

# CREATING COMMON GROUND

## Module 4

If you have a social media profile, chances are you've seen an argument or two on someone's page. It's almost comical when you see grown people just going at it, trying to change someone else's mind on different topics.

But here's the question: have you ever seen someone actually change their mind because of an internet argument? It's like negotiating with a drunk person. It just won't work. Yet people continue to do it.

There's a reason for that. Before we get into the specific ways people agree or disagree, we must explore how our minds form opinions.

You see, our brains are wired to accept a certain spectrum of opinions.

Imagine a number line ranging from 0 to 100 percent. At 0, you have one extreme of the opinion, and at 100 you have the other. You might think that most people's opinions fall on one end or the other, but the reality is, most people's opinions fall in the thirds: 30-ish percent or 70-ish percent. More importantly, we are willing to accept and associate ourselves with opinions that are near to ours but actually might be different.

**OPINION HOOK.** *Nobody* has the exact same opinion as somebody else, but a person with an opinion at 30% might find themselves mostly agreeing with a person who has an opinion at 20%. This is called an opinion hook.

Imagine an anchor on a boat. It doesn't keep the boat in one place. It allows the boat to stay in a specific area even though it may drift just a bit. Your opinion hook does this exact thing for you. Your opinion can drift a little to either side of any belief you may have.

That drift in either direction from your opinion hook is called the agreement zone.

**AGREEMENT ZONE:** A place where people with slight differences in opinion agree without conceding the details. It's like magic! If you agree with someone in your agreement zone, it will actually push your hook a little in their direction. There's a communication term you might have heard before: the foot-in-the-door approach.

Imagine I eat meat and someone else I talk to is an ethical Vegan. These may seem like polar opposites and in some ways, they are. However, if we could find an agreement zone our willingness to “understand,” the other person’s view increases.

I am not suggesting you violate your principles or values. We’re talking about finding ways to build rapport with someone. Looking for those opportunities to sway closer to another person’s view could in fact allow them to see your position better as well.

Focus on finding ways to understand another perspective versus looking at opinions as adversarial arguments. This must come from you, though. Never wait for them to concede anything.

What’s the best way to do this? By repeating what they say. Now, listen closely because how you execute this will be critical. When someone says, “Being Vegan is the only way to live.” If you’re a meat eater your opinion hook could be, “This person is crazy! How can that be the only way to live?”

If you go down that road, you’ll find yourself in a conversation that leads nowhere fast. Instead, repeat. When they say, “Being Vegan is the only way to live,” you say, “The only way to live?” Now, this is where it gets interesting. Instead of it being a battle, they will begin to open up.

Perhaps they say, “Yes, killing animals is horrible and when you eat plant-based foods you’re not only saving lives, you’re also helping the planet.” Then you reply, “It helps the planet?” As you continue this dialog you’ll begin to notice a shift in the conversation. It will be less confrontational and more collaborative. IF and only IF you have a genuine desire to understand.

If you come across as fake or condescending, this will backfire. You can even make a statement like, “It sounds like this is something you’re very passionate about.” Oh boy! Now this is getting exciting isn’t it? Practice that with everyone you can and you’ll see the power of this concept.

If you’re unwilling then it’s more of an ego challenge of being right or wrong versus your willingness to, perhaps, learn something new.

It’s important to first understand, the closer someone is to the extremes--that’s 0 and 100 on that number line--the shorter someone’s chain is going to be. A person who’s dead-set on a

100 generally won't concede to pretty much anybody. Meanwhile, someone who's near the middle will be more willing to look further outside their own viewpoint.

What's funny is how most people who ARE those extremes rarely see themselves as that. Most people want to be seen as flexible in their thoughts and opinions. But you and I know that's not the case. This is why I say again, it's up to you to drive those conversations. I'll share more about why this is important in a minute.

**Here's another tip:** *how you communicate with someone can actually change the chain's length, so to speak.*

Imagine it this way. The chain is longest when you're talking face-to-face, because a person can see your body language and hear your voice. They have more information to work with, so they're more open to additional perspectives. Phone communication makes that chain a little shorter, and it's at its shortest over text, email, or the internet.

