

# **Conflict Resolution 101**

*Tips, Secrets and Inside Information*

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## **2012 PRINCE WILLIAM NEIGHBORHOOD CONFERENCE**

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**PIEDMONT DISPUTE RESOLUTION CENTER**

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**CONFLICT IS NORMAL  
BUT  
CONFLICT DOES NOT  
HAVE TO BE DESTRUCTIVE**

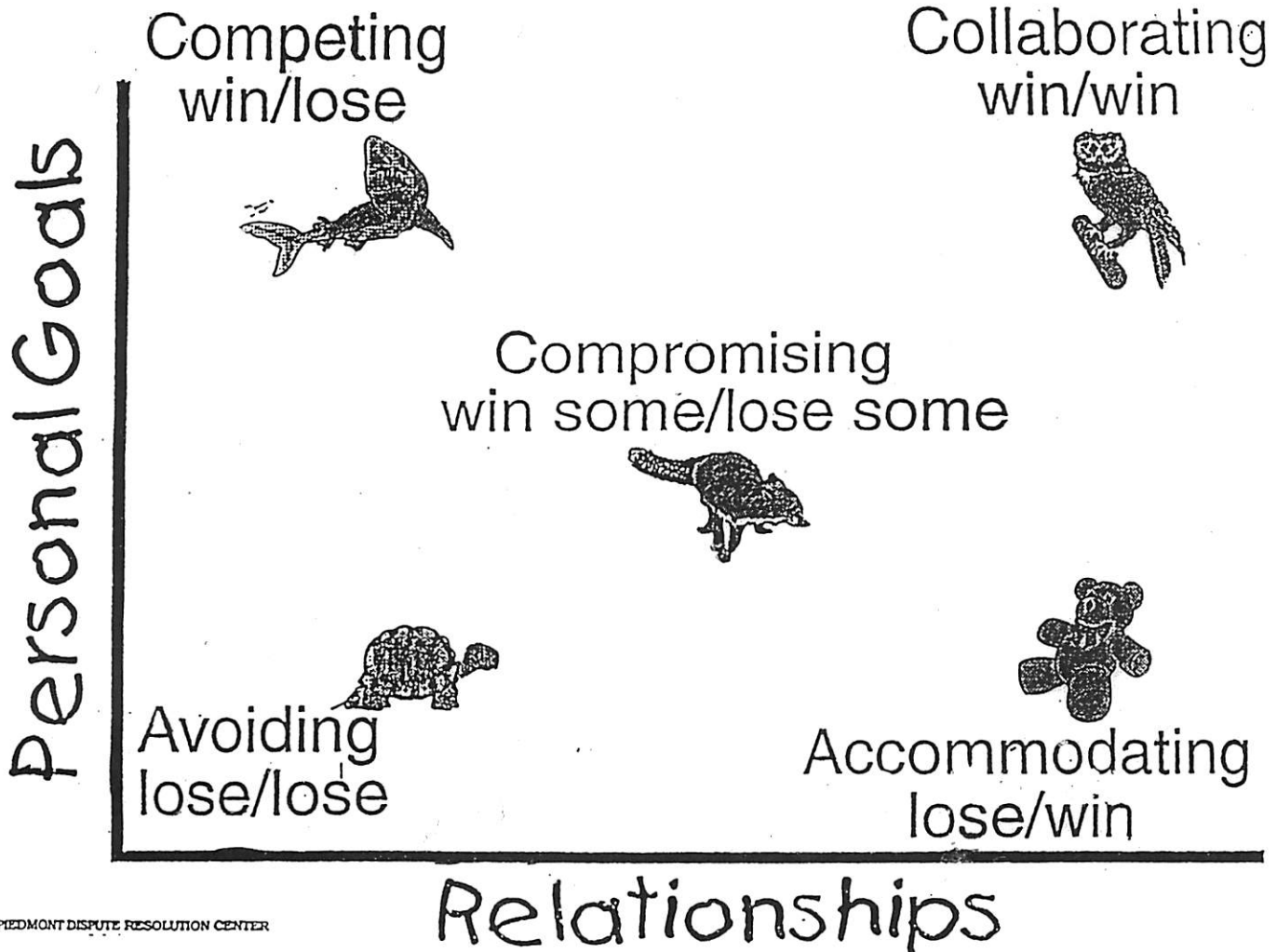
While conflict can act as a healthy and creative force, failing to deal with it in a constructive manner damages individuals, relationships and working environments. Although conflict is normal, people often avoid open confrontation or escalate it because they are uncomfortable with it or do not have the skills to handle it.

