# Conflict as Partnership

*by Sophia Tutorial*

### ☰ WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss how viewing conflict as a partnership between parties is key to the success of the process. In particular, we'll focus on:

1. Positions vs. Interests
2. Integrative Approach to Conflict

# 1. Positions vs. Interests

As you've learned, parties typically come into a conflict thinking about their positions, which are ways of getting their needs or interests met. However, these positions are not the only ways to get interests met.

The goal of the conflict resolution process is to get the parties to approach the issue in terms of their interests. This can be done through **win-win thinking**, which is an approach that asks the conflicting parties to try to meet each other's interests as fully as possible.

As a mediator, you want to get underneath the positions to reveal the real interests of each party, and then ask each party to see the interests of the other as equally important. That is the partnership.

### ⚙ THINK ABOUT IT

Recall the last time you were in conflict with someone. You, of course, wanted your needs and interests to be met, but did you see the interests of the other side as equally important?

It's human nature to become consumed our own positions, which is why it's important to make the conscious effort to see both goals as equally important to a successful outcome.

Win-win thinking really asks the parties to see the conflict as a problem to be solved jointly instead of a battle to be won.

### 📄 TERM TO KNOW

**Win-Win Thinking**

An approach to conflict resolution that sees the objective of a successful solution as meeting each party's interests as fully as possible, to the point of satisfaction with the solution.

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# 2. Integrative Approach to Conflict

In the conflict resolution process, the goal is to integrate the interests of both parties in a way that they can be mutually satisfied.

When two parties are in conflict, and come in with their particular positions based on one side winning and the other side losing, it's important to shift the focus toward the underlying interests.

**IN CONTEXT**

Jon and Alec have been living in their neighborhood for quite some time, during which time the neighborhood has changed. A lot of the people they knew have moved out, but they still love their backyard. It's a sunny backyard, and they have a big garden.

Next door to Jon and Alec, Tony and Lia have moved in. They're a younger couple with a few kids and a dog. They have decided to do some landscaping in the backyard, and part of the plan is to put in some trees. In fact, when Jon and Alec overheard Tony and Lisa talking about planting trees, they became alarmed because the trees would cast all kinds of shade over their beautiful, sunny garden.

These two sets of neighbors find themselves in the conflict resolution process because of this issue. Tony and Lisa are saying, "We have a right to plant trees if we want trees in our backyard." Jon and Alec are saying, "We're really upset that you are planting these trees in your yard because it's infringing on our property. We know you have a right to plant them, but we would like you not to."

While the parties have come in with two conflicting positions, after much discussion about their feelings and the way they perceive this issue, they uncover their needs. Jon and Alec don't want the trees to go up because they want to keep the sun; their interest is to preserve a sunny backyard for their garden.

Tony and Lisa want to put up trees because they don't want all that sun. They would like some shade so they can add a little play area for their children. When it comes down to shade and sun, the conflict can be reframed in order to look at the interests.

This is where, as the intervener, you could step in and say, "Tony and Lisa, your neighbors have said that they need to have sun in their backyard in order to have a satisfactory outcome here. Is there any reason why you would not want them to have some sun in their backyard? If not, can we say that the interest of providing an area of sun in their backyard must be met to have a successful outcome?"

You're now getting the other side, Tony and Lisa, to focus on this interest of having some sun in the backyard. By the same token, you could say to Jon and Alec, "Your neighbors would like some shade for their children and their dog to play under. Is there any reason why that would be objectionable to you?

If not, can we say that the interest of providing shade in their yard must be met to have a successful outcome?"

Again, you refocus the parties on the interests. The issue is no longer just about whether or not to plant trees, but also about how to find a creative way to allow one party to have some shade while still allowing the other party to have some sun.

The neighbors have now become partners in this conflict, working together on a joint problem in order to see if they can find a win-win solution that will be mutually satisfying to both of them.

⭐ BIG IDEA

Conflict resolution is really based on win-win thinking, which is very different than an approach that looks at conflict as a zero-sum situation, in which one side is the winner, and the other side is the loser.

📋 SUMMARY

In this lesson, you reviewed the difference between **positions and interests**. While parties often come into a conflict with their separate positions, the resolution process aims to shift the parties toward win-win thinking, in which the focus is on the underlying interests. You now understand that an **integrative approach to conflict** is the most effective because instead of battling over opposing positions, the parties become aware of their mutual interests, and then become partners in working toward a creative solution to the joint problem. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.

📄 TERMS TO KNOW

**Win-Win Thinking**
An approach to conflict resolution that sees the objective of a successful solution as meeting each party's interests as fully as possible, to the point of satisfaction with the solution.