

# UNESCO/APC MULTIMEDIA TRAINING KIT

## COOPERATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING: A GUIDE FOR TURNING CONFLICTS INTO AGREEMENTS

Developed by: Search for Common Ground

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### ***About this document***

These materials are part of the UNESCO/APC Multimedia Training Kit (MMTK). The MMTK provides an integrated set of multimedia training materials and resources to support community media, community multimedia centres, telecentres, and other initiatives using information and communications technologies (ICTs) to empower communities and support development work.

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction to the guide**

This guide to Cooperative Problem Solving is designed for people who want to know how to resolve conflicts with other people in a way that leads to mutual agreements and stronger relationships.

Based on the book *Getting to Yes*<sup>1</sup>, the Guide addresses:

- o Treating conflict as a natural resource
- o How to attack problems while respecting people
- o Raising an issue in a constructive manner
- o Exploring opposing positions to discover shared interests
- o Generating options to address all parties' needs
- o Crafting clear and healthy solutions
- o Dealing with differing perceptions
- o Managing emotions
- o Insuring two-way communications
- o Choosing when to use a cooperative approach
- o Being a peacemaker while resolving conflicts

We tend to know already what works and what doesn't work in interpersonal conflict resolution. This guide helps you draw upon your experiences to discover a process you can use in a wide variety of situations - at home, in the workplace, and in your community.

This guide is the textbook for the workshop called "Cooperative Problem Solving". It can also be useful by itself.

While the Guide is written for addressing conflict between two people, it can be used both within and between groups as well.

Also, as you move through this guide, please bear in mind that this is one of many models for Cooperative Problem Solving that exist in the world. While these materials were developed in the United States, they have also been shown to be useful and effective in other contexts. It may be appropriate to translate these materials into local vocabularies and customs.

## **Chapter 2. Introduction to Cooperative Problem Solving**

**How we deal with conflicts:** It is normal for people to live and work well together. But it is normal also for us to have conflicts from time to time. We disagree with each other because we each see the world differently, and we have different ideas about what we want and how to do things. To be human is to have conflicts. If we all agreed on everything, life would be boring! We don't have a choice about whether conflict will happen in our lives. But we do have a choice about how we will deal with it. We really have three choices: flight, fight, and unite.

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<sup>1</sup> *Getting to Yes*, by Roger Fisher and William Ury. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

## Conflict Management Options



Each of these responses has advantages and disadvantages:

**Flight:** We can avoid dealing with a conflict. Sometimes the wisest thing to do may be to let the other person have his or her way to get something more important. But if we ignore conflicts that hurt others, our relationships, or ourselves, the conflict is likely to continue and grow.

**Fight:** In other situations, we may decide to address the conflict through confrontation. This can take many forms: the justice system, an arbitrator, an argument, or force. These approaches give one party victory but the other defeat.

**Unite:** There are times when we want to address a conflict in a way that both solves the problem and improves our relationship with the other person. While this requires self-discipline and time, it has the benefit of increasing long-term cooperation and mutual respect. We call this approach Cooperative Problem Solving or CPS.

Here are the differences between the adversarial and cooperative styles of problem solving:

## **PROBLEM-SOLVING STYLES**

### **ADVERSARIAL:**

- o The parties see themselves as adversaries
- o Bargaining is based on positions
- o Facts are used to buttress positions
- o Polarization of parties and issues
- o Face-to-face contacts are restricted among parties
- o Winning arguments are sought
- o Yields all-or-nothing resolution of issues
- o Options are narrowed quickly
- o Characterized by suspicion and high emotion
- o Third parties intervene before issues are matured
- o Authority for decision rests with judge
- o Parties often dissatisfied with the outcome
- o Often fosters bitterness and long-term mistrust

### **COOPERATIVE:**

- o The parties see themselves as joint problem-solvers
- o Bargaining is based on interests
- o Parties make a joint effort to determine facts
- o Joint search for underlying interests
- o Face-to-face discussions encouraged among all parties
- o Workable options are sought
- o Yields resolution by integrating interests
- o Field of options is broadened
- o Characterized by respect and application of reason
- o Issues can be identified before positions crystallize
- o Authority for decision rests with the parties
- o Outcome must be satisfactory to all parties
- o Promotes trust and positive relationships

**What do we want in a conflict situation?** Imagine that you have been having problems with someone. You want to resolve the conflict and to improve your relationship with this person, so you have decided to sit down together to try to work it out. What do you hope will happen? What do you hope will not happen? Probably your thoughts are something like this:

#### **What I hope will happen:**

- o A good relationship: We show respect toward each other. The other person listens to me, understands my point of view, and hears my frustrations. There will be mutual listening and good faith.
- o A good solution: The other person will agree that there is a problem. We will come to an agreement, resolve the issue and move forward. I will get my needs met. We will find a way to deal with future problems.

### **What I hope will not happen:**

- o A bad relationship: There will be an angry exchange - a destructive confrontation. Accusations will be made; tempers will be lost. There will be miscommunication and misinterpretations. Things will be said that we will regret. I will be belittled, or there may be silence. I will be rejected and ignored. There will be hurt feelings, and the relationship will be jeopardized. Things will be made worse.
- o A bad solution or no solution: The other person will refuse to talk about the problem. The problem will be blown out of proportion or trivialized. There won't be any commitment to solve the problem. I won't get what I want. It will make matters worse.

And what do you suppose the other person is concerned about? Probably the very same things! There is good news here; if you want to, you have part of the problem solved before you even start. Look at all the things listed above, under "A good relationship." Those are all things that are within your power to do - show respect, listen to understand the other person's point of view and frustrations, and show good faith.

What about the other half - resolving the problem? Well, there is even more good news here! The main way to show respect is also a major ingredient for solving problems: listening. When you listen to another person and try to understand their point of view, two things happen: they feel respected, and information begins to be exchanged - a major step for solving problems. It may be that neither of you has a satisfactory solution on your own, but you may be able to create one together. Most problems are solvable by people who show respect.

That is what Cooperative Problem Solving (CPS) is about, and listening is the secret. It is a simple (but not always easy!) way for developing good agreements and good relationships. It involves four steps:

### **Four steps of Cooperative Problem Solving:**

1. Raise the issue with the other person in a way that invites cooperation.
2. Listen to each other to discover your interests.
3. Create options - possible ways to solve the problem.
4. Develop an agreement that meets as many of both of your interests as possible.

This Guide will show you, step by step, how to be successful in Cooperative Problem Solving. We know that in real life resolving conflict is not a neat, step-by-step process. But you will know how to use it once you understand its different parts. Before exploring those parts, let's consider the attitudes with which we approach conflict situations.

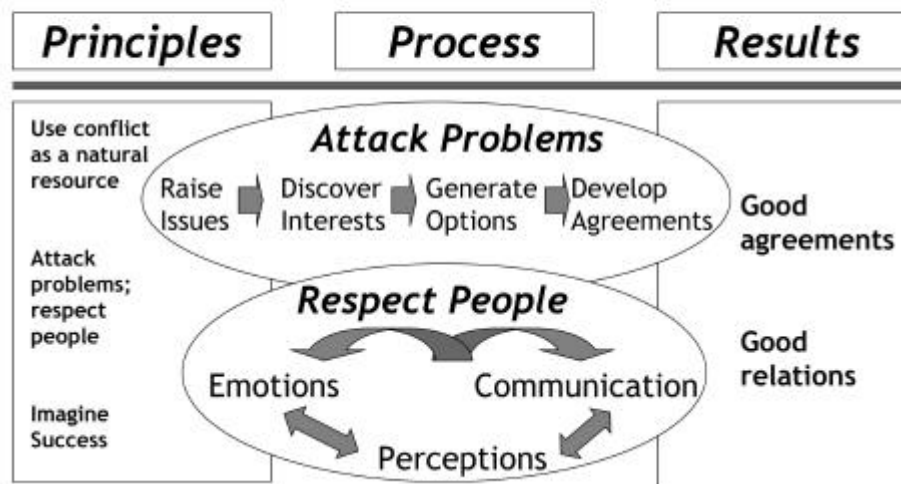
**How we see the other person:** Imagine that you are standing facing another person, and between you is an imaginary line on the floor. Now imagine that each of you wants the other to come over to their side of the line. Write down six possible things you might do to have this happen.