## COMMON PROBLEM CHARACTERISTICS

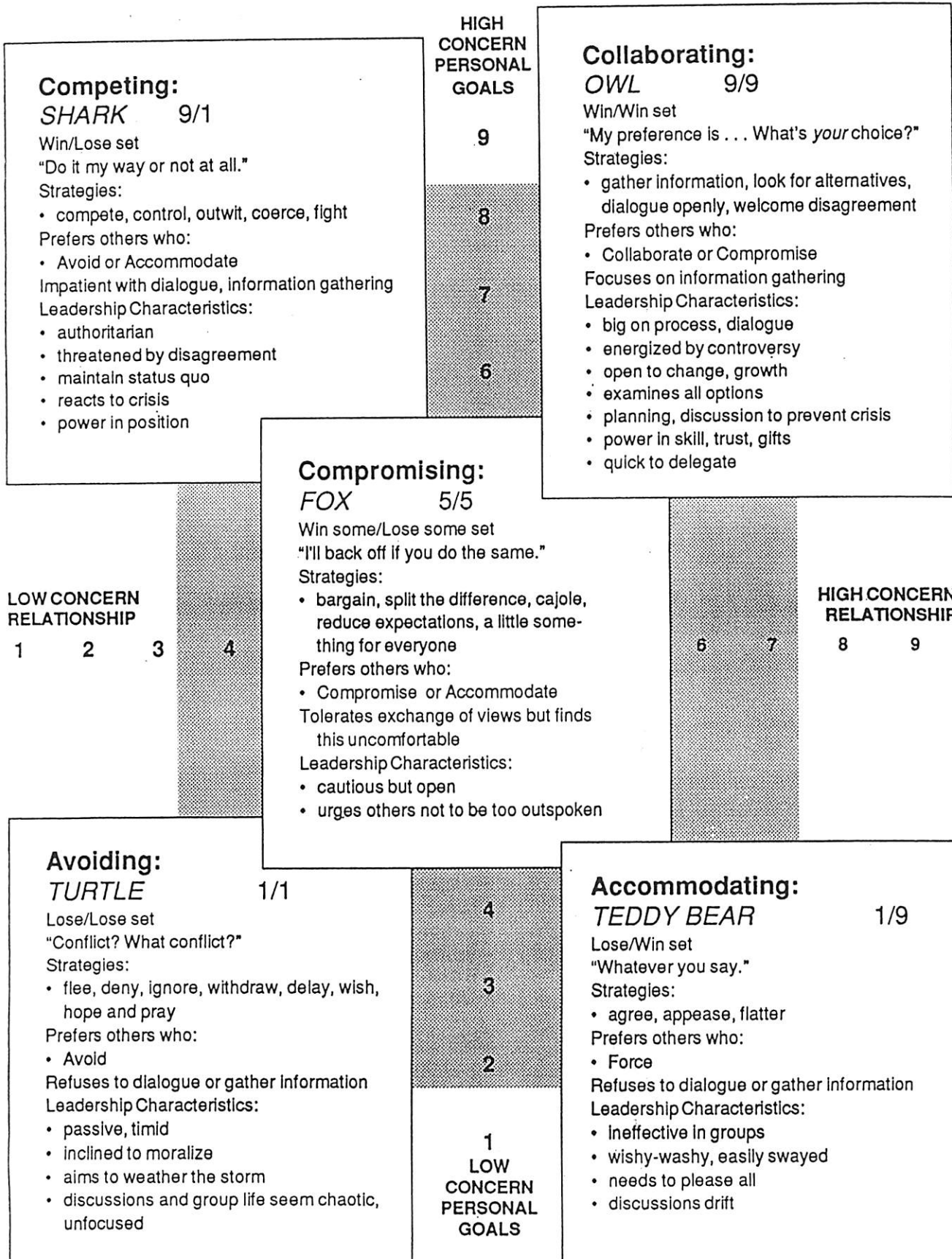
- ✎ **INCOMPLETE COMMUNICATION:** I/he/she didn't hear the whole story.
- ✎ **INACCURATE INFORMATION:** At least one of us/them had the wrong information.
- ✎ **STRESS OVERLOAD:** At least one of us/them was confused, overloaded, and stressed.
- ✎ **DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS:** We/they see things differently. They have different beliefs or values.
- ✎ **LIMITED RESOURCES:** We/they can't have it all because there is not enough to go around.
- ✎ **UNMET PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS:** My/his/her need for identity, security, recognition, control, or fairness is threatened.



