any group, some voices are heard more than others and some people operate closer to the center while others are on the margins. This happens in large organizations, in global teams, in organizations that have grown through mergers, and in any workplace where size or structure has created distance between people. Intentional connection means paying attention to who is included and who may be left out, who has access and who does not, and whose

perspective has not yet been sought. The question to keep asking is: whose voice is missing from this conversation?

- **Deepen It.** Bringing quality and resilience to connection is about the kind of attention people bring to one another every day and what happens when connection gets hard. Deepening connection means listening to understand rather than to respond, staying curious when there is tension rather than becoming defensive, and finding higher ground rather than common ground when there is disagreement. We do not always need to reach agreement. Sometimes we need to honor that differences exist and find the shared value that sits above them. Modeling vulnerability, admitting when you do not know something, and showing that your mind can be changed deepen connection over time.

The Systems Work of Connection

At the organizational level, connection moves from individual and team effort to shared responsibility. This is where leaders think about how to scale connection so that it becomes part of how the organization functions every day, not dependent on any one leader's initiative or any one team's culture.

Organizations are communities made up of individuals who are constantly giving and receiving. Culture is co-created and is always evolving, shaped by both outside forces and the people who make up the organization. The systems work of connection is about building the infrastructure that makes consistent connection possible across departments, locations, and roles.

Leaders at this level can ask:

- **Recognition.** How are we scaling recognition across the organization? Do people feel acknowledged beyond their immediate teams? Are there systems, such as a shout-out page on the intranet, peer-to-peer recognition tools, or meeting rituals that make appreciation visible across the organization?
- **Community.** Are we thinking about the organization as a community, and are we building smaller communities within it? What experiences are we creating for our people? What are we rewarding and what are we not rewarding?
- **Accountability.** Have we defined what good collaboration looks like, and do people know what they are striving for? When collaboration breaks down, are we asking what is getting in the way rather than assigning blame?
- **Bridging the Distance.** Are we thinking about connection before, during, and after meetings? Are people who are separated by geography, time zone, or organizational structure still part of the debrief, the follow-up, and the informal conversations where decisions often get shaped?
- **Protecting Human Spaces.** Are we preserving time for meaningful conversation and thoughtful decision-making, or has efficiency replaced the moments where human judgment and connection are most needed?
- **Choosing Presence.** Are we using time gained through technology to invest in people through mentoring, development, and working through challenges with patience and attention?

When connection is built into organizational infrastructure, it stops being something leaders hope will happen and becomes something people can count on.

Take Action This Week

Pick one and do it today:

- Send a specific thank-you to someone. Name the impact, not just the task.
- Start your next meeting with: "What is one thing going well right now?"
- Write your drains and fuels lists. Notice the imbalance and reclaim one thing that fuels you.
- Ask someone whose voice has been missing: "I would love to get your perspective on this."
- Take 60 seconds to list everything that has gone well in the past 30 days. Notice what shifts.
- Set a five-minute connection reminder for yourself each day to ground, reach out, or recognize.
- Audit one system, ritual, or practice in your organization and ask: does this bring people together or create distance?

We will never know all of the things that people are carrying. But we also will not know when one small moment of connection changes someone's day.

Want Support Putting This Into Practice?

As a DFA member, you do not have to figure this out on your own. We are here to support you as you Choreograph Connection™ more intentionally across your organization.

- **Strategy Session:** Each member organization receives an annual one-hour session. Use it to assess where connection is showing up and where gaps are emerging.
- **Policy Review:** Submit one policy, leadership model, or onboarding experience for feedback to help ensure your structures reinforce the culture you are building.
- **Advisory Hours (Champion and Leader Members):** Ongoing support to think through real-time challenges and explore how connection can be strengthened during moments of change.

We are here to walk alongside you as you continue building organizations where connection is intentional and people can do meaningful work together.