

**ASHLEY:** Polarization is not just a problem for Congress and our political system. It's also taking a toll in the workplace. Business and nonprofit leaders are worried. Employees are falling out with each other over politics, controversial Supreme Court decisions, and divisive issues in the culture wars. Colleagues who used to be friendly now barely nod in the corridor.

**RICHARD:** Organizations are in a tough spot. Some have banned talking politics at the office, or they've taken a public stand on an issue of the day in an effort to do the right thing.

**ASHLEY:** But that can end up pleasing some employees and alienating others.

**RICHARD:** Our guest today tells leaders edicts like this just won't help, but more thoughtful approaches can. This is Let's Find Common Ground. I'm Richard Davies.

**ASHLEY:** And I'm Ashley Milne-Tyte. In this, our second episode on polarization in business, we hear from Simon Greer. He's the founder of Bridging the Gap, a group that helps college students develop the skills to communicate well across differences, and he consults with organizations who face these same challenges among their workforce.

**RICHARD:** But Simon didn't start out as a Common Grounder. In fact, he used to stoke division for a living. In this interview, Simon tells us stories from his work with employers and employees and explains the very personal reason for his belief in the humanity of the other person.

**ASHLEY:** Simon Greer, welcome to Let's Find Common Ground.

**SIMON:** Thanks so much for having me.

**ASHLEY:** So we know that there's polarization within the workforce at a lot of businesses and nonprofits, and Richard and I have both heard a story about two longtime colleagues whose friendship essentially tanked after the Supreme Court decision on abortion a few months ago. Has it become harder recently for coworkers with different political views to work together and collaborate together?

**SIMON:** I think the short answer is it is harder. I think that's true. But to unpack it a little, the expectation that you would have a "friendship" at work, that that's a key factor in my work experience that these are my friends and that, with my friends, we agree, embedded in that is a lot of assumptions about the kind of world we think we want to live in. So those disagreements that you just described, those obviously existed before the Supreme Court decision, but now it came out. So now it's harder because it's out, and I'm surprised because I thought you were like me. We get along so well. How could you, this person like me, have these very different views?

And I actually think one of the deeper challenges we need to take on is we have to come to expect that it is a safe space where we all agree -- that's our community -- rather than it's a brave space where we have fundamental disagreements that we try to reconcile or we try to

understand. I think there's a lot of work to do, and I guess I should say this -- of course, these tensions are going to increase. This may be a statistic you're familiar with, maybe not, but 50 years ago, 60 years ago, if you were to ask parents about their children marrying someone of a different race, you would have gotten very negative responses, right? This country was very much against interracial marriage. Today, it's much less of an issue than it was. That's what all the polls tell us.

But in 1960, if you had asked somebody about their child marrying someone of a different political party, literally nobody would've cared. Today, if you ask them, there's massive concern. People dread the idea that someone would marry someone from the other political party. So, if you live in that climate, of course our workplaces are going to be supercharged around these questions of politics.

**RICHARD:** That's very interesting, what you just said, because it might indicate that, yes, politically, we're more divided, and we all know that, but culturally, in many workplaces and many communities, we're less divided. Is that fair?

**SIMON:** I think it's blurry what's political, what is cultural, what is identity. I've heard of some workplaces that have said, "We're not going to talk about politics because it's so divisive. Maybe we could talk about culture, but we're not going to talk about politics." I'm not sure you can make the decision. If you're trying to do pricing of your product, it has to do with inflation, it has to do with gas prices, and that's political. If you're trying to manage supply chain questions, it has to do with trade. If you're the NFL, and you're debating, do you have Snoop Dogg do the halftime show, is that cultural, or is that political?

So our culture and our politics really, I believe, are inextricably linked. It's actually now often the situation that if you and I were arguing about an issue, say the Roe v. Wade situation, I'm not actually arguing to convince you anymore. I'm arguing to show my team that I'm committed to our team. So we're not even in a debate. We're really in a process of showing where we belong, and I think that is as much cultural as it is political.