## STYLES OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT



# STYLES of CONFLICT MANAGEMENT



**Competing:**

**SHARK** 9/1

Win/Lose set

"Do it my way or not at all."

Strategies:

- compete, control, outwit, coerce, fight

Prefers others who:

- Avoid or Accommodate

Impatient with dialogue, information gathering

Leadership Characteristics:

- authoritarian
- threatened by disagreement
- maintain status quo
- reacts to crisis
- power in position

HIGH CONCERN PERSONAL GOALS

9

8

7

6

**Collaborating:**

**OWL** 9/9

Win/Win set

"My preference is . . . What's *your* choice?"

Strategies:

- gather information, look for alternatives, dialogue openly, welcome disagreement

Prefers others who:

- Collaborate or Compromise

Focuses on information gathering

Leadership Characteristics:

- big on process, dialogue
- energized by controversy
- open to change, growth
- examines all options
- planning, discussion to prevent crisis
- power in skill, trust, gifts
- quick to delegate

LOW CONCERN RELATIONSHIP

1

2

3

4

**Compromising:**

**FOX** 5/5

Win some/Lose some set

"I'll back off if you do the same."

Strategies:

- bargain, split the difference, cajole, reduce expectations, a little something for everyone

Prefers others who:

- Compromise or Accommodate

Tolerates exchange of views but finds this uncomfortable

Leadership Characteristics:

- cautious but open
- urges others not to be too outspoken

HIGH CONCERN RELATIONSHIP

6

7

8

9

**Avoiding:**

**TURTLE** 1/1

Lose/Lose set

"Conflict? What conflict?"

Strategies:

- flee, deny, ignore, withdraw, delay, wish, hope and pray

Prefers others who:

- Avoid

Refuses to dialogue or gather information

Leadership Characteristics:

- passive, timid
- inclined to moralize
- aims to weather the storm
- discussions and group life seem chaotic, unfocused

4

3

2

1

LOW CONCERN PERSONAL GOALS

**Accommodating:**

**TEDDY BEAR** 1/9

Lose/Win set

"Whatever you say."

Strategies:

- agree, appease, flatter

Prefers others who:

- Force

Refuses to dialogue or gather information

Leadership Characteristics:

- ineffective in groups
- wishy-washy, easily swayed
- needs to please all
- discussions drift

## The People Problem (Anti-Communication)

1. Seeing only what you want to see, seeing only your own side, using information selectively.
2. Taking positions
3. Deducing their intentions from your fears
4. Blaming them for the problem
5. Dwelling on the past
6. Expressing negative emotions, especially anger and fear
7. Using non-communication techniques such as debating and rambling
8. Using confused or inaccurate information
9. Undertaking irrelevant activities
10. Leaping to solutions, using insufficiently justified solutions, solutions outside legal requirements, or solutions based on your will versus theirs

## Principled Negotiation

1. Building accurate perceptions
2. Focusing on the issues
3. Recognizing your personal fears, seeking to identify and understand their intentions
4. Talking about yourself not about them
5. Looking to the future
6. Focusing on your interests and theirs
7. Talking with a purpose
8. Understanding the techniques of the record and the subject at issues
9. Remaining focused on negotiations
10. Using objective criteria for choosing solutions

### **THE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

Separate the people from the problem.

