

HANDOUT FOR VIDEO 4: FROM POSITIONS TO INTERESTS

This handout accompanies the eight-minute video in the Better Conflict exercises from the Conflict Transformation Collaborative at Middlebury. This is the fourth video in a five-part series. Below, you will find a transcript of the video and additional resources.

TRANSCRIPT

Speakers: Sarah Stroup, Mandy Berghela, Teyonce Allison

Sarah: What is at stake in a conflict? The answer is often more complicated than it first appears. In this video, we will talk about moving from arguing about positions to understanding interests. Let's imagine a specific situation. Mandy and Teyonce work together and run a delivery business.

Mandy: I think that we really need to buy this \$10,000 car..

Teyonce: Wow. I disagree totally. We should absolutely not buy that \$10,000 car.

Sarah: Mandy and Teyonce have positions that are completely different. This sort of situation happens a lot - you want one thing, and I want the exact opposite. If we stay focused on those opposing positions, a couple of things might happen. First, it can move beyond the car very quickly - and get very personal.

Mandy: I think that we really need to buy this \$10,000 car.

Teyonce: Are you nuts? \$10,000 for that car? That is a terrible idea! You don't even know anything about cars!

Sarah: Second, we might be missing some critical information that has shaped our position on the car. We need skills to analyze the conflicts we face in a new way. If we can move beyond these opposing positions and get to the deeper roots of the issue, we will be better able to identify creative solutions and maintain our relationships.

We are going to offer three practices that can help offer a new perspective on the conflicts we are in. The first practice: separate the people from the problem. You might have heard this one before. I find that it is easier said than done, which is why we need to practice it. When we are working with other people, it is easy to forget that we are dealing with human beings. Every person has emotions, deeply held values, and different backgrounds. We are also all imperfect - we have blind spots and bad habits, and we all make mistakes.

You might have heard of *Getting to Yes*, a famous negotiation textbook. Their first rule of thumb for dealing with conflicting positions is to be "hard on the problem, soft on the people." Here is the exercise. The next time you hear a position you disagree with, try to focus on both the substantive issues and the relational issues.

Teyonce: I think that we really need to buy this \$10,000 car.

Mandy: Ok. She wants to talk about our transportation problems, and that will have an impact on our budget. Our relationship isn't great right now - I haven't been in the office much lately, and we had a problem meeting our last project deadline.

Sarah: If you can separate the issue from the relationship, you may be able to move from seeing the other party as the adversary to seeing them as a partner tackling a shared problem. The second practice is to move from positions to interests. When two people articulate opposing position - buy the car! Don't buy the car! - it is hard to see a way forward. But if you keep digging, you might see a variety of interests and needs, some of which might overlap. One starting point is simple - ask the other person what their interests are.

Teyonce: I think that we really need to buy this \$10,000 car.

Mandy: Hmm, interesting. Why do you think we need another car?

Teyonce: I think it would help us maximize our productivity and get different places faster than just having one option.

Mandy: Okay, interesting. Is there something that this car is particularly good at?

Teyonce: Yes, it does have a four wheel drive, which means we can drive in so many different terrains.

Mandy: Okay, interesting. Can you say more about why you think we need this right now?

Teyonce: Well, with this upcoming winter, it can pose a difficulty, halting our ability to meet our delivery schedule on time. And so by having a car that's well prepared for that sort of temperature, terrain, and environment, I think we'll be able to do a great job executing our deliverables.

Mandy: Okay, interesting. What do you think will happen if we don't get the car?

Teyonce: I don't think that we'll be able to meet the necessary deadlines we have, and we saw what that did last time. And so I think it'd be great if we just are able to put ourselves in the best position possible.

Sarah: When you're in conflict with another person, there is a good chance that they are thinking about the issue differently than you are. And you won't know what they are thinking unless you ask. Asking questions doesn't mean taking a position. You aren't saying yes or no - you are just seeking more information.

Now, sometimes, we can't talk to the other person. In this case, we can still do a thought experiment that will help us uncover another person's interests. This is something that William Ury calls the "victory speech" exercise. Let's imagine that Teyonce has sent Mandy an email.

Teyonce: "Dear Mandy, I think we should spend \$10,000 on a new car for our delivery fleet. Let me know what you think. Respectfully, Teyonce."

What can Mandy do? Here is the thought exercise: imagine that Teyonce has to give a victory speech. Teyonce has to talk to the people that they care about the most - let's say her boss. If Teyonce got what she wanted, what would she say to her boss?

Teyonce: I'm happy to report that we got the new car! For our delivery business, we really need more vehicles on our fleet. I also got a great deal - I had been watching the price for a while and this was 15% lower than I've seen advertised. And this will give us so much more control over our delivery schedule instead of relying on that part-time worker that isn't always available.

Sarah: Here, we can imagine that Teyonce has a lot of different interests and needs. She wants to expand the business. She wants to be recognized as fiscally responsible. She wants more control. The "victory speech" exercise helps Mandy see that there *might* be a lot more going on in this conflict. If you are in a conflict, I encourage you to try out this exercise. What do you think the other person's victory speech would be if they got what they wanted? What might be most important to them in this conflict?

To recap, we have covered three exercises in this video:

1. Separate the people from the problem, trying to understand the issue and the relationships.
2. Ask people what their interests are.
3. Imagine their interest through the victory speech exercise.

When we are in a conflict where the other person's position seems directly opposed to ours, these practices can help us work *with* the other person to find creative solutions.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving*

In. Simon and Schuster, 2011.

Sarah Federman, *Transformative Negotiation: Strategies for Everyday Change and Equitable Futures*. University of California Press, 2023.

John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. Oxford University

Press, 2005.

Lisa Schirch and David Campt, *The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects*. Good Books, 2007.

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