**ASHLEY:** Going back to the workplace for a minute, even so, it's a problem. Many leaders see it as a problem. It's something that they're worried about, that they're very conscious about, that there's sort of dissent in the ranks, as it were. Is there anything they can do about it?

**SIMON:** For sure. Often, what triggers the -- let's call it the acute moment or the crisis in the workplace -- is something happens out in public life, and management thinks, "We should do something." They feel some pressure. There's a bubbling up. Or they think, "We need to shut it down," but either way, management thinks they need to react. I think what maybe, in a lot of cases, is missed is that the need to react sits on top of, as we were just discussing, this underlying expectation that there should be agreement in our workplace. On the big issues of the day, we should see it the same because we're culturally and politically cohesive. So I think one of the first jobs is to showcase for the team that the expectation here isn't that we all agree. Actually, we like the disagreement. We like it in our strategy conversations, we like it in

our marketing and design conversations, and it's to be expected in our political conversations. So, one, I think we have to challenge the underlying assumption.

But then, we have to also name, "Everything is politicized, and so we're not going to be able to avoid it." We can set guidelines. We can say, on our corporate Slack channel, "We're not going to campaign for candidates." Companies can set some standards, but what they don't want to do is create a culture of compliance instead of a culture of curiosity, and that's what I see a lot of. Of course, everyone needs to be physically safe and respected, but, beyond that, what we want management to do is bring out the curiosity that others have or could have for each other. There, I think, and this is my big hope for teams and workplaces, is this is not just about beliefs. It's about skills.

**ASHLEY:** What do you mean by that?

**SIMON:** We live in a moment where polarization, civility, pluralism, diversity, inclusivity, they're beliefs. I'm for them, or I'm against them. I like them. I'm committed to them. But that's not how I view it. I think of them as skills or practices. How do you do that? Now you're at a diverse table. How do you generate value? Now you're in a room with people who disagree. How do you make the conversation richer rather than shutting it down? I think that's where an investment by management in the skills-building, the capacities of the team to tolerate difference and to actually embrace it and thrive in it is a real deficit because we don't tend to invest in it. Less than 2% of us are trained in listening skills, even though we know every profession benefits from better listening.

**RICHARD:** We've heard about diversity training, but how do you build skills for a diverse workforce? Do you have an example of how that's done? How does a company improve the divides within the workforce?

**SIMON:** On the skills front, in my work, at least, we teach three core skills that we think are fundamental for bridging differences or for what we call courageous conversations. The skills are listening, storytelling, and feedback. We teach five building blocks to try to help people cultivate the capacity to truly listen. What we tend to do now is I only stop long enough to sort of catch my breath and reload, and then I talk again. That's not really listening. Or you're talking, and what you say is interesting, so then I grab the steering wheel, and now I tell you what I like. So you say, "I like pizza." I'm like, "Oh, you like pizza? I like pizza. Let me tell you about the last time I had pizza," but now I'm not really listening. Now I'm talking.

So we try to teach people how you refrain from grabbing the wheel and actually invite the speaker to go deeper. Simple tips, like a lot of people don't know what an open-ended question is. Simply stated, it's a question you can't answer yes or no. So, if you say something I disagree with, the tendency is to throw out my facts and try to convince you that I'm right. The dramatically different -- I would say revolutionary -- move would be to say, "Oh, well, tell me a little more about that." Just that act, rather than fighting back, but inviting further exploration

makes you more complicated than meets the eye, gives me a chance to catch my breath, and maybe it helps me see that there's more to this than I might have imagined.

So we teach five building blocks of listening. We teach people how to tell stories, good stories about who they are because, again, if I reduce you to that position, to that vote, to that deed, belief, comment, it's easy to demonize you. But if I get your full story, then I may come to see, "Oh, there's a lot to this person, and we do have some other things in common, maybe, or we don't, but I get that you're a complicated person like me." So I think we really can train and drill on the skills. We just don't tend to do it. We don't tend to invest there.

