

STEP 4

The 8 Revolution: The transformational power of a common goal



A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE



The transformational power of a common goal



In 1954, twenty-two 11-year-old Protestant boys from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, of similar middleclass backgrounds, unacquainted with each other and carefully screened for psychological stability, boarded two buses bound for a 200-acre Boy Scouts of America summer camp near Robbers Cave State Park in Oklahoma.

Observing all of this from his perspective as camp “janitor” was the architect of the study, Muzafer Sherif, a Turkish-born Harvard graduate, later credited with founding the discipline of social psychology.

The boys did not know, in these days before informed consent, that they were about to become guinea pigs in one of the most fascinating and beloved psychological studies of group behavior of all time.

Each group was told to choose a name (they selected the “Rattlers” and the “Eagles”), create their group’s own “flags,” designate places in the camp as theirs, write their own songs, and design practices and particular modes of behavior as exclusively “theirs.”

Each group was assigned separate living quarters far apart from the other, and at no point during this initial period was anyone allowed to meet members of the other group.

In the next phase of the study, Sherif and researchers engineered situations designed to be highly competitive and frustrating in order to deliberately bring the two groups in conflict. They announced a general tournament of sports and other competitive games, with a trophy, medals and eleven four-bladed Swiss Army-style knives as the much coveted prize for the winning team.

Finally, after a day spent practicing, both groups finally laid eyes on the already loathed other.

Over the four days of the competition, the staff manipulated the scorekeeping so that the scores remained neck and neck, and ensured that the two teams were constantly made aware of the closeness of the race. Good sportsmanship gave way to name-calling, invectives, and refusal by every boy even to eat when a member of the other group was present in the same food hall.

After a while, the experimenters didn't have to stoke the prejudice between groups. Decking themselves out commando-style, the Rattlers raided the Eagles cabin, turning over beds and ripping mosquito netting.

The Eagles retaliated with interest; armed with sticks and bats, they threw all the Rattlers' belongings in a heap in the center of the cabin. Each team destroyed the other team's flags. On the day the Eagles won the tournament, the Rattlers raided and stole the prize knives. The growing animosity ended in a fierce fistfight that the counselors had to break up



Sound like a version of today between our fiercely polarized society?

Having escalated such fierce prejudice between the groups, the Sherifs then experimented with activities to encourage the groups to co-mingle. But no amount of jolly, getting-to-know-you evenings, movie nights or festivities on the Fourth of July seemed to lessen the tension.

The Sherifs then created a series of crises in the camp that could not be solved without the resources and participation of all of the boys within both groups. After the drinking water suddenly dried up and the boys discovered a large sack stuffed into an outlet faucet of the water reservoir, both groups had to work together to figure out how to clear it.

The Rattlers and Eagles were also enlisted to pull a rope together in order to clear a partly cut through tree that may have posed a danger and then to help with a truck carrying food for both groups that had got stuck in a large rut.

Once the water began flowing again, the Rattlers allowed the Eagles to drink first from the fountain, because they hadn't brought their canteens and were thirstier.

After the boys had worked together to finance a movie, the Sherifs noticed the boys began eating together in the mess hall, with Rattlers freely mixing with Eagles. On the final day of camp, the boys unanimously voted to travel together on the same bus. Rattlers and Eagles sat together, arms draped around each other.

At a stop on the way, the leader of the Rattlers spent the \$5 he'd won on a bean-toss contest on malted milks for all twenty-two boys.

William Golding described his vision of an inherent “darkness of man’s heart” in *Lord of the Flies*: when the veneer of civilization is removed, even children are capable of turning savage. Sherif’s study demonstrates the opposite. Schoolboys indeed are fully capable of turning cruel and bullying toward each other if they are placed in opposing groups and forced to compete over scarce resources.

But when the Robbers Cave children were given a common goal and purpose – larger than themselves and their group – they readily put aside their differences to work together cooperatively as a superorganism.

Psychologists call this a superordinate goal – a goal only achieved by large cooperative teamwork of two or more people. Engaging in sharing and teamwork tends to transcend differences, because it emphasizes the very heart of humanity — we are all in this together. And if we are all in this together we are no longer competing for scarce resources.

There’s a good reason for why it works so well. The scientific evidence shows that people who fire together wire together; whenever a group works together for a common goal, the brains of all parties begin to get on the same wavelength, strengthening the connection, or Bond, within the group.

