



BRINGING LIGHT NOT HEAT TO PUBLIC DISCOURSE

## TEN ATTRIBUTES OF A

# COMMON GROUNDER

## AND HOW TO PUT THEM TO WORK

A Common Grounder seeks points of agreement on social and political issues through listening and productive conversation. Common Grounders set the example for productive discourse and behaviors and thereby create other Common Grounders. Common Grounders consider the 10 Attributes of Common Grounders when choosing which candidate to support.

### 1. IDENTIFY AND SET ASIDE PERSONAL BIASES.

We all carry personal beliefs, biases and opinions. As you approach a conversation, be aware of yours. Be willing to test them against new information and recognize when they may be closing your thought to what the other person is saying.

### 2. COMMIT TO SEEK AGREEMENT, PROGRESS AND SOLUTIONS.

Approach discussion or debates with an objective of trying to find common ground and solutions, not win arguments. Use a “let’s work it out” attitude.

### 3. LISTEN FIRST TO LEARN PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES.

It’s hard to work with someone if you aren’t listening to them. It’s also difficult to engage in a dialogue until the other person knows you have heard them. Active listening establishes the foundation for real communication. It provides the opportunity for the “I never thought of it that way” moment.

### 4. DON’T ASSUME, BUT SEEK TO UNDERSTAND MOTIVES AND INTENTIONS.

Understanding the motives and intentions behind someone’s position is necessary to finding common ground. The challenge comes when we assume, often erroneously, that we know those motives and intentions because we have accepted commonly held beliefs about people who take that position. Don’t fall into that trap. Instead, ask the questions that clarify the person’s true motivation.

# TEN ATTRIBUTES OF A COMMON GROUNDER (CONT.)

## 5. SEEK OUTCOMES ALL CAN LIVE WITH BUT DON'T COMPROMISE PRINCIPLES.

Don't go into a discussion with predetermined expectations of the outcomes. Be prepared to be flexible and work to find an approach that addresses concerns of all parties (including yours). But don't feel obligated to go along with something that you feel violates your principles. Be prepared to "agree to disagree."

## 6. ACCEPT THAT GOOD PEOPLE MAY DISAGREE.

Because people have different experiences and viewpoints they may not share your values. It's not necessary to always agree on what's important or why. But it is crucial not to equate a difference in values with whether a person is good or bad. Don't let arguments divert you from appreciating your fellow person. If someone is unreasonably dogmatic in a way that violates your principles, it may be best not to engage.

## 7. USE AND ACCEPT FACTS.

Rather than emotional arguments, bring verified facts to the conversation. If you are presented with verified facts, accept them, even when they don't fit your narrative. It's fine to examine them carefully and to see if something is missing, but don't reject them dogmatically.

## 8. STAY RESPECTFUL.

Watch what you are saying and how you are saying it so that you don't degrade the quality of the conversation. Eliminate pejoratives from your vocabulary. If your temperature starts to rise, take a breath and shift to a different line of discussion.

## 9. RESIST DEMONIZING.

There are two points to be made here:

- Name calling and personal attacks on groups and individuals are currently part of every day political conversation. Don't succumb to the temptation to use these methods.
- Watch your own thinking. When you hear these types of attacks, don't accept them. The more you do, the harder it will be to engage with others.

## 10. DE-ESCALATE HOSTILE SITUATIONS.

- This is about controlling your thought and thereby your actions.
- Be alert to everyone's temperature. It may be best to shift to a different line of discussion or a totally different topic before people become angry with each other.
- If you find yourself in a hostile situation, don't contribute to the hostility. Identifying and expressing what you appreciate about the other person's ideas and intent can help. As with attribute 6, don't let arguments - even heated ones - divert you from appreciating your fellow person.



BRINGING LIGHT NOT HEAT TO PUBLIC DISCOURSE

**COMMONGROUNDCOMMITTEE.ORG**

Common Ground Committee (CGC) is a non-partisan, citizen-led organization that inspires action on polarizing issues by bringing prominent leaders with opposing views together in public forums to find common ground. Since its founding in 2009, the organization has hosted dozens of notable panelists including John Kerry, Condoleezza Rice, Michael Steele and Donna Brazile to find points of consensus on issues ranging from race and income inequality to America's role in the world. Free of political agenda and financial influence, Common Ground Committee has a singular focus on bringing light, not heat, to public discourse.