Are the things you have written down the kinds of things that you would do with an *adversary* (bribing, manipulating, lying, forcing, etc.) or the kinds of things that you would do with a *partner* (listening, working together, or even dancing)? If you treated the other person as a partner, you are well on your way to learning how to do Cooperative Problem Solving. After all, the first step toward CPS is learning to distinguish between the other person and the problem and to realize that you can work *with* the person *on* the problem. It requires seeing things differently - from seeing an adversary to seeing a partner in problem solving.

**The two "secrets" of Cooperative Problem Solving:** To work out a problem with another person successfully (that is, the agreement meets the needs of both parties and their relationship is strengthened), there are two main things to remember:

- o It is important to shift from arguing over positions to exploring for interests;
- o The way to do this is to listen to and acknowledge the other person's point of view - whether you agree with it or not.

## Map of Cooperative Problem-Solving



### ***The three principles of Cooperative Problem Solving:***

- o **Treat conflict as a natural resource:** It is a natural part of life and it can be a resource for problem solving and strengthened relationships when handled well.
- o **Respect people; attack problems:** When we are attacked, we tend to defend ourselves and avoid the problem. On the other hand, when someone shows respect toward us, it is easier to engage in problem solving with them.
- o **Imagine success:** Cooperative Problem Solving requires confidence. If we approach another person to solve a problem together, but we actually believe there is little or no hope of success, it is likely that, at some point in the conversation, our natural instincts for flight or fight will take over, and our self-fulfilling prophecy of failure will occur. On the other hand, if we can imagine success before beginning - even though we don't know exactly how we will get there - that will give us the sense of confidence essential for success.

### ***Attack the problem - the four steps in Cooperative Problem Solving:***

1. **Raise the issue:** Unless we raise the issue, it cannot be addressed. It is important to raise it in a way that invites cooperation in solving the problem together.
2. **Discover mutual interests:** Beneath our differing positions, there are often mutual interests. Once these are discovered, they can form the foundation for mutual problem solving.
3. **Generate options:** An old saying has it that "there are at least seven solutions for every problem." Whatever the number, it is often helpful to work together to generate possible ways of solving the problem before making decisions.
4. **Develop agreements:** If the first three of these four steps have been taken successfully, developing an agreement that meets the interests of both parties is often the easiest part.

### ***Respect the people - three guidelines:***

**Manage Emotions:** Emotions are normal and healthy. They indicate that what is happening is very important to us. But they can de-rail Cooperative Problem Solving. Therefore, knowing how to manage them is very important.

**Respect Perceptions:** We all see the world a little differently. If we disparage the other person because they don't see the world our way (the "right" way!), then we have put up a barrier to cooperation. On the other hand, differences in perception, if treated with respect, can be sources of mutual understanding and creative solutions.

**Listen:** Listening is perhaps the most important ingredient in Cooperative Problem Solving. When we listen to another person, we not only learn more about the problem and possible ways to solve it but we also build a bridge of respect and trust, which is essential for carrying out our agreement once it has been reached.

Each part of the "Cooperative Problem Solving Map" will be explored in the following chapters of this Guide.

#### ***BENEFITS OF COOPERATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING***

- o The parties experience the process as fair
- o The parties craft their own agreements
- o There is commitment to agreements
- o There is improved mutual understanding and respect
- o In the long run, a cooperative approach requires less time and lower cost than adversarial approaches

## **DEFINITIONS**

<b>BATNA</b>	Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (how you can satisfy your interests if the negotiation fails).
<b>INTERESTS</b>	Underlying needs, concerns, hopes, fears.
<b>ISSUES</b>	Problems to be solved.
<b>OPTIONS</b>	Possible, often creative agreements or pieces of an agreement; options are not commitments.
<b>POSITIONS</b>	Demands of statements of what someone says they will do or not do; one party's solution.
<b>STANDARDS</b>	Customary, objective and widely accepted criteria for handling similar situations.

### ***Chapter 3. Raising an issue***

The way an issue is raised has an effect on the entire problem-solving process. By raising an issue in a constructive way, we set the stage for resolving the conflict productively. In this chapter, we will look at how to do that.

Imagine that someone wants to bring a problem to your attention. They want to resolve the problem in a positive manner and are about to raise the issue with you. What are some ways they might go about this that could cause you to be defensive or to respond aggressively? How about: shouting at you, making accusations, or confronting you in front of others, challenging your integrity, or belittling you personally? Why are these poor approaches? Because they tend to push us away from the other person. Who likes to be treated that way?

Here, then, are some guidelines to keep in mind when raising an issue with another person:

**GUIDELINES FOR RAISING AN ISSUE**

- 1. Prepare:**
  - o Time: Don't be rushed
  - o Place: private
  - o "Take a deep breath"
- 2. Put it on the table:**
  - o State the problem and why it's a problem
  - o Be respectful; talk about behavior, not personal traits
  - o Speak for yourself, not others
  - o Be brief
- 3. Invite cooperation:**
  - o "I'd like to come up with a solution that makes sense to both of us."
  - o "How can we solve this together?" etc.
- 4. Listen and learn:**
  - o "Listen actively" - active listening
  - o Be patient and tolerant of different styles of communication

In the next chapter, we will explore that last guideline, "listen and learn."

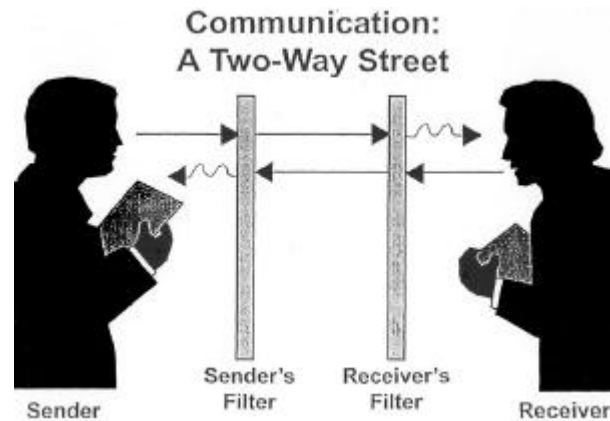
## **Chapter 4. Listening**

Congratulations! If you have finished Chapter Three, you now know how to raise an issue in a way that invites the other person to work with you to solve the problem. But what if they don't? What if they become defensive or aggressive? That is, what if they respond to your opening with "flight" or "fight"? This is often what happens. Even though you want to solve the problem together, it may seem to the other person that you are accusing or attacking them. We have all reacted that way.

You cannot predict or control how the other person will respond. But you *can* control how *you* will respond to the other person. You can choose to defend and justify your point of view (and thereby end the Cooperative Problem Solving process!) or you can listen to the other person and do your best to understand their point of view. If you succeed in doing this, several things happen:

- o You will understand things that will be essential for a mutual solution, and
- o You will have shown respect toward the other person - again, an essential step toward cooperation.