**RICHARD:** When Ashley and I interview guests on this show, on this podcast, we listen. We have to. That's our job. Do you think that one technique that might be helpful to people is to say, instead of just having a back-and-forth conversation with a colleague, maybe you should sit down with that person and interview them, just ask them a series of questions.

**SIMON:** I wouldn't do it as a straight-up interview, the way it's your job here to do, but I do think having a go-to set of questions and techniques -- partly because if I just keep asking you questions, it can feel like I'm assaulting your position through the art of the question, and I'm not disclosing, not sharing anything about me. But I ask a good open-ended question, and then I listen to the response, and then maybe I share a story about how I came to see it the way I see it, and then you react.

I actually think it would be powerful, and have seen some cases where this is done, where workplaces create the space not for management to announce the position or not to tell staff not to talk about it, but to say, "We're a community, and this affects our community. So we're going to create space where we can talk about these things with no political litmus test. You don't have to comply with the company position. Come as you are. Share your perspective. Share your journey. We want the diversity of perspectives."

I train teams on how to build trust, and it's very loaded, but in our definition, trust is comprised of my view of your competence, my view of your reliability, and my view of your concern for the other, concern for me. So, if I think you're capable, I think you're reliable, and I think you care about my success, I'll trust you. That doesn't have to do with what you think about politics. It doesn't have to do with what you believe out there in the world. It's how you show up here. But many teams have low levels of trust, which undermine their work performance but certainly make it very hard to then talk about the challenging issues of the day.

**ASHLEY:** Just going back to what you said about when companies take a position or say, "This is what we believe. This is our official position," can you just talk for a few moments about how that can affect employees? Maybe you have a story to illustrate something you've seen in your work.

**SIMON:** Sure. Let me say, generally, I'm very hesitant about position-taking. If you're going to take a position, then really important the employees don't read about it in the press, that

there's some internal discussion and explanation. And I would say, just like our Supreme Court, love them or hate them, you always hear the minority position. You always hear the dissenting view. I think if management's going to take a stand, management needs to acknowledge the team, why reasonable people might see this differently. So I think it's very important to do the internal work, to, as I said earlier, create the environment where people understand that we have diverse opinions here, and we like that. We don't expect homogeneity in terms of people's points of view, one.

Two, if you're going to make a statement, it's really much more important that the actions speak louder than the statement. I work with a law firm in Michigan, and they were saying they didn't make any statement after the George Floyd murder. They actually doubled down on the cases they did to defend and protect lower-income African Americans, and that was more important for the alignment and excitement and enthusiasm of their workforce than making a big public stand. They wanted to do something. So I'm much more in the do-something than take-a-stand point of view. I think there are real downsides. If you take a stand and you don't do anything, then you lose your credibility even with the people who agreed with the stand.

**ASHLEY:** He says there's another case he's been grappling with lately. In this one, he worked with a group of nurses who felt at odds with hospital policy.

**SIMON:** The hospital system where they were working introduced some new language, and the language had to do with expectant mothers. They were now going to call the expectant mothers the "birthing parent" rather than the "expectant mother." And the question was, did they plan to "chest feed," not breastfeed but chest feed. The group of nurses were religious, Christian. They were Evangelical nurses who worked in this health system, and they felt like this was -- as women, they're like, "Look, you're taking away the one thing that women do. Like, this is my role. This is a function that is sacred for me, and now it's been given to everybody." And they had, I would say, biblical resistance, "This is not what I learned in the Bible, this blurring."

Then they told about the case of a transgender teenager who came to the hospital who had just tragically tried to commit suicide, and in the patient room, there's this terribly broken teenager who obviously had tried to take their own life, and their mother yelling, "You're John! You're not Joan!" The hospital policy about how we handle transgendered youth and the rights of teenagers versus the rights of their parents -- they're still minors -- and the culture was such that there was no room for the nurses to grapple with their mixed feelings. It was just like, "We have policy. We have language. Comply with it."

