

# Understanding **CONFLICT**

## Position versus interests

### Objective

- Understand the important role that “position” and “interest” play in negotiation.
- Analyze how negotiation progresses and/or changes when interests are identified.

### Audience

High school and above

### Time

20 minutes

### Supplies needed

One lemon for each pair of participants (plus a few extras)

### Do ahead

Prepare envelopes with position cards

### Source

Adapted with permission from materials developed by Rob Ricigliano and Nancy Burrell, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

### Recommended reading

Fisher, Roger, and W. Ury. 1991. *Getting to yes*. New York: Penguin Books.

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### Background

**U**nderstanding the differences between positions and interests can lead to a successful resolution in conflict. Let’s look at the definitions:

**Position:** A stand a party takes that he or she feels will satisfy his/her interests.

**Interests:** The needs, concerns, goals, hopes, and fears that motivate parties to negotiate.

In conflict, we often protect our interests and don’t let the “other side” know what we want. As a result, we end up arguing positions rather than sharing the interests behind our positions.

But what would happen in conflict if we were able to mutually share our interests? It is likely that the more information that is shared, the higher the quality of the agreement for both parties.

### What to do

#### Trial 1

- Instruct each person to find a partner.
- Give each pair one lemon, and give each individual of the pair a sealed envelope that contains a card. On each card is written:

#### My position:

#### I MUST HAVE THE LEMON.

- Instruct the teams that they are to negotiate over the lemon, based on the information contained in their individual envelopes.
- After a couple of minutes, bring the group back together and compare the results. What types of deals were made? What were your positions?
- Share with the group that this is a simplified, but quite typical situation in conflict: We argue positions but rarely deal with the underlying interests.
- Relate the example of the man who tells his potential landlord that he needs a fourth-floor apartment. His position is that he wants an apartment on the fourth floor, but what are his interests? If you were the landlord, trying hard to rent that apartment, it would be to your advantage to figure out why the man wants a fourth-floor apartment. Why might he? (e.g. safety, can’t reach the fifth-floor button, wants to spy on someone on the third floor, afraid of heights) These would be his possible interests. His position is that he wants a fourth-floor apartment. How might knowing his interests affect your efforts to rent him an apartment?

## Stalemate?

If the other party is unwilling to share, use good inquiry methods to get at interests.

### Trial 2

- Now try the Lemon Negotiation again with different cards.
- Each pair should still have their lemon. If they don't, give them a new one. Give the pair new envelopes with cards. One individual will have a card that states:

**My position:**  
**I MUST HAVE THE LEMON.**

**My interests:**  
**I NEED THE LEMON RIND TO MAKE LEMON POUND CAKE.**  
The other individual has a card that states:

**My position:**  
**I MUST HAVE THE LEMON.**

**My interests:**  
**I NEED THE PULP OF THE LEMON TO MAKE LEMONADE.**  
Instruct the pairs to negotiate over the lemon. Give them a little longer for this round. When you notice that most groups have worked through the exercise, discuss the negotiation process as a large group.

- Was anyone in a partnership where both parties openly shared their interests up front? What did that do to your negotiation?
- For those of you who didn't share your interests right away, did you eventually do so? How did that happen?

- What made you feel as if you could share your interests?
  - In conflict, how might it help you to identify potential interests that the other party has prior to your negotiation?
- How might you be able to help the other party feel comfortable in sharing his/her interests?

## Extending the activity

- Run a third trial with a new variable: relationship. Explore how the relationship with the other party might affect negotiations and explore ways to improve the relationship.
- Work with the group to develop a list of good inquiry questions. Examples include:
  - Can you tell me more about that?
  - Can you share your thinking with me?
  - Help me understand what you see.

## Summary

Moving from guarding positions to sharing interests can lead to a higher quality agreement for both parties in conflict.



# Position versus interests – Trial 1

**My position: I MUST HAVE THE LEMON.**



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## Position versus interests: Trial 2

### Individual 1

**My position: I MUST HAVE THE LEMON.**

**My interests: I NEED THE LEMON RIND  
TO MAKE LEMON POUND CAKE.**

**My position: I MUST HAVE THE LEMON.**

**My interests: I NEED THE LEMON RIND  
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# Position versus interests: Trial 2

## Individual 2

**My position: I MUST HAVE THE LEMON.**

**My interests: I NEED THE PULP OF THE LEMON  
TO MAKE LEMONADE.**

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