

Don't Get Trapped in a Chinese Finger Puzzle Sue Dyer

Most children have at some time or another played with a woven straw cylinder about five inches long known as a "Chinese finger puzzle". There is an opening at each end just large enough for a finger to be inserted in each end - and trapped. Trying to escape, you pull your fingers apart, but the harder you pull the tighter the straw stretches around each finger. Only by pushing inward, by moving counter to the direction in which escape seems to lie, can you get free.

This is exactly how non-adversarial negotiating works. Instead of pulling toward our own self-interests and protecting ourselves, we instead push toward the other people and issues involved, seeking to really listen and understand them. Then, together, we can co-create a good solution to our problem. The more overlapping your interests are, the more ability you will have to co-create a solution that gives everyone what it is they need.

The problem with an adversarial approach is that it causes us to pull away from each other, like in the finger puzzle, and we get trapped. After that it is very difficult to really talk to each other, to explore possible solutions, and to co-create durable solutions.

How can you agree on a solution when you don't agree on the problem? Talking to each other, and not at each other, is the key to being able to agree on the real problem. I have often listened to both parties in a dispute tell me their story only for it quickly to become obvious that of course they didn't agree on the solution (which they have been arguing over for months and years) - they didn't agree on the problem! If you don't agree on the problem then you won't agree on the solution.

Non-adversarial negotiating has *seven principles* at its core. These principles are designed create the attitude and atmosphere required for people to talk to each other, to hear what is needed, and then to co-create a solution that is fair and justifiable. Below is a brief description each principle.

The Seven Principles of Non-Adversarial Negotiating

Principle #1: REFUSE TO BE AN ADVERSARY

This is number one because it is fundamental to effective negotiation. No matter what is sent your way, you refuse to get sucked into a defensive mode; don't be drawn into their camp. When you become defensive, the opportunity to come up with a creative solution is lost, and your mind will only be looking for ways to win.

Principle #2: COMMUNICATE FROM A POSITION OF POWER

When you work toward the common, long-term good, you automatically communicate from a position of power. If you are trying to do what is right for both sides, and keep a long-term point of view, you will be very powerful. Certainly you want to get what you need and to feel satisfied with the outcome of any negotiation. If you think that you will never see this person again, you are probably wrong. Most negotiations are relational, not transactional.

Very rarely do we have one transaction and then walk away, never to be affected by it again. Even if you don't deal with the same person, there will be someone whom they've talked to that you will have to deal with. Now you are building a reputation. People will give you great power when you work toward the common good; they will rise up to help you.

Principle #3: LEAD, DON'T MANIPULATE

Your integrity is the cornerstone from which you negotiate. Taking a leadership role will help you move the process from a boxing match to a dance. Leadership in this case need not be based on actual authority, but can be assumed by anyone who seeks a solution which will give all of the stakeholders what they need. Leadership is NOT manipulation. Manipulation is taking an action to achieve influence that would be less effective if the other person knew your actual intentions. Leading is finding out what it will take to bring the parties into harmony.

Principle #4: LISTEN BETWEEN THE LINES

Negotiations and conflicts are not usually about what people say they are, they have more to do with ego. By listening with empathy, between the lines, you will hear what people are telling you they truly need and will be able to create a solution to fulfill their need.



Principle #5: **ACT AS IF**

Negotiations and conflicts are won, lost, or created in our minds. William James said “You don’t sing because you’re happy, you’re happy because you sing”. If we act in a manner that is consistent with what we want to have happen, it must eventually occur. This is the law of consistency; perception is reality.

Principle #6: **DECIDE THE OUTCOME BEFORE A POSITION OF POWER**

Man has the ability to create, first in his mind and second in the world. Deciding the outcome before means that you create in your mind what it is you want to have happen in any given negotiation.

You must look at your optimal, worst case, and walk away outcomes in order to understand the parameters of you negotiation. Understanding your objectives and those of the other side will help you know how to start and where to move in order to get your desired outcome.

Principle #7: **DO THE IMPOSSIBLE**

Whether you believe you can, or believe you can’t, you’re right. Doing the impossible is based on keeping yourself open to possibilities. Expect a miracle. One definition of a miracle is a change in perception. This is what all of these principles are about. Try to look at old things in new ways, through new lenses. It is usually possible to create a solution that gives everyone what they need and to walk away with a new level of respect and understanding.

By following the *Seven Principles* you will find that you are able to negotiate solutions that are based on fairness – preserving long-term relationships. The negotiation will be a path to understanding, not war. As the world continues to grow into one global economy we become more and more inter-dependent, and, as such, win/win or lose/lose become our **only** two options. Pushing toward each other to find resolution to our problems is the only approach that makes sense in this new age.

Sue Dyer is the founder and president of the International Partnering Institute, a non-profit educational organization that offers certifications in professional partnering facilitation and partnering competencies. Sue is also president of OrgMetrics, a consulting firm specializing in partnering facilitation and non-adversarial approaches to resolving disputes. To find out more, please contact Sue at suedyer@orgmet.com or 925 449-8300. You can visit us on the web at www.partneringinstitute.com and www.orgmet.com



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