Most of us have had the experience of not being heard. It's pretty frustrating. But when someone genuinely listens to us, it is easier to express our thoughts clearly. When we want someone to listen, we want them to give us time to talk without challenging or interrupting. And if they don't understand us, we appreciate it if they ask for clarification rather than telling us we are wrong. This is called "active listening." And here is why it works so well: We hear



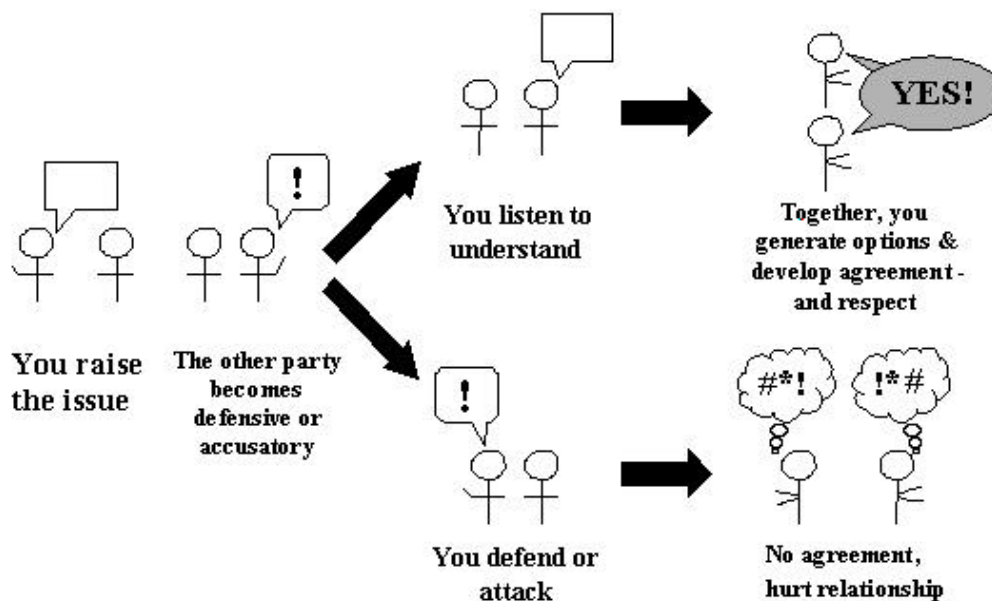
others through the "filter" of our perceptions, which are discussed in Chapter Six, "Working With Perceptions". That means we may "hear" something different than what the other person meant to say. And when a situation is complex, emotional, or preceded by a long history, misunderstandings are almost guaranteed.

So, the simple act of checking for understanding is essential. This is especially true when the other person says something we disagree with. Rather than challenging them (and thereby encouraging defensiveness, argument, and hardening of positions) it is important to listen actively. For example, "Is this what you are saying . . .?"

Sometimes we don't want to show understanding for the other person's point of view because they might think we agree with them. To deal with this, it is okay to say: "Even if I don't agree with you, I want to understand your point of view. Is this what you are saying . . .?"

And sometimes we really don't want to understand their point of view because we might learn something! Remember, we can always shift to the "flight or fight" method of solving a conflict. We choose Cooperative Problem Solving when we want to satisfy our interests - and theirs - as well as develop positive relationships. Cooperative Problem Solving is dialogue, not debate.

### Handling Defensiveness : Your Choice



**"I have often learned the most from those  
with whom I most disagree."**

Anonymous

**"Seek first to understand, and then to be  
understood."**

- Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*

## A COMPARISON OF DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

### DIALOGUE

Dialogue is collaborative: two or more sides work together toward common understanding.

Finding common ground is the goal.

We listen to the other side in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement.

We enlarge and possibly change our own point of view.

We examine our own position.

Dialogue opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions.

We have an open-minded attitude: an openness to learn and change.

We present our best thinking, knowing that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.

We search for basic agreements.

We search for strengths in the other's positions.

We show respect for the other person and seek to not alienate or offend.

We assume that many people have pieces of the answer and that together we can put them into a workable solution.

Dialogue remains open-ended.

### DEBATE

Winning is the goal.

We listen to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter their arguments.

We seek to affirm our own point of view.

We defend assumptions as truth.

We critique the other's positions.

Debate defends one's own positions as the best solution and excludes other solutions.

We have a closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right.

We present our best thinking and defend it against challenge to show that we are right.

We limit ourselves to our current beliefs.

We search for glaring differences, for flaws and weaknesses in the other's position.

We belittle or deprecate the other person.

We assume that there is a right answer and that we have it.

Debate is oppositional: two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.

Adapted from: Study Circles Resource Center; based on a paper prepared by Shelley Berman, from discussions of the Dialogue Group of the Boston Chapter of Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR).

**"Understand the differences; act on the commonalities".**

- Andrew Masondo, African National Conference

We all want a chance to tell our story, especially when we feel challenged. So if you are going to raise an issue, it is important that you not only do it well (see Chapter Three, "Raising an Issue") but that you shift right away from talking to listening - and not just passive listening (e.g., "Are you finished yet so I can tell you why I am right and you are wrong?") but active listening.

One of the most satisfying moments in Cooperative Problem Solving is when one of the parties says to the other: "Yes, that's what I am trying to say!" It's not that the problem has been solved yet, but that recognition and respect are developing. And that can happen only when one person has listened - really listened - to the other. Here are some guidelines for **active** listening:

**Rules for active listening**

- o Listen with respect – give them time to talk
- o Don't challenge or interrupt
- o Check for understanding
- o Don't problem solve



A simpler guideline is the old saying: "Why did God give us two ears but only one mouth? To remind us to listen twice as much as we speak."

It takes time, patience, and a genuine spirit of inquiry to understand the other person's point of view. This is because we all see things differently and we have strong feelings about things that are important to us. These two dynamics will be explored in Chapter Six, "Working With Perceptions" and Chapter Seven, "Respecting Emotions."

Once you have raised an issue and listened actively until you understand the other person's point of view, you are ready to move to Step Two of the Cooperative Problem Solving process: Discovering Interests.

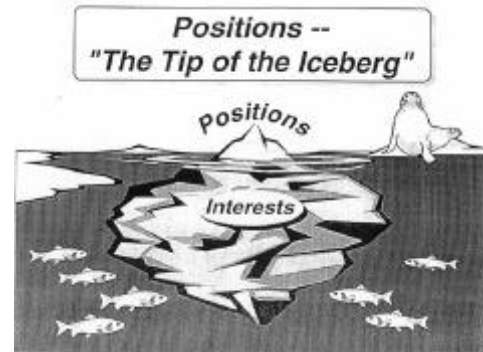
## Chapter 5. Discovering interests

To be successful in Cooperative Problem Solving, one of the most important things to understand is that positions are not interests. We often enter into conflicts with a focus on our positions - the way we think things should be done to solve a problem. If we remain focused only on our positions, we limit the possible solutions to one of the following:

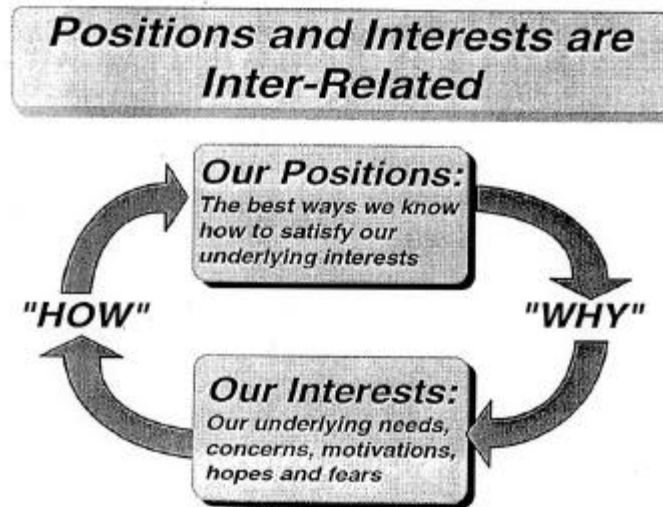
- o I win, you lose
- o You win, I lose
- o We each partly win and partly lose (compromise)

What is the way out of this? Shifting our focus from **positions** to **interests** - the reasons why we have come up with our positions - our underlying hopes, concerns, and needs.

You might think of positions and interests in terms of an iceberg. Positions are like the ten percent of the iceberg that is visible above the water, while interests are the ninety percent of it hidden below the surface.