*Be soft on the people and hard on the problem.*

Focus on interests, not positions.

*When positions look incompatible, look at the underlying interests and needs.*

Generate options for mutual gain.

*Work for a win/win approach.*

Assure a fair process.

*The process is just as important as the outcome.*

Practice direct communications.

*Talk with others, not about them.*

## THE PEOPLE PROBLEM

It is sometimes easy to forget when negotiating a disagreement that the representatives of the 'other side' are people. They have feelings, values, and varying backgrounds and viewpoints. People factors can either aid the process of negotiation or bring it to a complete standstill.

A respectful approach to negotiations, one built on an appreciation that people can have honest differences, will make negotiation smooth and efficient. On the other hand, fear, anger, and frustration result when people are rude or intimidating, when they do not listen to one another, or when they misinterpret or distort what has been said. Then negotiations end, and the people problem begins. People are no longer interested in finding a mutually acceptable solution to an issue. Instead, the issue is lost and the goal becomes to score points, place blame, or save face.

Research about negotiated agreements has identified several tactics that can lead to the people problem, for example: shouting, leaping to conclusions, rambling on about irrelevant subjects. We have called these tactics and others like them anti-communication techniques. Successful negotiators know how to identify and avoid them. You can do the same.

## PRINCIPLED NEGOTIATION

Unless deliberately avoided, the people problem will occur almost naturally as attempts are made to resolve disagreements. Principled negotiation is a technique which has been successfully used in many settings to reach a satisfactory agreement and to prevent the people problem-anti-communication- from occurring. The technique is based upon specific skills such as listening carefully, talking with a purpose, and using objective criteria rather than personal opinions or hearsay for proposing solutions. Principled negotiation produces wise agreements when agreement is possible. It is efficient. And it should improve or at least not damage the relationship between the negotiating parties.

The main idea in principled negotiation is that there are two levels of negotiation. The first level is the problem, or the substance or content of the dispute. For example, is a given child eligible for special education services? Or what level of services is appropriate? The second level is the interaction that takes place between the negotiating parties. In matters concerning special education, these parties will usually be parents and school personnel. Do they shout at one another? Do they blame each other for the child's difficulties? Or do they try to understand one another's views and speak to each other with respect? The difference is crucial.

In principled negotiation, the parties to a dispute do not lose sight of each other as people. Therefore, they pay as much attention to the way they are interacting as they do to the content of the problem. In this way, the people and the problem are kept separate. The problem is something to be worked on. The methods used to do that work are deliberately chosen to avoid hurt feelings, injured pride, and angry frustration. In short, the goal of principled negotiation is to stay focused on the problem and to stop the people problem from taking over. You, too, can use techniques of principled negotiation.

## **PRINCIPLED NEGOTIATION\***

In principled negotiation, the parties are aware of both the content of the problem and the interaction among the parties. They do not lose sight of each other as people, but keep the problem and the people separate.

### **BUILD ACCURATE PERCEPTIONS**

Usually in any negotiation between clients and professionals or among professionals, there is a mass of information involved. A natural inclination is for opposing sides to select from this information the facts that confirm their own views. With both parties stating only their own point of view and not trying to understand each other, it is easy to ruffle feelings and reach a stalemate.

An alternative approach is to build accurate perceptions of the situation by asking questions. With this approach, each person knows that the other is interested and willing to listen. Then channels of communication stay open. It is important to remember that in negotiations the object is to influence the other side. Generally, it is more useful to try to understand the perceptions of the other side before trying to change those perceptions.

### **FOCUS ON THE ISSUES**

By focusing on the issues, rather than concentrating on defending a position, the problem to be worked on remains in the forefront. It keeps feelings of pride and the wish to "score points" out of the way of finding a solution. Good agreements can occur when each person is able to consider the merits of the other's suggestions.

