

## Three Boundary Spanning Ideas

<https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/three-boundary-spanning-ideas-2/>



When times are tough, our natural tendency is to hunker down. Battle lines are drawn. Organizational silos get taller. Worldviews shrink, attitudes narrow and positions tighten.

All too often, boundaries create borders that divide groups into Us and Them. The result can be fractured relationships, diminished resources, suboptimal results and divisive conflict.

Yet, boundaries are also frontiers — a place of emergent opportunity and new possibility. Wherever group boundaries collide and intersect, there is potential for different ways of working and new forms of collaboration. Boundaries can reveal new frontiers for solving pressing problems, driving innovation and leading breakthrough change.

But how do you incorporate boundary spanning into your leadership?

In our work with clients, CCL uses a range of tactics to jump-start a process or to crack open a specific challenge where effective boundary spanning is imperative. In a new white paper, [Boundary Spanning in Action: Tactics for Transforming Today's Borders into Tomorrow's Frontiers](#), we share the stories of organizations that are successfully putting boundary spanning into practice and describe more than 30 specific tactics. Here are details for three favorites:

The Team Charter Off-Site is a tactic we use and recommend for setting out a team's uniqueness and direction (*a buffering tactic*, if you're familiar with our boundary spanning leadership model). Head off to a place that gets everybody out of the office. Spend half the time away in a non-work activity (hiking, eating, golfing, etc.). Focus the rest of your time constructing a Team Charter. Elements you'll want to discuss are:

- **Purpose.** Narrow down the group's mission, calling or guiding purpose into a single, 25-word sentence.
- **Values.** Identify three or four values that define your group.
- **Differentiators.** What defines and sets apart your group?
- **What we produce, direct or influence.** Clarify the group's output, task or concrete contributions.
- **How we like (and expect) to work.** Nail down processes and expectations. How will you share information, deliberate and decide? What expectations do you have around how you work and what you do?
- **Relationships with others.** What links exist between your group and others? How solid are those ties? How will you interact with others?
- **Who is "in" and who is "out."** A group doesn't exist without boundaries. Who is included in your group and who isn't? How might this change?

At the end of the day, capture the team's **identity** in a fun and memorable way. Create a short video that tells your team's story or a touchstone that represents what the group is all about.

**Walk and Talk.** A surprisingly simple way to *connect* with others is to walk and talk. In our boundary spanning work, we have asked people from different groups to pair up to take a 15-20 minute walk and ask each other four questions:

- What brought you to your profession (or to this job or to your company)?
- What do you enjoy most about your work?
- What do you wish you were doing more of?
- How do you like to spend your time when you are not working?

The first question often unlocks a passion and commitment that people have for their work. It's part of their personal story. It usually engages both people, leading to a comfortable conversation around the other questions.

This is an activity that can readily be built into a normal working day, workshop or training session, or when new people are brought together to resolve a shared challenge or create something new.

**Map the Challenge.** A *weaving* activity that we call “shared affinity mapping” allows group members to clearly see facets of a challenge or situation; reveal areas of overlap, connection and concern; and begin to create shared ownership of solutions.

Divide into small groups, asking each to brainstorm a list of issues or factors related to the project or challenge. Include the question, *what obstacles might get in our way of success?*

The groups then post their topics for all to see. Each member marks the top three issues that he or she thinks must be addressed. We like to use colored “sticky dots” to visually capture the votes from each group or person. As the different colors are posted, participants can see how their ideas overlap, cluster or blend. People see both differentiation (the colors) and integration (the patterns). Facilitate a discussion around key themes and use insights to begin prioritizing, problem-solving and planning.

This is a great activity to do if a group is gathered in one room — posting issues and voting can be done on boards, walls or flip charts. But the process also works well in a virtual space, in real time or asynchronously.