

Interest-Based Negotiation

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss a way of addressing the underlying interests of both parties in the conflict resolution process. The areas of focus include:

1. Interest-Based Negotiation vs. Positional Bargaining
2. How to Express Interests in Conflict
 - a. I-Statements
 - b. Active Listening
3. Unexpressed Interests

1. Interest-Based Negotiation vs. Positional Bargaining

When parties are in conflict, they are typically on opposite sides of an issue. They each have taken a strong position.

In order to bridge that gulf so that they can come together and move towards a mutually-satisfactory solution, the parties can use a strategy called interest-based negotiation.

Interest-based negotiation is a type of negotiation that focuses on the parties' interests rather than their positions. This is the opposite of positional bargaining, in which parties try to trade parts of their positions back and forth.

The results of positional bargaining are often unsatisfactory because while the parties think their **positions** are what they want, underneath those positions are the real **interests**, or the needs that have to be satisfied.

Moving away from positional bargaining can be a particular challenge in U.S. culture because we are so used to using this method.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** You find an ad online for a bicycle or a car, and you call the owner because you want to buy it. Sellers often take a certain stance on what they're going to charge for something, while buyers are firm on what they're going to pay for it. This becomes a battle over price, or the position that you've staked out for yourself in terms of what you will pay. In other words, this is a win-lose situation.

This happens in a large number of negotiations that take on this positional bargaining stance.

➦ **EXAMPLE** An environmental group might come into conflict with loggers or business owners because they hold conflicting positions. The environmentalists say, “We’re going to protect the land, and that’s it. All development of this land would be bad for the environment.” The loggers might say, “We’re going to protect our business interests here. People in the community want economic development, and we need to use this land to create jobs.”

It’s hard to progress toward a resolution when everybody stays with their initial position and won’t move from it.

But by shifting from positional bargaining to interest-based negotiation, you shift from this win-lose outlook to examining and looking at the underlying interests.

When you find mutual interests, you can seek ways to satisfy those interests through creative solutions that will be a win-win.



TERMS 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.

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. How to Express Interests in Conflict

Mutual interests can be uncovered by asking clarifying questions that get to the heart of each party’s position.

However, when you are in a conflict resolution process based on interest-based negotiation, it’s important to follow some guidelines in terms of how you uncover those interests.

2a. I-Statements

If you are expressing your own interests, using I-statements in assertive communication is very helpful.

➦ **EXAMPLE** A condominium association is having a conflict over how to redo the common space outdoors. There are a number of different positions that people have taken on the issue.

As you begin to ask questions, and people begin to speak, it’s apparent that there are interests underneath these positions that need to be expressed. All the parties need to hear these interests if they’re going to come to a solution that will be satisfactory for everyone.

So when you’re speaking about your particular interest in this meeting, use an I-statement: “You know, I feel a little nervous and upset about the plans. When I hear everyone talking about plans to expand that common space in the back, I feel nervous because it’s going to impact my privacy. It’s outside my window.”

That's a lot different than aggressively saying, "You're all just thinking about yourselves here. Nobody's thinking about what it's going to be like for me and the people on my side of the building."

Instead of aggressive communication in which you are only thinking about your own needs, you use assertive communication that allows you to speak up about your needs with respectful I-statements.

2b. Active Listening

It's also important to really understand the needs and interests of the other side. If you seek to understand before being understood, you will find that it's reciprocal; people will listen to and understand you as well. You can do this by asking clarifying questions and practicing active listening, which involves listening not only for the content, but for the emotions underneath the content.

➦ **EXAMPLE** In the situation with the condominium, you could ask someone a clarifying question, such as, "Can you tell me more about how you see that impacting you?" Or you could say, "It sounds like you're quite concerned that we might be spending too much money on this project." By speaking this way, you're seeking to understand another person's point of view through listening actively and asking questions.

3. Unexpressed Interests

Through this process of asking questions and speaking up assertively about your own interests and needs, you can uncover what's really going on underneath the positions, and perhaps find some mutual interests.

You might also discover, however, that there are some people who are sticking to their guns. They don't want to move even though everybody else seems to be making some shifts in understanding.

When people are unwilling to give up a position, many times it's because there's been an **unexpressed interest**, or an interest that the person has not revealed.

➦ **EXAMPLE** There may be a person in this meeting who is really not buying into this landscape plan. We'll call him Tom. You can find out what's underneath Tom's position by asking the right kinds of questions and allowing him to speak.

It may turn out that Tom's the one who's been doing all the gardening. He's enjoyed the fact that people have given him this responsibility, and now it feels like it's being taken away. They're going to use some landscaping company, and he's lost this role that he cherished.

Tom would like to be part of the landscaping, whatever the plan is. He would like to be someone who tends the garden. Nobody realized that before. They thought maybe he'd be glad that they were going to be redoing this space so that he wouldn't have so much to do.



TERM TO KNOW

Unexpressed Interest

A party's interest in a conflict which has not been stated or explained to anyone other than the party holding the interest.



BIG IDEA

It's important to spend time uncovering the underlying interests and needs of all parties by giving everyone a chance to speak and be heard. It's also important to express your own interests in a respectful way by using assertive communication and I-statements.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **interest-based negotiation differs from positional bargaining** in that interest-based negotiation focuses on putting the parties' opposing positions aside in order to uncover mutual interests. When **expressing your own interests in a conflict**, it's important to use I-statements as a form of respectful assertive communication. While others are speaking, you should practice active listening so that you hear their views as well. You now understand that when a party seems unwilling to budge on their position, it might be because this party has an **unexpressed interest**. You can uncover this interest by asking clarifying questions and allowing that party the opportunity to speak. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



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