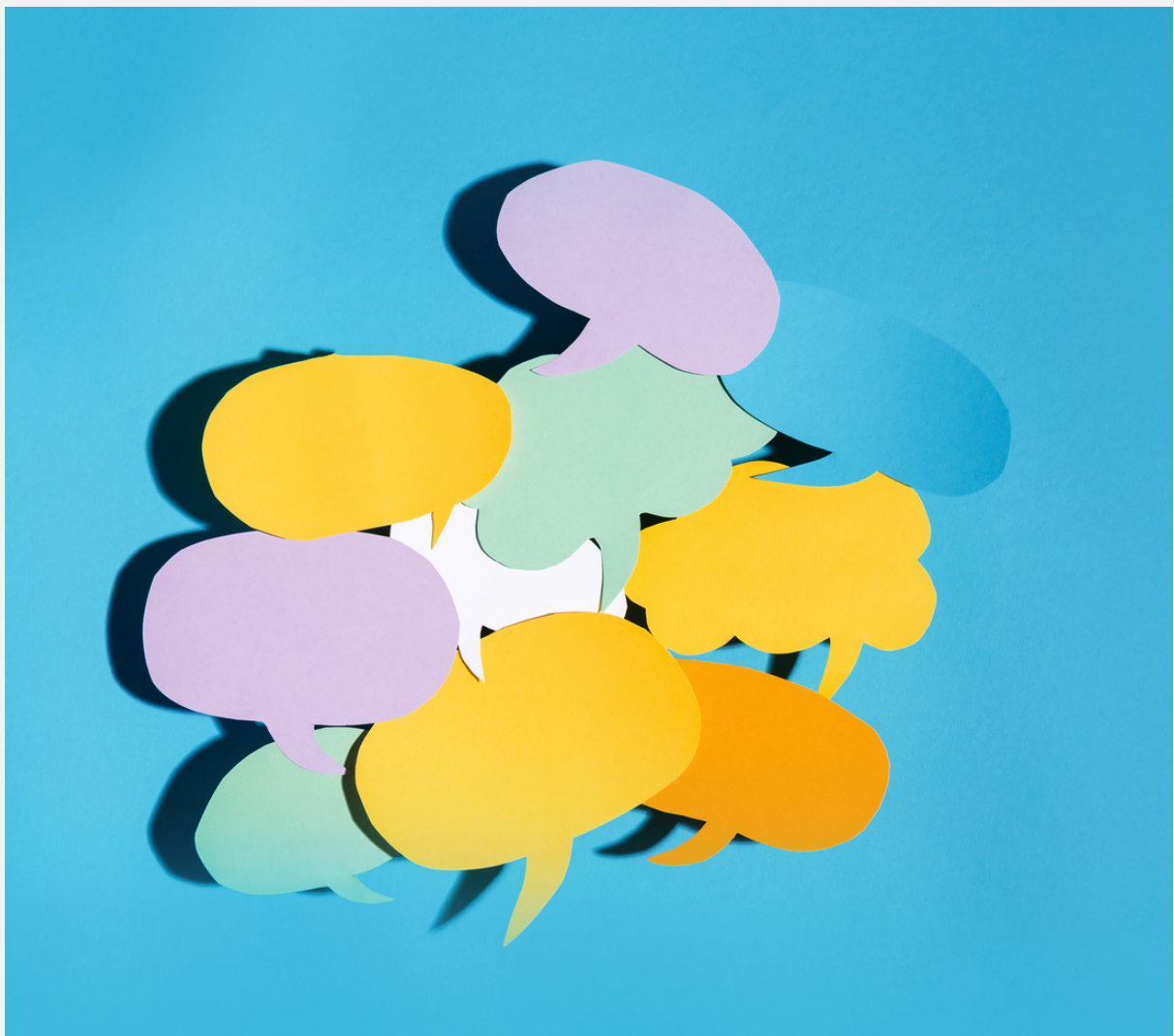
When we work with others for a common purpose, we literally get on their wavelength. Coming together in small groups with a common goal provides a social cohesion beyond money, job or size of property.

A common and larger purpose creates instant closeness in any social setting and offers an excellent tool for maintaining cooperation in your neighborhood. And as many experts in conflict resolution recognize, working on a shared problem helps to unite people who are in opposition on other issues.



DISCUSSION TOPICS FOR YOUR POWER OF EIGHT® GROUP

- *What kind of ‘barn building’ can you do together in your own neighborhoods?*
- *What aspects of your community that presently spur rivalry and competition can be redesigned to run in a spirit of sharing and cooperation? (Planting in the grounds between houses is one way to give the neighborhood a unified ‘feel’)*
- *How can your local businesses be involved to provide more support for the local community and also work together with other local businesses?*
- *What measures can be adopted encouraged in your local schools to involve children in creating ‘bonding’ in schools and their local neighborhoods?*



POSSIBLE ‘BARN-BUILDING’ GOALS FOR YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

- Plant in community spots
- Form a ‘landscape brigade’: take turns gardening or landscaping each neighbor’s yard together
- Organize block parties and pot luck dinners regularly
- Cook or bake extra and share around the neighborhood
- Build a fence or a shed together
- Walk dogs together
- Start a neighborhood jogging club
- Create a Partnership. Start a local partnership for your health care, utilities, or any other service — owned by and run by the community
- Create a clean-up committee — to get rid of graffiti, sweep up litter or leaves, and generally prettify the neighborhood
- Run a Neighborhood Watch scheme
- Take neighborhood suggestions to the school board or local government
- Share the school run
- Share the commute to the office
- Take turns taking food to the neighbor who has just lost his job or gotten ill
- Create a youth club for children and take turns running it
- Tithe (each put aside a tiny regular sum toward your neighborhood each month). Create a bank account for the neighborhood and keep the money there.

Once you’ve decided on your barn-building projects for your own neighborhoods, your Power of Eight® group may then discuss with you how to implement them.

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