That makes sense, right? If you're not 100% certain at this point, just go to your social media platform and observe a conversation around politics or religion. That should help you connect the dots. The keyboard warriors are vicious.

This is why understanding why opinions matter is critical. If you want to not only have meaningful relationships, but also influence others in your life, consider how you communicate in terms of venue as much as the words you choose to express your opinions. Now, just outside the agreement zone, there's a space called the disagreement zone.

**DISAGREEMENT ZONE:** Think of it as a place where someone will disagree with a person and be more or less unwilling to alter their stance. This is a place where people are usually willing to "agree to disagree" on an issue. This is also where most compromises happen and the area where great communication can scale or go south really quick.

Using our diet example. If I believe the best way to get protein is only from meat and my Vegan friend says that's crazy, they get more protein from raw plants than meat...who's right?

The answer is, it doesn't matter. Sometimes it's okay to agree to disagree. That's the big takeaway here. We don't have to convince everyone of our views. We need to accept and appreciate that others may be different to us.

This is why our world is so amazing. We don't have to agree, but we can respect others' beliefs. If there's one thing you can take away today, it's knowing when this zone triggers within you.

That sensory acuity will allow you to make purposeful choices on how you respond.

Finally, beyond the disagreement zone, is the **FRICTION ZONE**: A place where opinions clash. But, attempting to persuade someone of an opinion in this zone simply won't work. In fact, it will actually have the opposite effect. Something communications experts call the *blowback effect*.

**BLOWBACK EFFECT:** When Person A tries to convince Person B of an opinion in their friction zone, Person B won't just disagree with them. They'll actually retract to the place where all communication shuts down. I know I've been there, and you probably have too.

Let's look at this with a common example we started with: an internet argument. Because it's over the internet, people's chains are short and their agreement zones are small.

Because their agreement zones are small, their disagreement zones are also small. What does that leave us with? The friction zones are huge. It's why you'll almost never see people come to a compromise over the internet.

So, how does this relate to you in your life? More importantly, how can you leverage this personally and professionally?

**Choose your medium of communication.** Avoid the temptation of trying to solve an argument over text or the internet. Face-to-face communication is king. Phone is a close second. If you do find yourself in that scenario, remind yourself it's not about right or wrong. It's about the relationship. If you don't know them, then why would it matter to make a comment?

You know this already but having a trigger to remind you is sometimes helpful to avoid that situation from escalating. If you are able to communicate on the phone or in person, do it. And remember the best practice I shared with you? Build rapport by repeating their point in an authentic way. Do that several times and they will reveal themselves to you.

**Avoid those things that cause friction to begin with.** If not, you'll reinforce division and push the other person away. I know that's not your intent but remember people will judge you based on what you say and do... never your intent.

**Find points you can agree on first in every situation.** This builds rapport and will bridge communication with others. In my Vegan versus Meat eating example, I can say, “I find it fascinating how one can get protein from so many sources. I always believed meat is the best. What have you found that works for you?”

In that sample conversation. I wasn't conceding that eating plant based is better, but I am opening dialog to respect and understand a different perspective.

Here's why this is so important. Small agreements help shift a person's anchor in your direction and will help you be more persuasive when you reach the places where you need to compromise. It will make your communications more effective, more constructive, and more likely to progress.

You now have this brand-new perspective on how to communicate opinions in a way that can actually build meaningful relationships. Most people want to be understood and not judged. It's okay to not agree, but it's never okay to marginalize someone else.

The challenge is that it happens unconsciously, and the results are never positive. But now you have a new perspective! Try it, beginning right now. Practice repeating with the intent to understand. Build rapport and find yourself in the agreement zone much more.

Understanding when you see these triggers in yourself is the most important. That self-reflection will translate into more confidence because your words and actions are based on logic and not just opinions.

At the end of the day, collaboration and relationships are what really matters. Opinions are always shifting based on past beliefs and experiences. In the end, they don't really matter when all is said and done.