### **RECOGNIZE YOUR PERSONAL FEARS; SEEK TO IDENTIFY AND UNDERSTAND OTHER PEOPLE'S INTENTIONS**

Being able to negotiate effectively requires that the parties recognize and accept their own fears. They are able to say, "I'm afraid this is going to happen," rather than "I know the other person is going to do something." Determining the desired outcome and pursuing it is most productive. Second-guessing what the other side is going to do gets in the way of reaching an agreeable solution.

### **TALK ABOUT YOURSELF, NOT ABOUT THEM**

People who have studied successful negotiations have found that effective negotiators generally do not make statements about the other side. There is only one reaction to being blamed for something -- first to defend, then to attack.

## **LOOK TO THE FUTURE**

The present and the future often offer several different outcomes. By concentrating on what can happen, negotiating efforts can move forward and become creative problem-solving arenas.

## **FOCUS ON YOUR INTEREST AND THEIRS**

Find a way to begin a problem-solving session with a positive statement that expresses each person's willingness to work together toward a solution. When people attend meetings where differences of opinion are to be discussed, they expect the tone to be adversarial. A statement of cooperation made by all people at the beginning of a meeting lays the groundwork for negotiating agreements.

## **TALK WITH A PURPOSE**

Keep in mind the central issues and points of discussion. People should know what they are saying and why they are saying it. Most of the discussion should be framed in language regarding the well-being of the client and reflect the issues at hand.

## **UNDERSTAND THE ISSUES**

It is important that the information present during the negotiations is accurate. If unsure of something, it is better to ask a question rather than making a statement. Generally, a statement explaining each person's viewpoint will prevent the parties from becoming flustered and reacting on the basis of feelings rather than knowledge. When people know what they are talking about, others listen with respect and attention.

## **REMAIN FOCUSED ON NEGOTIATIONS**

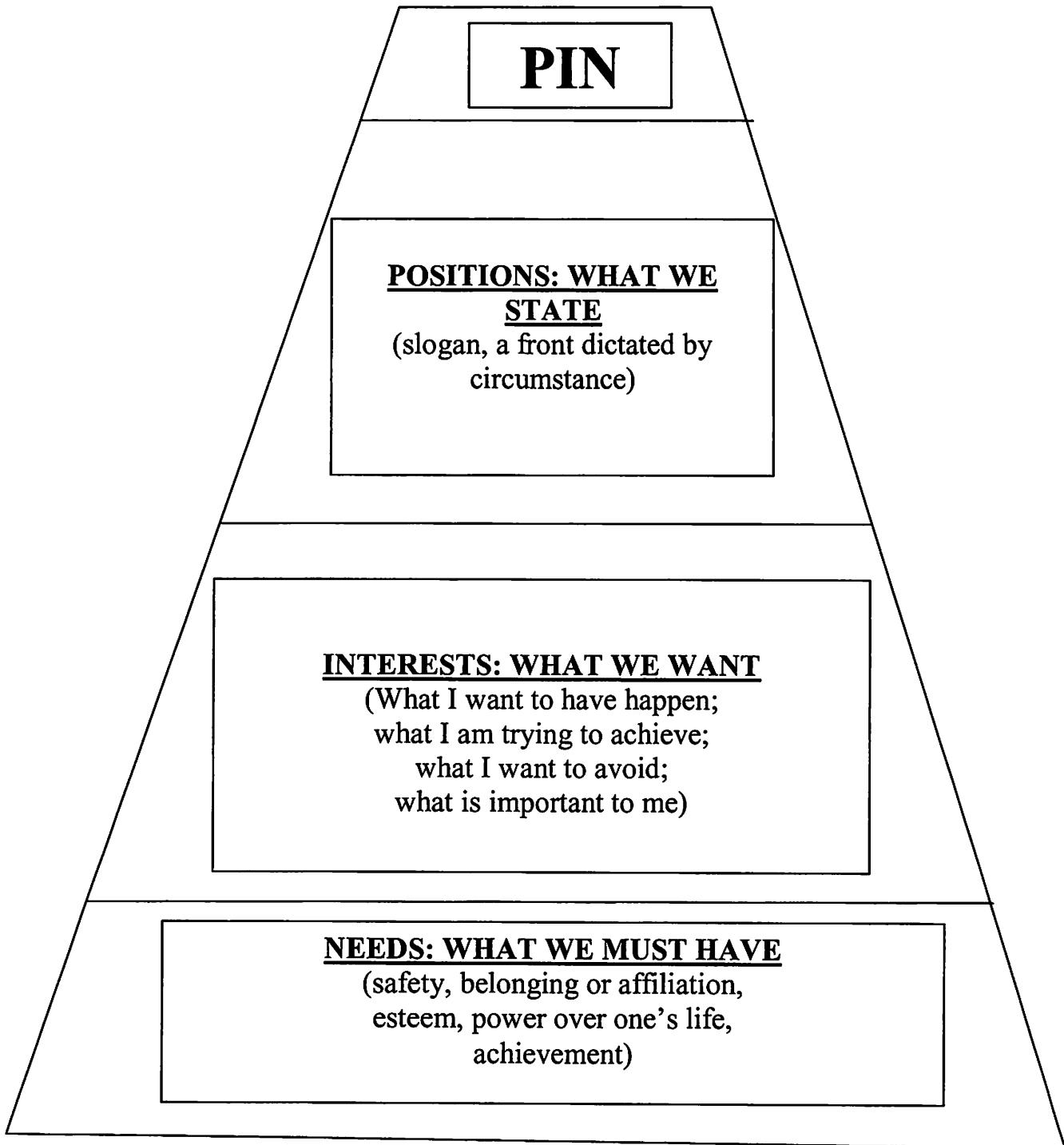
When problem-solving bogs down, the temptation is strong to get off track. It can be helpful to call attention to people's common purpose of meeting together. Statements such as "We've put aside valuable time to meet today. Let's see if we can work out the disagreements," can be used to focus on the process.