In my work with the nurses, what we unearthed was they all struggled. They struggled with what they would describe as -- this is their tradition, not mine -- but what they understand the words of the Bible to tell them about these kinds of issues and the tension that brought them with what they would describe as the love of Jesus, and that you have a broken teenager who's tried to take their own life. They need love. They don't need policy, and they don't actually even need biblical teaching. They need love. And these nurses, given the space, started to describe their own internal struggle, and the members of their own extended family who are

transgender or who are questioning these identities and that, when they got to tell the story about -- fundamentally, they went into this profession because of that love, and that's what guides them at the end of the day. It's guided them in their own family and in their own practice. I thought, "That's the journey people need to go on to get beneath the headlines," but the hospital system just put out a policy, sent you to a training, and expected adherence rather than: where is the space in this workplace? Because these are complex issues, and we're human, and so we need to go through our own journey.

I like to say that stories are how we comprise our common sense. I understand the world around me through story. If I don't my story, if you don't know my story, your ideas will exist outside my common sense, and I won't take them seriously. But once we've shared our stories, now we can construct common sense together, and if we skip that step, and we just go to policy and position and training and compliance, we miss it, and people don't move. They don't go on a journey. They actually retrench. They've got to protect this thing that feels under-siege rather than feeling like they're being invited to explore, to be a work in progress the way we all are.

**RICHARD:** Many of us in corporations and nonprofits and universities have undergone DEI, diversity, equity, and inclusion training. How does what you're talking about here differ from that or is the same as that?

**SIMON:** That's a good question. DEI trainings, they really vary. There's a full spectrum. What you might think of as DEI training and what I might think could be totally different, and I've heard many good things about them and many critiques. As a white person in a moment of, let's say, racial reckoning in our country, I'm the last person to say, like, "DEI good," "DEI bad." I don't think I'm the right arbiter for that. What I've seen in the worst cases of any training but particularly in DEI training is that I believe that it is curiosity and the inquiry, the humility to know that I can't see the whole picture, that there's new information I need. I'm going to gain some of that from people who I disagree with, that I'll be enhanced by hearing those diverse perspectives. That isn't always welcome.

There is one approach to all sorts of training, DEI included, that's like, "We're going to give you the answer. Here are the facts. Here's the language. Here are the rules." I think if we want people of all backgrounds across our country to tackle the un-tackled racial challenges we still face, then people need to be invited into a journey to explore that rather than be told there's one answer. Frankly, that's a controversial position I just took. Some people will attack me. I've gone soft on the racists, I'm selling out, or I'm failing to... What do I know about racism?

There's fair critique in all of that, but what I've seen from fashion brands that are trying to respond to George Floyd's killing or to foundation leaders with very diverse politics or television networks that are grappling with, like, how down with the struggle you need to be or film production companies struggling with diversity. I mean, I've seen so many of these companies get stuck in compliance. Then you get -- some people will comply, some people will just duck, like, "I hope I don't get caught up in this," and other people will resist.

Compliance, hiding, resisting, none of those make you an agent of change, and really what we want to do is unlock people's capacity to make change, to feel like they can be part of helping America live up to its promise in the places they work, in their congregations, in their political parties, in their neighborhood associations. And I fear that the way we're leaning toward compliance and policing language, it's creating more fear, which creates more resistance rather than creating more of an appetite for change.

**RICHARD:** You're listening to Simon Greer on Let's Find Common Ground. I'm Richard.

**ASHLEY:** I'm Ashley. We reckon that if you're listening to this show, you are probably a Common Grounder yourself, and with the midterm elections around the corner, we want to remind you about a tool Common Ground Committee has designed for voters like you.

**RICHARD:** The Common Ground Scorecard lets you see the politicians who seek common ground on vital issues and who doesn't, who consistently reaches out across the aisle to work with colleagues on the other side and who puts rigid ideology first.

**ASHLEY:** To see how your local politicians score, just go to [commongroundscorecard.org](http://commongroundscorecard.org) and enter a politician's name or put in your zip code. That's [commongroundscorecard.org](http://commongroundscorecard.org).