*Positions and interests are closely related.*



## SOME POINTS ABOUT POSITIONS AND INTERESTS

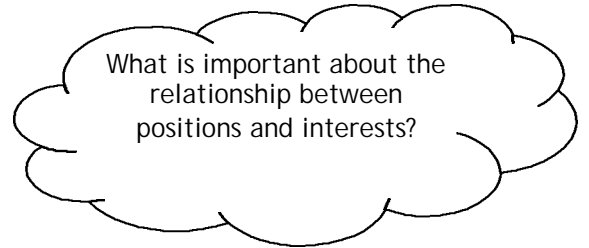
POSITIONS POLARIZE; INTERESTS INTEGRATE

BEHIND EVERY POSITION IS AT LEAST ONE INTEREST

INTERESTS HOLD THE SEEDS OF SOLUTIONS

POSITIONS ARE LIMITED AND LIMITING

INTERESTS ARE MORE NUMEROUS THAN POSITIONS, AND CAN BE SATISFIED IN MANY WAYS

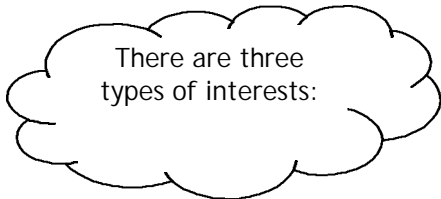


## TYPES OF INTEREST

All parties share these interests

Not all parties share these interests, but no party is opposed to them

These are interests that are in opposition to, or in conflict with another party's interests



Though we are all different in many ways, we share some fundamental human interests:

## BASIC HUMAN INTERESTS

Maslow's "hierarchy of needs"



In the workplace, too, we share a number of predictable interests:

## INTERESTS OF PEOPLE IN THE WORKPLACE

Have a clear purpose	Be proud of our work
See the results of our work	Satisfy our customers
Feel "in control"; be able to improve the way work is done	Communicate and work as a team
Feel competent	Be able to grow and learn
Be accountable and responsible	Be recognized and respected
Be challenged – not bored or frantic	Help others

The United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* lists the following as fundamental interests of people everywhere:

1. Freedom of expression, personal development, association, political participation and religion
2. Dignity and equality and economic, social, and cultural rights
3. Equal justice under law
4. Work, and just remuneration for work
5. Time for rest and leisure
6. A standard of living that is adequate for the health and well-being of oneself and one's family
7. Education
8. Security
9. Understanding, tolerance, and friendship among nations and groups

### SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCOVERING INTERESTS

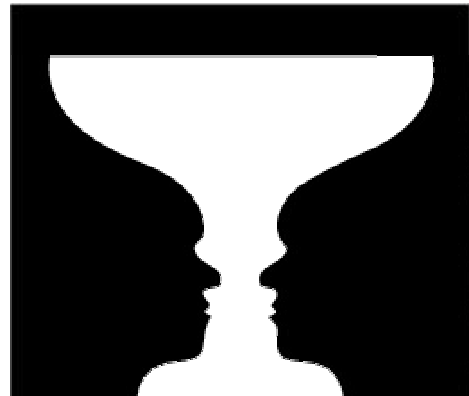
- o What is important to you about doing it that way?
- o What benefits will your position bring?
- o What are your concerns about the other position?
- o What do you want to have happen?
- o What do you hope to accomplish?
- o What concerns do you have?
- o What problem are we trying to solve?
- o Are there other problems?
- o What will it take for us to work together?
- o What would need to happen for you to feel satisfied?
- o What is the best-case scenario for you?

## **Chapter 6. Working with perceptions**

To be successful at Cooperative Problem Solving, it is important to understand - and respect - the role of perception, or how we see things. Here is a way to demonstrate that. Close one eye, extend your arm, and cover a distant object with your thumb. Now, open that eye and close the other. You will see that the object "moved!" Of course, it didn't actually move - it's just that your view or perception of it changed. We see things differently because we have different points of view - just like our eyes have a slightly different point of view because they are in different places in our head.

Here is a picture that can be used to demonstrate the point:

If you ask several people what they see when they look at this picture, some will say a vase, some will say two profiles, and some will say both! But who is correct? They all are, of course - that's what they see! How we see things is influenced by many things - the experiences we have had in life (for example, poverty or wealth in our youth), our beliefs (political, religious, etc.), which side of a river we were born on, our gender, birth order, etc.

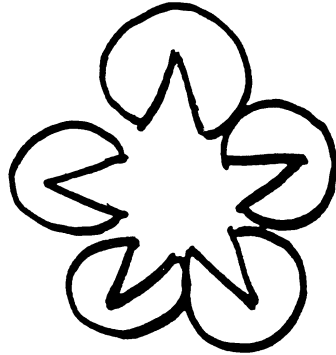


### **SOME HIDDEN SOURCES OF DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS**

**Economic background**  
**Parents' political beliefs**  
**Veteran/non veteran**  
**Myer-Briggs type**  
**Other???**

## WHERE YOU STAND DEPENDS ON WHERE YOU SIT

Our perceptions or viewpoints are very useful; they help us make sense of things when the information we have is incomplete. For example, consider this drawing:

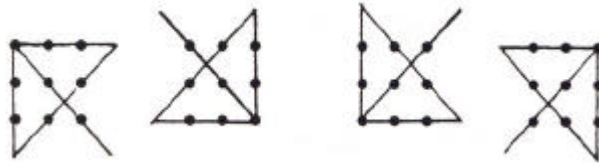


You probably see a star, even though there are only five partial circles. Our perception helps us "fill in the blanks" to make sense out of life. It can also limit our understanding. Here is a way to demonstrate this. Try to connect these nine dots with four straight lines, without taking your pencil off the paper and without doubling back on any of your lines:



When you want to see if you got it, turn the page.

There are actually several ways to solve this problem:



Why do most of us find it difficult to connect these nine dots? (Congratulations if you solved it - you are a member of a very small group!) The difficulty comes from the fact that, when we look at the nine dots, we tend to "see" a box. In our mind, we connect the nine dots and, of course, there is no way to solve the problem inside the box. The good news, however, is that there is no box!

In summary, sometimes our perceptions are limiting and sometimes they are liberating. When we are trying to resolve a conflict with someone, we can expect that the other person may see the situation differently than we do. What can we do about this? We might, for example, argue over whose perception is "right," accuse each other of dishonesty, and end the Cooperative Problem Solving process.

We can take another lesson from the thumb exercise: Because each of our eyes sees things differently, we can tell whether things are near or far. We literally can see a third dimension - depth! And, in the same way, different points of view can lead to fuller understanding and more creative solutions. How do we do this? By using two-way communications, as discussed in Chapter Four.

#### PRINCIPLES OF PERCEPTIONS

- o We use perceptions to make sense of the world. Our brains fill in information to fit some pattern we know.
- o Perceptions are not "right" or "wrong" – they just are.
- o Perceptions can limit our options for acting.
- o We can change our perceptions; we can learn from each other.
- o **My** perceptions make perfect sense to me.
- o You don't have to **agree** with my perceptions, just **respect** them.
- o Showing respect for my perceptions is showing respect for me. That makes it easier for me to listen to and work with you.

## PERCEPTIONS AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

- o Discovering interests is an exercise in discovering perceptions.
- o Appreciating perceptions helps us distinguish between people and problems.
- o We tend to attribute different behavior to "badness". Often it comes from having a different **perception**.
- o Understanding perceptions can help us expand the range of possible solutions.

### THE FIVE BLIND MEN AND THE ELEPHANT - AN ANCIENT FABLE

One day, a man leading an elephant came upon five blind men sitting by the side of the road. As he passed, one of the blind men called out: "Who is it on the road?" "It is I and my elephant," said the man. An elephant had never come down the road. "Pray, stop so that we may discover what an elephant is like!" said one of the blind men. The elephant driver did as he was asked.

