
A USER'S GUIDE TO
**THE MIRACLE AT
BRIDGE CREEK**



What Is The Miracle at Bridge Creek?

Spotted owls and logging. Wetlands and farming. Urban life and waste disposal. Natural resource disputes are confusing and frustrating—even paralyzing—to many of us. For society, they are polarizing and expensive. They often lead to showdowns in courtrooms and legislative halls. The outcomes of those rarely please everyone. Sometimes, they don't please anyone.

That's why in 1986 in Oregon an unlikely combination of people, though suspicious of one another, decided to explore whether they could find ways to reduce—maybe even

prevent—polarization on natural resource issues.

Representatives of ranching, timber, environmental and conservation organizations formed a group. They named themselves the Oregon Watershed Improvement Coalition, or OWIC. *The Miracle at Bridge Creek* examines some of the challenges, successes and failures those people

***The video
was designed
as an ice
breaker.***

experienced while trying to learn to communicate with one another.

The 30-minute *Miracle at Bridge Creek* video was designed as an “ice breaker” that could be shown to groups at odds seeking common ground. Attitudes and skills that help people work together are embedded in the story.

Other audiences that may find the video useful: interest groups or individuals considering participating in a coalition; participants in workshops for potential facilitators or educators; participants in classes or workshops on the politics of coalitions.



Cover: Character actor Jack Elam, narrator of *The Miracle at Bridge Creek*.

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Before the Screening

(suggestions for showing the video)

Your role

If you're showing the video as an ice breaker at a meeting between representatives of groups at odds, keep in mind that the individuals may have limited knowledge of each others' lifestyles, beliefs, needs and desires. They may be prejudiced, even hostile, toward one another. Initially, your goal should be to break down barriers and get them to talk. Once they have expressed their thoughts and feelings, they're more likely to work together looking for common goals.

To create an atmosphere conducive to effective communication, it's important to:

- Allow each individual to express feelings and perspectives.
- Encourage people to communicate by talking *to*—not *at* or *about*—each other with the goal of clarifying and understanding rather than scoring points in a “win-lose” debate. The idea is not to squelch conflict. In a constructive dialogue, conflict can stimulate creativity.
- Protect participants from personal attack.



Preparing the Group

- Introduce yourself.
- Explain that meetings of this type are in the experimental stage and that you are accompanying the group in the learning process.
- Ask participants to introduce themselves and tell why they agreed to attend—what they want to get out of the meeting. Encourage candid disclosure of thoughts and feelings about attending and about an opposing group or groups, but *do not allow personal attacks*.
- Ask participants what they hope to gain by communicating with the opposing group.



After the Screening

(a few more suggestions)

Here are questions people at the screening could discuss:

- Near the beginning of the video, an environmentalist refers to ranchers as people who want to “play cowboy” and “play the Marlboro man.” A rancher refers to environmental advocates’ “lies.” What effect do such comments have on communication between individuals and groups?

■ In the video, OWIC member Bill Krueger said, “The environmentalists felt the same thing about the cattlemen, that they owned the legislature and that they basically did as they pleased. So the first thing they figured out together was that they feared each other both for the same reason. Kinda meant that either they both were right or they both were wrong, and they couldn’t both be right.” In what ways do the people at your meeting fear each other? How might they all be wrong? How might all be right?

■ OWIC wanted to see if people of opposing viewpoints could reach a consensus on what constitutes a sound watershed. The video says members



found that simply developing a scientific description wasn’t enough. What did work was identifying each

member’s land-use needs—what they wanted from the land. What motivates the people at your meeting?

■ What was the benefit of having OWIC meetings at sites where watershed issues were obvious? How can this procedure help in working with controversial issues?

■ In the video, OWIC members often ate together. How important was the character of OWIC meetings to the progress of the coalition? (Hint for the facilitator: Some OWIC members feel getting to know one another informally was as beneficial as sharing thoughts about natural resource issues.)

- OWIC members agreed early on to look at where they were going, not where they had been. That is, rather than worrying about what happened in the past, they decided to focus on what they wanted to accomplish in the future and how they could do that. Ask the people at your meeting why OWIC might have taken that approach.
- Why did some people leave OWIC? What impact did these people have on the group?
- How did the groups represented by OWIC members benefit from meeting together? How might society at large benefit from such cooperation?



Other Resources

Following are selected references that will help you learn more about the skills, roles and stages in the coalition building process.

1. Ching, Donna R. 1991. *Designing Successful Meetings: Unit I—Meeting Focus: Content, Process*. A participant's guide to accompany the video "Meeting Focus: Understanding the Importance of Content Focus and Process Focus." Honolulu, HI: HITAHR Information Text Series 040, University of Hawaii.
2. Ching, Donna R. 1991. *Designing Successful Meetings: Unit II—Meeting Roles: Facilitator, Recorder, Participant*. A participant's guide to accompany the video "Unit 1—Meeting Roles: Facilitator, Recorder and Participant in Facilitative Meetings." Honolulu, HI: HITAHR Information Text Series 041, University of Hawaii.
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4. Fisher, Roger, William Ury, and Bruce Patton. 1991. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*. 2nd ed. New York: Penguin Books.
5. Gray, Barbara. 1989. *Collaborating: Finding Common Ground for Multiparty Problems*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
6. Hocker, Joyce L., and William W. Wilmot. 1991. *Interpersonal Conflict*. Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown.
7. Moore, Christopher. 1987. *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
8. Ohio Ctr. For Action on Coalition Development. 1992. "Building Coalitions" (16-part publication series). Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.
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Extension & Station Communications
Oregon State University
422 Kerr Administration
Corvallis, OR 97331-2119

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