**RICHARD:** Now back to our interview with Simon Greer.

**ASHLEY:** Simon, tell us, how did you come to this work in the bridging community, and why are you so passionate about it?

**SIMON:** True confession, I was not always a bridge builder. I was a bomb thrower. Not literally, I didn't throw bombs, but I grew up in a left-wing, and I spent the first 20 years of my career doing what I now call hand-to-hand political combat. So, whether that was organizing the unions in South Carolina... we were trying to organize the First Union Hotel on Hilton Head Island. To put pressure on the company, we actually picketed at the CEO's church on Sunday. We blocked traffic on to the island. I did that kind of dramatic political action. I was part of a team that tried to block the docks at the port of San Francisco on the 500th anniversary of Columbus's arrival to block the reenactment of the landing, which the City of San Francisco was trying to do. I let security for massive protests against the World Bank and things like that in Washington, D.C. So, if there was a contentious struggle, there I was.

**ASHLEY:** Over the years, though, Simon came to realize that by simplifying and demonizing the other side, he was part of the problem. But by that point, he says, he was a Progressive leader, a somebody, and he didn't have the courage to walk away.

**SIMON:** Then, overnight, I lost my job, and, ironically, the rupture of losing my job and no longer being a somebody, no longer being a player in Progressive politics, that rupture gave me the freedom to decide, "I want to do something different," to see the world in a wide-open

way. I mean, I licked my wounds for a while, and I was certainly reeling there for a little bit, but then what I realized, what I needed to do was immerse myself with the very people I had been part of caricaturing. White working-class conservatives and corporate leaders, I would say, were the two groups that Progressives had most regularly caricatured as part of our strategy. So I spent the next few years spending all the time, money, and energy I could going to dinner with corrections officers and making small investments in startup companies so I could hang around with businesspeople just to put myself in the shoes and the life and the experience of the people that I had condemned as the other.

**RICHARD:** Simon, I want to put you on the spot. We've been talking about bridging differences, and as a consultant, as someone who works with corporations and nonprofits, what's been the most difficult problem that you've faced? Was there a case where employees or colleagues, work colleagues, were so divided that it was incredibly difficult to make progress on having a workforce where people could actually collaborate together and get along a little bit?

**SIMON:** I'll give you an example. I was working with the film production company, and they didn't take a public stand after George Floyd's murder. And some of the way they edited their filming, they definitely created the impression that there were more African Americans in the audience of a set of events they were portraying than there were. It was a hugely white audience, and there were a few people of color, and they zoom in on that person. In the clip, it would look like, oh, wow, it was a pretty mixed audience for this conversation, but it wasn't that mixed. And the leadership was suspect because they hadn't taken a stand after George Floyd, and now they were viewed by some of their employees as manipulating to make it look like it was diverse.

I knew from the leadership that they thought that was what they should do, like, "Don't we want to make it look inclusive? We would want African Americans to feel like they'd be welcome in this story, and so we emphasize that African Americans are welcome here." And the staff, of course, is like, "No, you're tokenizing. You failed to be diverse, and now you're faking it, and you didn't even take a stand." This was a small company, very tight-knit.

So what was hardest -- well, a lot of things. One, my point of view that we need to be curious and listen to perspective we disagree with was kind of rejected. "Well, you're a sellout, and you're condoning racism." I was accused of two-sider-ism. I actually think there's like 20 sides on any issue, not just two, but I didn't know you could be condemned for believing there are multiple sides. So it was like a rejection, initially, of the whole approach. And what's underneath that is, "We're going to get a pound of flesh. Someone is going to get taken out for this. That's how staff will know we've been hurt. Someone will lose a job."

**RICHARD:** Someone will be canceled.

**SIMON:** Someone will be canceled. Someone's going to pay because this is a moral wrong that they've done, and not just a bad deed, but we've come to believe that people are worse than their worst deed, not better than their worst deed. What if they did show more African

American faces than were actually there? I mean, they were there because they have them on footage, but they make it look like there were more of them. Maybe that was a bad move. It doesn't mean they're deplorable or irredeemable, but that's what they become, right? You're one of the bad people. You're one of the racists, and you are going to pay. And I'm white, so it's like, "You're going to try to facilitate a conversation to get the white leadership to understand, and you believe in two sides, and you think we should have real curiosity? No, no, no, no, no. There's right and wrong."

