

Negotiation Interests and Positions

Divergent viewpoints can be great at stimulating new ideas, or dangerous in leading to loss of productivity. An introduction into the interest based route to resolving organisational differences through negotiation.

When two people take opposing sides on any particular issue in a dispute, they both often refuse to budge from their divergent viewpoints. The end result is a stalemate. If a solution is found then both will win.

The basic reason why many people fail to find agreement is that each has taken what is known as a ['position'](#). One wants something that the other doesn't. That's usually the basic reason.

It's like kids in a playground yelling back and forth, *'Can too!'* followed by the equally persuasive reply of, *'Cant too'* We often see this grown-up version resonate in negotiations as well. The crucial question that neither party has asked the other, is to explain the reason and motivation behind their position. The motivating forces or reasons which underlie their negotiation positions are what we refer to as their ['negotiation interests'](#). Interests are the 'why' or the basis for the **negotiation position**.

The main problem is that the people involved in a dispute always know the positions of the parties, but they often neglect to understand why the other person has taken this position in the first place.

There's a classic example which illustrates how our knowing the other person's interests might overcome positions. Two men seated together in a building are at odds on whether to keep a window open or closed. Hearing this ongoing feud, a third person enquires about the dispute. One gentleman demands that the window be closed to avoid a draft. The second gentleman wants the window open for the fresh air. The third person then goes into the next room and opens a window. This simple solution resolves the problem by providing fresh air to one of the parties while negating the issue of the draft for the other. A creative solution is applied by considering a smart solution which happily satisfies both their interests.

Negotiation interests largely relate to basic human needs. They are powerful influences in our decision making processes. Interests not only include those tangible desires which correspond to the specific problem at hand such as increasing sales or productivity. They also link to our more basic human emotions, that are less obvious to the participants. These basic emotional needs are couched in our psyche, but some examples might include our need for security, empowerment, inclusion, control, or recognition. These intangible needs illustrate what may well be overlooked when considering the interests of our [counterpart](#). We might even neglect to realistically consider our own basic human needs when trying to define or describe our interests to someone else. They are all equally valid and just as important.

It's vital to ferret out all the underlying information to determine not only our interests, but the interests of the other side. Let's take a look at how we might accomplish this process.

What We Need to Know

- ◆ What's the issue? We must be absolutely clear we understand the issue or problem by stating it clearly. Both parties should be in agreement on the fundamental issues at stake. They need to do this before they even attempt to resolve the issues. They will otherwise be at cross purposes and resolution will be extremely difficult if not impossible. This is the first item where both parties have to find mutual agreement.
- ◆ Having defined the problem, it is equally crucial we understand what obstacles are preventing us from solving our dilemma. Each side will relate both similar and dissimilar obstacles that are acting as barriers to finding [common ground](#). We both need to fully understand all the specific obstacles involved. If we neglect to perform

this crucial step, both parties will not fully appreciate all the obstacles which prevent them from achieving closure.

- ◆ Separation - Both parties need to take a step back. When confrontational disputes linger, there is a tendency of personal animosity. We begin to take the matter too personally and a highly charged atmosphere surrounds what could be literally described as verbal combat. The participants need to separate themselves from the problem and to restore some degree of objectivity.
- ◆ What are your negotiating interests? Our interests include those tangible needs or what we might consider as the underlying mechanical components of the problem. Payment terms, transportations costs and scheduling are some of the issues which can be addressed at one level. Other interests, such as trust or anxiety, which also relate to our business interests, are equally relevant in terms of their importance. Caution should be observed as either party could have a different opinion about the degree of importance they attach to each other's interests.
- ◆ Problem Solving. By understanding the problem and the obstacles which need to be overcome, together with fully understanding each other's needs and interests. the possibility of finding a solution is then greatly enhanced. The approach to problem solving needs to be addressed through a mutual perspective of both parties' unique and somewhat different circumstances. Most negotiation problems can be broken down into different components, lessening the strength of any obstacles which lay in the path to a mutually agreeable negotiated resolution.

Summary

All negotiation positions are supported by interests. Only by knowing and defining these interests can we really be effective in clearly appreciating and understanding the full extent of the dispute. This approach applies to every kind of dispute whether it is a business venture, a dispute with a co worker, or even within the fabric of our everyday lives.

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