

Interests versus Positions

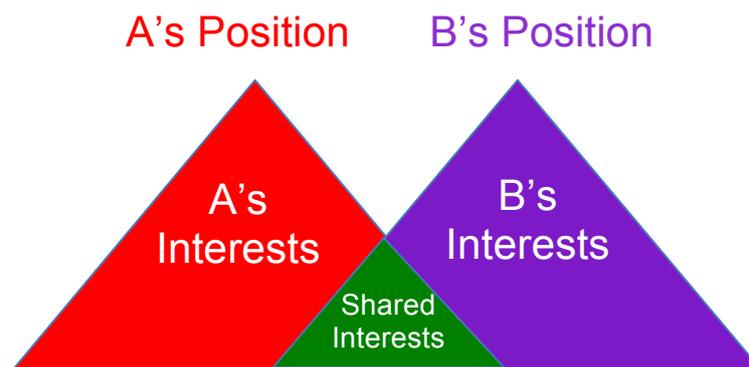
Based on research from Harvard Negotiation Project

An 'interest' a person has in something is not necessarily the same as the 'position' they openly take or state.

For example, two office co-workers are arguing about whether to have the window open or not. One opens the window (takes a position), the other gets up and closes it (takes a contrary position). An argument ensues and it appears that this is a 'win-lose' situation.



However, if each party took time to understand the interest(s) of the other (one wanted fresh air, whilst the other did not want to sit in a draught), then they could work to find a 3rd solution, a 'win-win'. In this case it involved opening a window at the other end of the room, so that fresh air could enter, but not cause a draught where they are sitting.



A better solution arose when they jointly explored what each needed, and thought creatively to find a resolution that met both their individual needs, and their shared interests, for example to maintain a good working relationship in the office.

How you approach a negotiation will play a key role in how the negotiation proceeds. Start with an *"I win only if you lose"* mentality and you are going to be in for a tough battle, and a solution, if any, that is sub-optimal; you will... 'leave money on the table'. If the pair above had opened the window half way then there would not be enough fresh air for one and still a draft blowing down the neck of the other; both would probably still be dissatisfied and irritated with the other.

So, in order to find a mutually satisfactory resolution, use questioning and listening, probing and exchanging information, to understand the other party's interests (needs) that lie behind the positions that they take, and constantly reinforce your interest(s) to them.

You can also look for low cost concessions that might have high value to the other person, and vice versa. Get creative; the solutions are there if you jointly explore.