And I tried to introduce the listening skills, but what I saw before my very eyes was that people who seem to like each other and trust each other on work suddenly like, boom, "Now I don't even know you." And their identities made them suspect. "You're not credible to speak about this because you're white and male and older," which means, then, that the younger, maybe more junior people -- in this case, people of color -- white women, now only their voice is credible. Is that really the solution, that now a new group has its voice valued at the expense of the other group? I fundamentally believe you have to love something if you're going to change it. Dr. King said that, "Hate can't drive out hate. Only love can do that."

What I saw in the workplace was that the love of the work and the -- not love like intimate love -- but the love of each other, like, "We're a team," it evaporated. So the good faith was gone, and then there wasn't much interest in the skills. That's really where I come in, is, "I'm going to give you the skills to cross lines of difference and learn about people rather than simplifying them and hear their stories and give the hard feedback but give it in a timely manner and give it in a skillful way, so that it's actionable.

But if you've written off the other people, then why do you want the skills? You're not legitimate in this conversation. I found that to be heartbreaking because it wasn't that there was no trust at the beginning, but the trust evaporated so quickly, the sides got drawn, and the, really, lack of humanity of the other side took hold in a way that made progress really -- not just a little untenable. There was no road forward.

**ASHLEY:** What happened? No solution?

**SIMON:** Well, there's no Hollywood ending on that one. I think one of the most destructive things that happens in workplaces is, if you and I have a disagreement, and I go and find other people who agree with my view of you, you showed up late -- that's the data -- "You came to my meeting late. I think you're unreliable." That's my interpretation of why you showed up late. Now I go ask other people, "Don't you think those two are kind of unreliable? Oh, you do? Now we're a team. We're the "They're Unreliable" team, and you've built your team. That's how we end up with these divisions in workplaces not just on contentious issues but on performance issues.

So what I dread is that gossip. Don't talk to that person over there about the third party. Turn and face them, face-to-face. Talk to them about the performance challenge. Talk to them about the tension. Talk to them about their shortcomings. But what I found in this case was that I

couldn't break that cycle. I couldn't get people to, "Well, just go sit. Go back into the room. Go grab coffee with them and tell them really how it made you feel." They'd have group sessions, and there would be an attack, and it would deteriorate, and then people would... whether they actually left, or you could just see that they had left. Their physical body was there, but they were no longer engaged in hopeful resolution of this conflict for the betterment of themselves, each other, and the company. They're just like, "Yeah, these people don't get it," was the general tone and demeanor, and I found it to be heartbreaking because I knew all the players. Two days before the fight, they had all been good people, well-intentioned, committed to each other and to the business.

**RICHARD:** Well, before we go, did you want to say anything else? Is there a question you'd like us to ask you that has not been asked that gives you an opportunity to say something that hasn't been covered here?

**SIMON:** Yeah. People will say that what I'm talking about is like, kumbaya, mushy middle, compromise, watered-down. Like, "We don't want civility. We want change!" So I get the skepticism, but this is what happened to me, and I don't always share it, and I couldn't have made it up. I was leading a delegation to Poland, and I reread Viktor Frankl's book "Man's Search for Meaning." He writes about how love and beauty are the things that sustain people in horrendous or horrific circumstances. There was something about that that kind of rattled me. It's not the fight. It's the love and the beauty.

**RICHARD:** Can I just interrupt? Because that book is so beautiful. I love that book. Viktor Frankl was a concentration camp survivor who went through a living hell and came out the other side with a remarkably loving heart, with a very different view of life, right?