The blind men gathered around the elephant. The first man, touching the elephant's great side, said: "Oh, now I know what an elephant is like! It is like a huge wall!" The second man, touching the elephant's trunk, said: "No, no - an elephant is like a great snake!" "You are both wrong," said the third man, wrapping his arms around one of the elephant's legs, "An elephant is very much like a tree trunk!"

Touching one of the elephant's tusks, the fourth man said: "How could you possibly think such things? I tell you, this elephant is like a branch of a tree!" The fifth man, holding the elephant's tail, said: "Let me settle this for us all - an elephant is most like a brush." And the five blind men set to arguing as to who was right.

Continuing on his way, the elephant driver said to himself, "In some respects, each of those men is right. But it is only if they listen to each other that they will come to discover what an elephant is truly like."

Sometimes there is another barrier to communication: emotions. The ability to manage emotions is another key to Cooperative Problem Solving. That is the topic of the next chapter.

## **Chapter 7. Respecting emotions**

Emotions are normal in a conflict situation, and they can contribute to problem solving as you learn how to manage them. When emotions arise, we can be certain of one thing: Whatever is happening is not trivial. We experience emotions in relation to things that are important to us. In a conflict situation, our emotions are often related to our "flight" or "fight" instincts:

### **EMOTIONS THAT CAN ACCOMPANY OUR "FLIGHT" INSTINCT**

- |                                   |                                   |                                  |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Anxious     | <input type="radio"/> Hurt        | <input type="radio"/> Persecuted |
| <input type="radio"/> Confused    | <input type="radio"/> Lonely      | <input type="radio"/> Rejected   |
| <input type="radio"/> Depressed   | <input type="radio"/> Nervous     | <input type="radio"/> Sad        |
| <input type="radio"/> Embarrassed | <input type="radio"/> Overwhelmed | <input type="radio"/> Shocked    |
| <input type="radio"/> Scared      | <input type="radio"/> Paralyzed   | <input type="radio"/> Trapped    |

### **EMOTIONS THAT CAN ACCOMPANY OUR "FIGHT" INSTINCT**

- |                                  |                                   |                                 |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Angry      | <input type="radio"/> Destructive | <input type="radio"/> Jealous   |
| <input type="radio"/> Annoyed    | <input type="radio"/> Envious     | <input type="radio"/> Outraged  |
| <input type="radio"/> Aggressive | <input type="radio"/> Exasperated | <input type="radio"/> Sarcastic |
| <input type="radio"/> Bitter     | <input type="radio"/> Furious     | <input type="radio"/> Vengeful  |
| <input type="radio"/> Blaming    | <input type="radio"/> Hateful     |                                 |

**Anger - a common emotion in conflict situations.** Sometimes it stands alone; sometimes it is accompanied by other feelings, but anger is the most common emotion in conflict situations. Where does our anger come from? It usually stems from threats we perceive, including threats to our safety and self-respect. At the same time, we often experience fear, feelings of powerlessness, and loss of control. Here are a few important things to remember about anger:

- Anger is a natural human emotion.
- It can provide energy for needed change.
- Anger itself is not destructive; it is behavior that is destructive.

#### **How can we manage our own anger?**

There are many things we can do to manage our anger:

- Acknowledge it - sometimes just naming our feelings gives us power over them.
- Know your own "hot buttons" - what are the words or phrases that can anger you?
- If you are angry, find a safe place to vent your emotions verbally or by releasing them through some form of physical activity that does not hurt anyone. For example, go for a jog or do push-ups.

- o Avoid personal attacks.
- o Take a break.

**How can we manage others' anger?**

- o As with our own anger, acknowledging the feelings of another person, and doing it with respect, can be a positive step.
- o Find a time and place to talk without interruption.
- o Set boundaries - respecting another's feelings does not mean accepting attacks.
- o Focus on the problem to be solved.

**Chapter 8. Generating options**

You may be hesitant about trying to resolve a conflict with another person because you are not sure that there is a solution. By keeping in mind the old saying that "two heads are better than one," however, you may come up with a solution together that neither of you would have found by yourselves! In fact, it's a good thing if you don't have a solution; that allows you to be more open-minded about ideas that the other person may have. And coming up with a mutual decision is what this is all about. Moreover, we all tend to be more committed to solutions that we have had a hand in creating.

**Options are possible, often creative agreements or pieces of an agreement; options are not commitments.**

**"There are at least seven solutions to every problem."**

But if it doesn't happen, it's time to generate options.

That simply means asking each other: "How can we satisfy as many of our interests as possible?" Note how different this question is from the question asked in adversarial problem solving - "Which party to the conflict will get what they want?"

There is an old saying that goes "there are at least seven solutions to every problem." That is the best attitude to bring to the process of generating options.

- RULES FOR BRAINSTORMING**
- o Quantity, not quality ("wild and crazy" is OK)
  - o One idea at a time
  - o Build on others' ideas
  - o "Pass" until everyone is finished
  - o No "killer phrases" (such as "that will never work" or "what a stupid idea")

Generating options also requires some skills in bringing out creative ideas. The process of "brainstorming" has been designed for this purpose. To the left are some rules to guide the brainstorming process.

Other methods can be useful as well, especially when working in groups:

## **Methods for generating options in groups**

**Written brainstorming** - This technique is especially helpful for groups that might include introverts who find brainstorming to be uncomfortable. The process involves giving individuals a stack of 3 x 5 cards on which they are to record ideas, one idea to a card. As in brainstorming, time is a factor, and participants are encouraged to write any ideas that come to mind as quickly as possible. At the end of a specified time period, all the cards are collected and read out loud. The cards can be sorted into groups of ideas that share similar concepts.

**Idea gallery** - This technique involves writing several problem statements or several variations of the same problem statement on separate sheets of flipchart paper. These are posted around the room, and all participants in the problem solving process move around the room recording possible solutions on the flipchart sheets. The physical activity of moving around the room can help spur creativity, as can the piggybacking of ideas that occurs when people see what others have written.

**Focus or buzz groups** - This technique involves soliciting ideas from people not involved in the problem or conflict. Admittedly, this takes time but can generate ideas not thought of by those close to the problem. Individuals are presented with "How to . . ." statements, but not background details, and asked for ideas to solve the problem.

**Bizarre ideas** - To explain this process, it is helpful to tell a story told in creativity circles. The story, supposedly true, is from a power company in up-state Minnesota, which had great difficulty maintaining power lines every winter because of the ice that formed on the lines causing them to break. The greatest problem areas were remote ones, inhabited by more wildlife than humans. The power company had difficulty getting service technicians to go into those areas because of the threat posed by bears.

As the story goes, a meeting was held by management to consider this problem. Someone jokingly said, "Let's train the bears to fix the lines." This was naturally met with laughter and dismissed, as the group got back to business. But then someone else, enjoying the levity, asked, "How would we train the bears?" Another person suggested putting honey pots at the tops of the power poles to entice the bears to climb them. This was met with, "How do we get the pots on the poles?" Someone responded that a helicopter could be used to fly over the poles and drop the pots. Can you see where this led the group? Out of the bizarre idea of training bears came the workable solution of using helicopters to fly over power lines; the down draft from the helicopter blades breaks the ice loose and helps prevent the lines from breaking.

Bizarre ideas can trigger workable solutions. The process of using such ideas as a trigger can give individuals or small groups a challenge to offer the most bizarre idea they can think of. That group then gives its idea to another small group, which dissects it to find something workable. This process often forces people into non-linear thinking and can lead to creative solutions.

**Renaming the problem** - Sometimes semantics can be very powerful in giving meaning to a problem or conflict. A technique to generate new insights involves trying to restate the problem in as many ways as possible. For example, the statement "How to cope with an impossible boss..." takes on a new meaning when re-phrased as "How to help my boss get promoted...."

