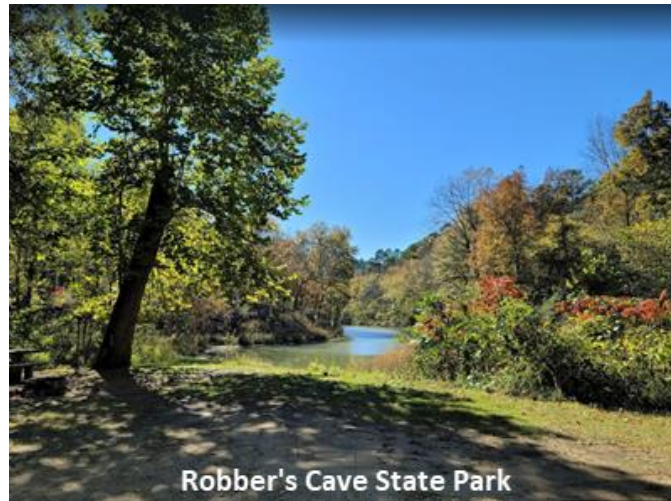


How to Transform an Enemy into a Friend

The Value of Having a Common Vision / Goal in Marriage



During the summer of 1954, Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues conducted what is now seen as a classic social experiment in conflict resolution. He took 22 eleven year old boys who attended a three week sleep-away summer camp at Robber Cave State Park in Wilburton, Oklahoma and divided them into two groups. During stage one, each group of boys, unaware of the other's existence, had an opportunity to build positive relationships with one another. During stage two, the two groups were brought into contact for the sole purpose of creating competition, antagonism, and conflict between the two groups of boys (the Rattlers and Eagles). Members of each group were unified in their dislike for the other group, and engaged in acts of hostility against the other (e.g. name-calling, burning of the other group's flag, raiding and ransacking the other's cabin and stealing items, and even fighting. Experimenters had to intervene on more than one occasion. During the third and final stage, various attempts were made to reduce the conflict and build cooperative and harmonious relations between the two groups and among all the boys regardless of which group they were in.

Initially, nothing worked, which worried the experimenters. Finally, Sherif and his team created harmony through the introduction of "superordinate goals." These are goals which both sides wanted but could not be attained on their own. In order to reach these goals, the two groups needed to work together.

In stage three of the camp study, breakdowns with the water system, the truck that delivered food, and the need of money contributions for an onsite movie, and the like, were staged in such a way that required a joint effort by both groups to solve the predicament or obtain what was wanted. The impact of each successful joint venture was cumulative. As the successes began to

pile up, “the change in behavior and patterns of interaction between the groups was striking to all observers.” The boys among both groups became friends.

Sherif summarized, “When a state of interdependence between groups was produced for the attainment of superordinate goals, the groups realistically faced common problems. They took them up as common problems, jointly moving toward their solution, preceding to plan and to execute the plans which they had jointly envisaged.”¹ In other words, enemies were transformed into friends because what united them was stronger than what divided them.



For Discussion: Aa31-35

This same principle readily applies to marriage. A shared vision can help transform your conflicted marriage into a more harmonious one. Working together, for example, to (a) build a vision of a happier relationship, (b) provide a stable and loving environment for your children, (c) protect against financial ruin, etc., are the kind of areas that can bring the two of you closer.

Question: What is your vision for your family, marital relationship, and yourself? Please use the outline on the next page to identify them.

¹ Muzafer Sherif, O. J. Harvey, B. Jack White, William R. Hood, Carolyn W. Sherif (1954/1961). “ Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation: The Robbers Cave Experiment.” <https://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Sherif/chap8.htm> page 209.