

# METHODOLOGY

Everything we cover in *The Kindness Challenge* is the result of years of cumulative research: interviews, investigation, and eight national surveys with more than fifteen thousand people since 2003 (seven of the surveys were nationally representative). All research has been conducted under the guidance of Dr. Chuck Cowan of Analytic Focus, the former chief of survey design at the U.S. Census Bureau.

For the additional research necessary for this book (the eighth major study we have conducted), we tracked more than 700 people of all races, ages, and walks of life as they applied these kindness solutions to their lives over time and discovered what worked best. Many doing the kindness tests were surveyed, and *The Kindness Challenge* includes those results. We focused in particular on a core study group of 134 men and women who made a good-faith effort to do the 30-Day Kindness Challenge for a particular person (a spouse, child, colleague, in-law, and so on) and completed our primary before-and-after surveys. This study group tested the Challenge in two tranches, one primarily testing the marriage and romantic-relationship application during September and October 2015, the other testing the application to all other relationships in October and November 2015.

Nearly all of the research I've done over the years has been rigorously conducted across all demographics, and these kindness tests were as well, with the exception that those testing the 30-Day Kindness Challenge were more likely to be churchgoers than the general population. Our need to have a before-and-after thirty-day study group prevented us from conducting the purely nationally representative survey we have commissioned for all other studies.

In previous studies our primary survey need was a highly quality-controlled panel from which we could randomly pull a nationally representative sample of individuals to tell us about their thoughts as a member of a specific demographic group. In other words, if we were doing a study of how women think, our primary need was the assurance that if a survey-taker said she was a forty-two-year-old woman, that she wasn't in fact a seventeen-year-old boy. Thus, most of our other surveys were conducted by Decision Analyst using their highly quality-controlled panel of survey-takers. In this survey, however, an even more important need took precedence: we needed to recruit diverse individuals who were willing to test specific types of thoughts, words, and actions for thirty days and take full surveys

both before and after so that we could see what, if anything, changed. This would by definition be a self-selecting group of those interested in doing the 30-Day Kindness Challenge. But we were okay with that trade-off, since the book audience would have that same interest in common. In other words: we were looking primarily for a month-long sample that was as close to nationally representative as we could get, rather than a purely nationally representative sample that might or might not do the Challenge.

We put out a very wide call across social media and through both Christian and secular networks to recruit people to test the Challenge and take extensive anonymous pre- and post-surveys. It turned out that those we heard from were very diverse across age, race, socioeconomic background and geography but had a higher rate of church attendance than the overall population. (Which is not surprising, since my books have been popular in that audience over time.)

Because all other major demographics (race, age, geography, and so on) were represented, because we still interviewed and surveyed many non-churchgoers, and—most important—because the Challenge-related results of the non-churchgoers were consistently similar to those of churchgoers, we are comfortable that our findings are broadly applicable to all.

In addition to our two primary surveys, we also specifically worked with several community organizations, churches, and media platforms to recruit special-purpose and more in-depth test groups before and after the official survey rollout. Participants in these groups knew they were part of our research, and many were willing to keep extensive notes, participate in focus groups, and/or make themselves available for interviews before, during, and/or after doing the Challenge. (Others participated solely for the benefit of the 30-Day Kindness Challenge to their life, knowing their contribution to the research would be the anonymous pre- and post-Challenge surveys.)

Among the 134 individuals in the core study group from the two primary surveys, not all participants finished the full thirty days and not all participants focused on all three elements of the Challenge (some participants ended up focusing primarily on the tips or hints that were sent out in reminder e-mails each day). But since that too will be a common dynamic in real life, their results were included. In our analysis, we found that the two most important variables for relational improvement were doing the three elements of the Challenge itself (whether or not the person did the tips of the day) and participating for two weeks or more.