**Role-taking** - This technique is a variation on renaming the problem. The process involves the parties of the conflict taking on the position or perspective of the other side. While in that role, an individual presents as many convincing arguments as possible in support of the other party's position. This forces people into seeing a problem, conflict, or issue from someone else's perspective.

These techniques are useful because they break us out of "mind funnels," a term Edward Glassman coined to explain mental collectors of related thoughts. Mind funnels can limit our perspective and, by extension, the solutions available to us. Certainly you would not use all of these techniques to increase options, but they are useful additions to your tool kit as you increase your effectiveness in managing conflict and solving problems. Two excellent resources to expand your comfort with these techniques are *The Creativity Factor* by Dr. Edward Glassman and *A Whack on the Side of the Head* by Roger Von Oech.

Once you have generated some possible solutions, you are ready to actually craft an agreement. That is the subject of the next chapter.

## **Chapter 9. Using standards and developing agreements**

**Introduction:** If you have been successful in discovering interests and generating options, the process of developing an agreement is often the easiest part of CPS. Here are some tips that can help you.

**"Framework Agreement":** If there are a number of parts to an agreement, you and your partner may not be able to agree on all of them at the same time. This situation calls for a "framework agreement." This is a draft agreement that spells out both what has been agreed upon and what remains to be worked out. By using such an approach, there is a sense of progress that helps move the CPS process to a conclusion.

**To Write or Not to Write?** When is it a good idea to write down an agreement and when might it not be a good idea? Here are some suggestions:

<b>TO WRITE OR NOT TO WRITE</b>	
<b>WRITE IT DOWN WHEN:</b>	<b>DON'T WRITE IT DOWN WHEN:</b>
The issues are complex	Issues and solutions are simple
The solutions are complex	Few people are involved
Many parties are involved	It will be seen as "documentation" – a prelude to adversarial action
Policies or procedures are changed	

**What should be included in a written agreement?** When you decide to write down your agreement, here are some tips on what to include:

Standards: Sometimes, despite your best efforts, you and your partner may disagree on what constitutes a fair agreement. In these situations, standards may help. Standards are customary, objective, and widely accepted criteria for handling similar situations. Here are some examples:

- o Official guidelines, documents, etc.
- o Local customs
- o "Same period as last year"
- o Other organizations' practices

**WHAT SHOULD BE IN A  
GOOD WRITTEN  
AGREEMENT**

- o Be specific
- o Be clear about dates and deadlines
- o Be balanced
- o Be positive and realistic

Sometimes a concern can arise about the fairness of the problem-solving process. For example, who should go first? In this case, "process standards" can help solve the problem. If, say, two children cannot agree on a fair way to divide a piece of cake, their parent could resolve the problem by having one child cut the cake and the other choose the piece he or she wants. That strongly encourages fairness!

Here are some other examples of "process standards":

- o Flip a coin
- o Take turns
- o Evaluation by a neutral party
- o Draw straws
- o "Rock, scissors, paper"

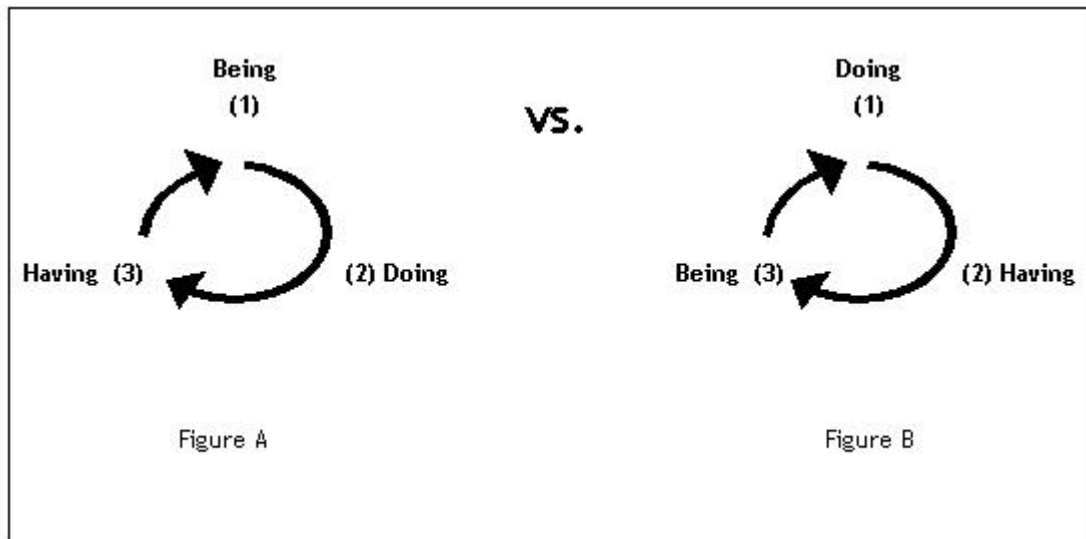
Often we can come to agreement without the use of standards. They can be useful, however, when fairness is an issue or people are stuck.

## ***Chapter 10. Being a peacemaker***

**Introduction:** Cooperative Problem Solving is not simply about carrying out a set of "steps"; it is primarily about developing a relationship of cooperation. This requires an attitude of respect for yourself and for the other person that is independent of your competence - or your success - in carrying out the steps in CPS. We refer to this as "being a peacemaker."

**Being a peacemaker (Figure A):** When we are (1) *being* a peacemaker (a matter of attitude, conviction, and presence, independent of circumstances), we (2) *do* things that make it more likely to (3) *have* a good agreement and a good relationship.

This is different from the way we often think about how to be successful (Figure B): If we just (1) *do* things right, we will (2) *have* what we want, and we will then (3) *be* satisfied.



**Characteristics of an Effective Peacemaker:** What are the personal characteristics of an effective peacemaker? If you make a list, it will probably include the following:

### ***CHARACTERISTICS OF A PEACEMAKER***

- |                                  |                      |                                |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Approachable                  | 13. Empathetic       | 26. Respects others            |
| 2. Balanced                      | 14. Empowers others  | 27. Respects self              |
| 3. Believable                    | 15. Encouraging      | 28. Safe to talk to            |
| 4. Brings out the best in others | 16. Ethical          | 29. Sees all sides             |
| 5. Calm                          | 17. Fair             | 30. Shows confidence in others |
| 6. A coach                       | 18. Forward-looking  | 31. Sympathetic                |
| 7. Competent                     | 19. Friendly         | 32. Takes action               |
| 8. Confident                     | 20. Good listener    | 33. Thoughtful                 |
| 9. Courageous                    | 21. Has vision       | 34. Trustworthy                |
| 10. Courteous                    | 22. Honest           | 35. Understanding              |
| 11. Decisive                     | 23. Motivates others | 36. Wise                       |
| 12. Determined                   | 24. Objective        |                                |
|                                  | 25. Practical        |                                |

**You as a Peacemaker:** Think of a time or an incident in which you demonstrated some characteristics of a peacemaker. Take a minute or two to write a description of the incident, what you did, and some adjectives that describe how you behaved in that situation.

Once you have done this, you will have clarified the part of yourself that will help you be successful in Cooperative Problem Solving - that part of you that is a peacemaker. Here are some quotes/thoughts to remind you of the importance of being a peacemaker while engaging in Cooperative Problem Solving:

## **Nelson Mandela, 1994 Inaugural Speech**

Original Text by Marianne Williamson

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.  
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.  
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.*

*We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be brilliant,  
gorgeous, talented and fabulous?"  
Actually, who are you not to be?*

*You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world.  
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other  
people won't feel insecure around you.*

*We are born to make manifest the Glory of God that is within us.*

*It is not just in some of us; it's in everyone.  
And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give  
other people permission to do the same.  
As we are liberated from our own fear,  
our presence automatically liberates others.*

## **Our Better Angels - On Being Peacemakers While Doing Conflict Resolution Work**

By Tom Dunne

Our success as conflict resolution practitioners depends greatly on our professional knowledge and skills - on our expertise in the techniques of doing the work. But at least as important as our ability to do the work is how we are while doing it - on our being peacemakers while doing conflict resolution work. Being a peacemaker has to do with what is going on inside us, rather than on the activities that people see us carrying out. Abraham Lincoln once referred to the personal values and character traits that inspire us toward peace building as "the better angels of our nature." It seems to me that four of our "better angels" serve us particularly well as conflict resolution practitioners.