**SIMON:** Yeah, exactly, 100%. So I reread the book because I was leading this delegation to Poland. I took the group to Auschwitz. And when I arrived at Auschwitz, that's the land of my grandparents, so it was already emotional, and members of my own extended family were killed there, and people, as you said, call it Hell on Earth, and it is. But at the end of the -- I don't know if either of you have been, but there's this disembarkation point, which is where the train tracks come to, which is where the train cars arrived. I was standing there at the end of the tracks, listening to this story about a brother and a sister who came off the cars holding hands. The sister was pulled to one side, sent to the crematoria, and incinerated; the brother sent to work in the camp. He actually lived to tell the story, but they never saw each other again.

And as I stood there, my own children, brother and sister, popped into my heart or into my mind, and the agony, the rage, the heartbreak, it was like it was literally too much to bear. It's a freezing December day, and I drop to the ground, crumble to the ground, and I weep, just there on the ground at Auschwitz, sobbing. Then the craziest thing happened. The sobbing, the weeping, it subsided, and I had this totally bizarre awareness, this raw sense that all of us, that we're all bound up together in this tangled web of life, not just the good ones but all of us inextricably linked, that it can be tempting to say, like, "I hate this about you," but that thing I

hate in you, some little thing of it lives in me. I have to admit it, and what I love most deeply must reside in you.

So it was like a revelation. I could no longer just hate and simplify the other. I wanted to get more clear and crisp in my own values but not to be aggressive against the other because I'm connected to them. They're part of me. I'm part of them, and that is not -- it's the last thing I ever would've thought I would feel at Auschwitz. I was raised in the, like, "I hate the Germans." That's how I was raised, and, "Hate the Poles!" But there I was, brokenhearted about what it would be like to lose my children that way, and, after the heartbreak, the clarity was that I'm not giving a pass to the bad actors. That is not me.

I think we have to condemn the bullies and the cowards and the hatemongers and the people who undermine what it means to do what we're trying to do here in America. So I'm not soft. I do have this approach I call "strong back, soft front." It comes from my martial arts practice, and I think the more we're clear about where we stand, the less we need to be brittle or rigid or land a cheap shot or throw a jab. But it came that day, was the sense that I want to be skillful enough and convicted enough in my beliefs that I can stand for my values, but I can still be inviting. I can still be openhearted to the other because sitting in the fire of disagreement and recognizing the humanity of the other person, I think that's how we heal our souls and repair the world.

I don't think there's a shortcut, and I think, in light of our conversation, I think workplaces can manifest that, too. But there's a technique question, and then there's the deeper grounding question, and I guess that's why I wanted to share that origin about my approach to this work. So hopefully that fills out a little bit of the picture of me.

**RICHARD:** Simon Greer, thank you very much.

**SIMON:** Thank you. Thank you. Good to spend the time with you.

**ASHLEY:** Going from the profound to the practical, Richard, if I have one big takeaway from this conversation, it's that idea of having a workplace culture that's curious rather than compliant, right? You don't announce an official stand on some cultural or political issue without first having some kind of discussion with employees and making them feel involved.

**RICHARD:** Yeah, and Simon also says that finding common ground doesn't mean an end to conflict or disagreement. It's fine to disagree, he says, but let's do it in a way that doesn't objectify other people. I was also moved by what Simon said about the need for curiosity and even love. So much of what he's saying runs counter to conflict entrepreneurs who often dominate the debate in today's media.

**ASHLEY:** Absolutely. It's a very different take. We hope this episode has been helpful, and, as ever, we'd love to hear from you. Tell us what you think at [podcast@commongroundcommittee.org](mailto:podcast@commongroundcommittee.org).

**RICHARD:** Again, that address is [podcast@commongroundcommittee.org](mailto:podcast@commongroundcommittee.org). And don't forget to go to the Common Ground Scorecard at [commongroundscorecard.com](http://commongroundscorecard.com) to find out how much your politicians seek common ground and move the country forward. I'm Richard Davies.

**ASHLEY:** I'm Ashley Milne-Tyte. Thanks for listening.

**ANNOUNCER:** This podcast is part of The Democracy Group.