

# Illustrating Multiple Positions to Reach Interests

*by Sophia Tutorial*



## WHAT'S COVERED

As you've learned, the key to a successful conflict resolution process is to identify and meet the needs of each party through negotiation. In this lesson, we'll discuss two different forms of negotiation:

1. Positional Bargaining
2. Interest-Based Negotiation

## 1. Positional Bargaining

**Positional bargaining** is a process that we've become very accustomed to, as it's the most common form of negotiation in the United States.

This type of negotiation is based on **positions**, or certain ways of getting a need met that are not necessarily the only ways.

When parties are in conflict, they typically come in with their positions, thinking they are the only ways to get their respective needs satisfied.

Sometimes a single party can have multiple positions.

➦ **EXAMPLE** There are some workers on strike, and they have multiple demands or positions regarding what they want. These positions might have to do with any of the following:

- Health care benefits
- Hours on the job
- Pay raises
- Safety

There are a number of issues, and the workers have a position on each one.

Of course, underneath the position is a real **interest**, or the reason why the parties are really there. In other words, the position is what they say they want, and the interest is the reason they want it.

However, conflicting parties often come in thinking only about their positions, which leads them to use positional bargaining. This process consists of the parties trading elements of their different positions back and forth in order to get their needs partially met.

The parties' needs can only be partially met because they're not talking about the real interests underneath their conflicting positions.

➡ **EXAMPLE** Think back on the mother, Ingrid, who wants her son to do chores more responsibly. If she sticks firmly to her position that he has to empty the dishwasher and take out the trash, she might only get part of her underlying interest satisfied; her interest is to have her son help ease her duties around the house and to learn life skills.

If she were clear about her interests and negotiated around them instead of her positions, she might better satisfy her interests by getting her son to agree to rotate through different chores so that he would learn more household skills, and also find a chore to take responsibility for long-term that feels like a better fit to him than the dishwasher.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Positional Bargaining**

A form of negotiation in which elements of each party's positions are seen as things to be traded back and forth in an effort to get needs partially met.

##### **Position**

A particular way of getting an interest met, but not necessarily the **ONLY** way of getting that interest met.

##### **Interest**

An action, belief, or physical item that a party perceives as important or essential to his/her satisfaction or happiness.

---

## 2. Interest-Based Negotiation

In the conflict resolution process, the goal is to move people away from positional bargaining, in which they're thinking about what they want in terms of their positions, and towards thinking about their interests.

When parties uncover the interests underneath their positions, they can engage in the process of **interest-based negotiation**. Interest-based negotiation focuses on the underlying interests, not on the positions.

Because we are so accustomed to thinking in terms of positions, we may have difficulty expressing or identifying the real interests at stake.

This is why, as the conflict-resolver, one of your roles is to help the parties analyze their positions in order to clarify their interests.

You may even suggest alternate positions since a position is a way of meeting an interest.

You could do this by asking questions such as:

- *What if we did x?*
- *Have you considered y?*

Putting out alternate positions—not advocating for them, but laying them out as alternatives—may help clarify that a position is really not an interest and can help the parties see their underlying interests more clearly. These might be interests they've expressed, or even interests they have not expressed, but once you reach the level of being able to talk about interests, you can move into the process of interest-based negotiation.



#### TERM TO KNOW

### Interest-Based Negotiation

A form of negotiation in which parties' interests rather than positions are focused on in an effort to get all interests fully met.



#### BIG IDEA

When you use interest-based negotiation, it's possible to reach not just a partial solution, but a full solution that can meet all the interests of both parties. If you are only doing positional bargaining, you end up trading off a few elements, resulting in an agreement that partially meets the interests of both parties.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about two forms of negotiation: positional bargaining and interest-based negotiation. While **positional bargaining** involves parties trading elements of their positions, or ways of meeting an interest, back and forth, **interest-based negotiation** allows parties to uncover the interests underneath their positions in order to understand why the parties want what they do. You now understand that as an intervener, you can suggest alternate positions as a technique to help the parties clarify what is truly at the heart of the conflict. When the parties do this, they can use interest-based negotiation to find a solution that satisfies both their needs. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Interest

An action, belief, or physical item that a party perceives as important or essential to his/her satisfaction or happiness.

##### Interest Based Negotiation

A form of negotiation in which parties interests rather than positions are focused on in an effort to get all interests fully met.

##### Position

A particular way of getting an interest met, but not necessarily the **ONLY** way of getting that interest met.

##### Positional Bargaining

A form of negotiation in which elements of each party's positions are seen as things to be traded back and forth in an effort to get needs partially met.