**Courage:** Often we need to take action even though we have inadequate information, feel doubtful or uncertain about the outcome, or expect opposition or even failure. At some point, delay can turn into paralysis. Bringing forth our courage is what's needed at such points. Woody Allen claims that "90% of success in life is just showing up." Sometimes we can work up our courage by ourselves ("Just do it!"). But sometimes we need to give ourselves a jump-start - by reading something inspirational, meditating, praying, or talking with a colleague. (This is true for all of our "better angels" - sometimes we need a little help from our friends to bring them forth).

**Compassion:** We all have the ability to look at another human being with respect and empathy - to imagine the most unlikable person standing beside the pool of their own tears. We have the ability to do this with ourselves as well. And to the extent that we treat ourselves and others with compassion, to that extent we open the possibility of understanding, of being a force for bringing out the best in ourselves and others, and of weaving, together, the fabric of community and cooperation.

**Creativity:** Often, people in conflict feel trapped - unable to imagine a workable way out. Yet solutions are available in the vast majority of situations. The ability to let go, even for a short time, of our stereotypes and habits is essential to discovering the beginnings of solutions.

**Conviction:** There are times when it is less difficult than others to have hope in the future. But sometimes it seems that the power of hatred and violence is overwhelmingly greater than the power of respect, wisdom, and cooperation - and that peacemaking is a fool's errand. To the extent that I allow external circumstances determine my optimism for cooperation, I become a victim of those circumstances. But I can choose otherwise: I can decide that no one can predict the future, that all humans have a desire for cooperation, and that I can make a small contribution towards our moving in that direction. My experience tells me, in fact, that when I make this existential decision, I am much better able to act with courage, compassion, and creativity in contributing toward that possible future.

## **ATTITUDE**

By Charles Swindoll

*The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of ATTITUDE on life. ATTITUDE, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearances, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company ... a church ... a home.*

*The remarkable thing is, we have a choice every day regarding the ATTITUDE we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past. We cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our ATTITUDE. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you. We are in charge of our ATTITUDES!*

## **Chapter 11. Understanding BATNA**

The Cooperative Problem Solving process does not always work. Paradoxically, however, you are more likely to succeed if you know how you will solve the problem by yourself if CPS fails. That is the purpose of a BATNA.

**BATNA stands for "Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement." A BATNA is:**

- o A second-best solution that you hope you don't need to use
- o A "reserve parachute" - so you are not in an "all-or-nothing" frame of mind
- o A "safety net" that allows you to focus on the task at hand (i.e., Cooperative Problem Solving)
- o Usually a "flight" or "fight" strategy
- o Something you can do unilaterally, if you can't achieve a mutual agreement

**Examples of BATNAs:**

- o Going over the boss's head
- o Filing a formal grievance or complaint
- o A manager exercising his/her decision-making authority
- o Deciding to accept a situation the way it is

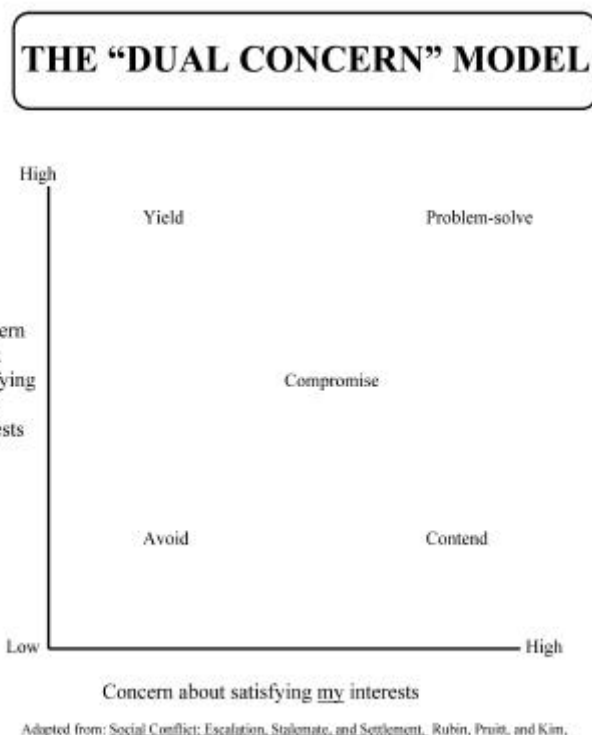
**A Good "pre-BATNA":** Ask a third party who has the confidence of everyone involved to help the parties resolve the problem cooperatively.

**Conclusion:** Before attempting a CPS with someone, it is wise to think through what you will do to solve the problem unilaterally in case the CPS process doesn't work. This will increase the likelihood that it will succeed. You will be more relaxed and able to listen to and appreciate the other person's point of view, and be creative about possible solutions.

## Chapter 12. CPS – a matter of choice

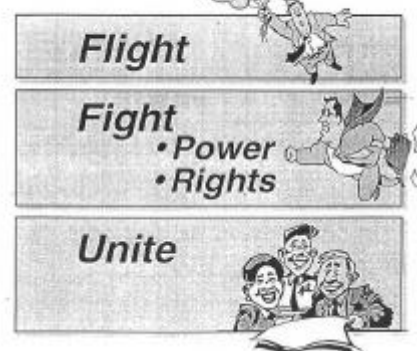
**Introduction:** Cooperative Problem Solving is often the best way to deal with a problem. However, sometimes other strategies are desirable. It is possible to assess a situation and choose an appropriate approach.

**Ways we deal with conflict:**  
When conflicts arise in our lives, we have a variety of ways to deal with them. Sometimes we **avoid** dealing with a conflict altogether. Sometimes we **yield** to the other person and let them have their way. Sometimes we **contend** with that person to get our own way, and sometimes we **compromise** so that we each get some of what we want. Finally, we sometimes work together with the other person to **problem solve** jointly. The "Dual Concern Model" to the right illustrates these choices.



**A matter of choice:** Each method of resolving conflicts has advantages and disadvantages. What is important to remember is that we have choices in how we respond to conflict.

