

CHANGE: focus on interests, not positions

“Like it or not, you are a negotiator.”* For change makers especially, negotiating skills are critical to successful advocacy, yet few do it well. Most attempt a trade-off between getting what we want and getting along with people.

Principled negotiation offers a better method, and one of the main tenets is to **focus on interests, not positions**.

“Interests motivate people; they are the silent movers behind the hubbub of positions. Your position is something you have decided upon. Your interests are what caused you to so decide.

- from Getting to Yes

Consider the story of two sisters fighting over an orange, both taking the position that they should get the whole thing. They compromise and cut the orange in half. One promptly eats the juicy fruit and throws away the peel, while the other



throws away the fruit and zests the peel for a cake she is baking. If only they had shared their interests during the negotiation!

Putting It Into Practice

Express your interests clearly. The purpose of negotiating is to serve your interests. The chance of that happening increases when you communicate them. Make them come alive with vivid details.

Acknowledge their interests, too. If you want the other side to appreciate *your* interests, begin by demonstrating that you understand and appreciate *theirs*.

Explain your interests before your proposed solution. If you lead with your demands, the other side may not even hear your reasoning as they are mentally preparing counter-arguments.

Look forward, not back. You will satisfy your interests better if you talk about where you would like to go rather than where you have come from.

Be hard on the problem, soft on people. Do not commit to your position, but do commit strongly to your interests. Attacking the problem increases pressure for an effective solution, while giving support to the humans on the other side can improve the relationship and increase the likelihood of reaching a mutually advantageous agreement.

* These insights are from “Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In” by Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton.