

IDENTIFY COMMON GOALS

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **1X/WEEK** | Duration: **VARIABLE**



WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

People are often hesitant to work with—or even interact with—people they see as different from themselves. But when people from different groups identify a goal that they share, and they recognize that they need to work together to achieve that goal, they're capable of putting aside their differences to come together, replacing distrust with a spirit of goodwill. Though you may have disagreements, look for the goals that you have in common with members of other groups—and if you're in a position to bring different groups together, try to highlight for them the goals that they share.

TIME REQUIRED

Variable

HOW TO DO IT

One way to help people identify common goals is to call their attention to a big problem that is affecting both of them. There are subtle ways that you can call people's attention to the common goals they might actually share with those who they see as being different from themselves.

1. **Strengthen relationships grounded in trust and open-mindedness.** “The starting point is getting in the same mind space and having the right kinds of trusting relationships,” says Steven Olikara, founder and president of the Millennial Action Project, which brings legislators across the partisan divide together to identify common goals and support solutions in their community. “You can only start to listen to new ideas if you really trust the source,” he adds. “That really starts by having a trusting relationship.”
2. **Identify individual goals.** Start by asking everyone to take a few minutes to individually write down their individual goals and what they sense might be common goals shared among all members of the group. Then, each person in the group shares their responses. When someone is sharing, the other group participants should practice active listening and not interrupt or respond to the goals presented.
3. **Discuss and workshop until you've identified common goals.** The goals shared might seem different, but if you dig deeper as a group, you'll discover overlaps. This is exactly what happened for Millennial Action Project's work in Iowa as they brought legislators together to do renewable energy projects in the state. Republican legislators were on board because of the high paying employment and economic opportunities. Democratic legislators were on board because it was a concrete action to address climate change.
4. **Discuss the nuts and bolts involved with accomplishing these common goals, and learn how others have been successful in the past.** After they identified this common goal in Iowa, legislators then embarked on a renewable energy tour together to listen and learn from existing efforts. One example that happened at a recent Millennial Action Project summit was a legislator in Ohio who methodologically explained how he framed these common goals to constituency who have different values.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Sherif, M. (1958). [Superordinate goals in the reduction of intergroup conflict](#). *American Journal of Sociology*, 63(4), 349-356.

Researchers brought a group of boys to a camp and placed them on separate teams—and rivalries and hostilities followed. But when the camp faced a series of challenges that could only be solved by both teams working together—that is, when the teams developed a common goal—they put aside their differences and forged bonds across group lines.

WHY IT WORKS

Though people may harbor distrust or fear toward people who seem different from themselves, evidence suggests that those perceptions of difference are malleable. To shift those perceptions, it can be useful to appeal to people's enlightened self-interest, helping them see how those other people can actually help them achieve goals that they share. Even if they have trouble identifying commonalities in their backgrounds, identities, or other traits, focusing on common goals can shift their perceptions of one another—from adversaries to collaborators who are part of the same team.

SOURCES

This practice is part of the Greater Good Science Center's [Bridging Differences Initiative](#) and is featured in the GGSC's [Bridging Differences Playbook](#).

This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