### Conflict Management Options

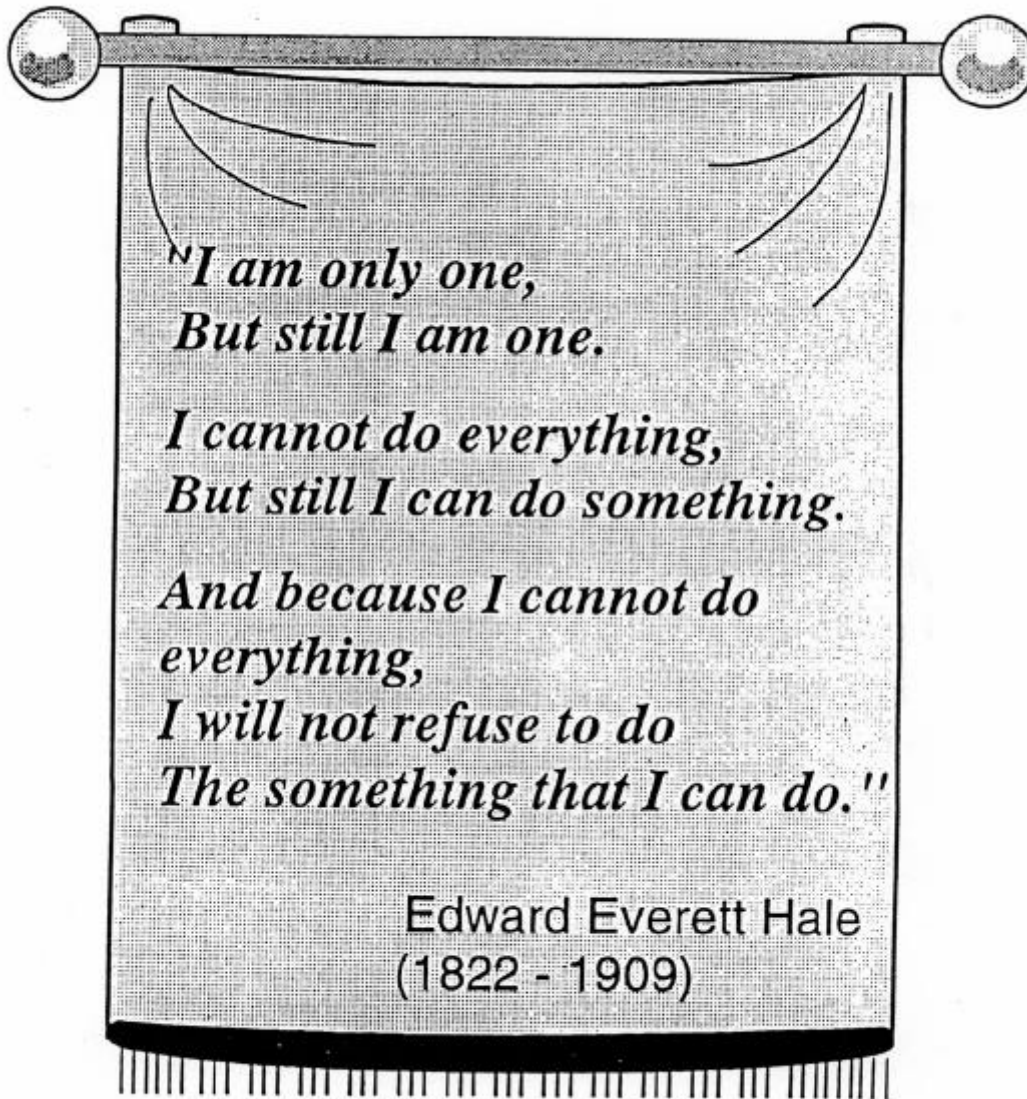


**Some factors to consider when choosing the best way to manage a particular conflict:**

- o Do I care about the outcome? Is it important?
- o Is this an ongoing relationship?
- o How important is harmony?
- o Have I caused the problem?
- o Do I owe respect or deference to the other person?
- o What are the parties' respective roles and power?
- o Do I have an obligation?
- o Are religious or other principles involved?
- o Are there time pressures?
- o Will this set a precedent?
- o Is justice or fairness involved?
- o Has a law been broken?
- o Do I want to expend the necessary time and energy?
- o Will the conflict possibly escalate if I address it?
- o Is everyone in a rational and competent frame of mind?
- o Is there a possibility of physical harm?
- o Is this a life or death situation?
- o What could be the costs and benefits?

**Conclusion:** Real-life Cooperative Problem Solving doesn't go in neat steps. The CPS "map" is just that - a map, and not the journey itself. It is intended as a guide as you go about using your own wisdom in addressing a particular situation. You may find Appendix-A, "Cooperative Problem Solving Planning Sheets" useful in applying the CPS process to your daily life.

Although it is simple, Cooperative Problem Solving is not an easy way of dealing with conflicts. But each time you use this approach, you contribute to making the win-win way of dealing with conflicts better known. You contribute to making cooperation the expected and normal approach to conflict in your community. And you contribute to the movement from a "you or me" to a "you and me" world where the dignity of all is respected. As a wise man once said, "I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something I can do."



## ***Appendix. Ten tips for Cooperative Problem Solving***

When conflicts arise, we often fall automatically into adversarial, "you or me" ways of thinking and acting that lead to win-lose decisions and damaged relationships. Here are some tips to remember when you want to turn a conflict into a mutual agreement as well as a good relationship:

1. **Accept that conflicts are normal:** In fact, they are inevitable. There are seven billion people on this planet. We will never all agree. But with the right tools, we can learn how to manage many conflicts as partners so that everyone is satisfied.
2. **Treat conflicts as natural resources:** Conflict is neither positive nor negative in itself. It is the way you deal with the issue and with the other person that is the key. If you know how to handle conflicts well, this can lead to good agreements and improved relationships.
3. **Treat the other person as a partner:** When in conflict, you can either try to be the sole winner or ask: "How can we work this out together?"
4. **Listen:** If you don't listen, the other person probably won't listen to you. So before trying to solve the problem, listen - ask questions and really listen - until you understand your partner's point of view. We all want to be heard and understood.
5. **Discover interests:** We tend to have disagreements over our positions - the way we want to do things. But we seldom talk about our interests - the reasons why our positions are important to us. Express your interests honestly, and ask about your partner's interests. Often you will find some overlap between their interests and yours. It is in that common ground that you are likely to find solutions.
6. **"Understand the differences; act on the commonalities":** There is an old saying that "there are at least seven solutions to every problem." So once you have discovered interests, work together to find as many answers as you can to the question: "What are some possible ways for us to meet our interests?" You don't have to come up with a solution by yourself - work it out together.
7. **Respect people; attack problems:** If emotions flare, don't give in to anger or personal attacks. Emotions just mean that this is an important matter. Whatever happens, respect your partner's dignity as well as your own. Stay away from questioning the other person's motivation or character. Focus on the problem.
8. **Choose your approach:** You have choices when it comes to managing conflicts. Some conflicts are just not worth dealing with. At other times, it may be appropriate to resolve a conflict by just saying "no". Other possibilities include going to court, going to the police, or having someone else decide. But for those times when your goal is solving the problem and improving the relationship, a cooperative approach will serve you best. What is important is to realize that you have choices.
9. **Know how to do it:** Like any other process, there are some fundamental steps in Cooperative Problem Solving. Use them as guides:
  - o Describe your point of view briefly and without judging the other person.
  - o Discover interests through two-way conversation.
  - o Generate options - possible ways to meet everyone's interests.
  - o Develop mutual agreements.

10. **Be a constant learner:** Cooperative Problem Solving is a learning experience for all involved. It requires that we temper our instincts for flight or fight. And it requires that we change our assumptions that conflict is a bad thing rather than an opportunity for problem solving. But like any other skill, you can get better at it with practice. It is rarely the easy route, but ultimately it is the most rewarding. And when you treat someone with whom you disagree as a partner rather than an enemy, you have at least increased the practice of civility in society.

## ***About the developers***

**Search for Common Ground** is an international non-profit, non-governmental organization based in Washington, DC that works in partnership with the European Centre for Common Ground in Brussels, Belgium. Search for Common Ground is dedicated to transforming conflict into cooperative action. Our "toolbox" includes training, community organizing, and the use of radio/TV, journalism, sports, drama, and music to bring conflicting parties together. Founded in 1982, the organization now operates in fourteen countries around the world, working with partners on the ground to strengthen local capacity to deal with conflict.

**Common Ground Productions (CGP)** is the media division of Search for Common Ground and the European Centre for Common Ground. CGP's role is to provide support to all domestic and international Common Ground Media initiatives, as well as completion of projects unique to CGP. CGP produces programs that are dedicated to transforming conflict into cooperative action. They use strategic communication approaches such as radio, TV, film, print and Internet. The aim is to show that even contentious problems can be examined in ways that inform and entertain, while still promoting the search for solutions.

**Search for Common Ground**  
1601 Connecticut Avenue, NW - Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20009 USA  
Tel: (202) 777-2230  
[tdunne@sfcg.org](mailto:tdunne@sfcg.org)  
<http://www.sfcg.org/>