## **USE ESTABLISHED STANDARDS FOR CHOOSING SOLUTIONS**

In cases of disagreement between clients and professionals or among professionals, it is a good idea to refer to pertinent sections of policies and procedures in order to justify a solution. Solutions based on best practices, policies, procedures and law are more likely to be mutually satisfactory and implemented.

\*From Shared Decisions: Problem-Solving and Mediation in Early Intervention, Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center, 1993.

# CONFLICT IS ALSO ABOUT...



## The PIN Pyramid

**A rule for conflict resolution is to focus on and talk about needs and interests behind the positions, rather than the positions themselves. Generate movement by moving people off of their positions!**



# PARAPHRASING

*Stating in Your Own Words What the Other Said and Feels*

## **Purpose:**

- Focus on the speaker
- Include facts and feelings
- Be brief

## **Paraphrasing Stems:**

- “So you believe strongly that...”
- “You were very unhappy when she...”
- “The way you see it is...”

**Paraphrasing** lets the other person know you are trying to understand, clarifies communication, slows the pace of interaction, reduces intensity, helps elicit more information and facilitates situational assessment.

- Cautions:**
1. Do not make evaluations or judgments
  2. Avoid stereotyped responses
  3. Attend to timing
  4. Be careful about “overshooting”

## **Some Practice Paraphrasing**

1. He left me on July 17<sup>th</sup>, to move in with a woman he has been having an affair with for about a year. My children have been asking why Daddy left without saying goodbye. I have more bills than I have money and I haven't seen a cent of child support from him. I just can't handle it anymore. I want a divorce as soon as possible. He hasn't even called the children to see how they are doing, or bothered to try to visit them. What am I suppose to say? It breaks my heart to see them so upset and teary-eyed.
2. I've been thinking about quitting this job for a long time. It is a good job and everyone is nice and supportive. But I've interviewed and been offered a job with more flexible hours and closer to home. I honestly feel I have to move on. It would cost me less money in child care and I wouldn't be so tired from getting home so late. The hardest thing is telling Mrs. Smith. She's a good boss and his always been kind to me.
3. I can't believe he said that! When I took this job the work was already backed up and way behind. The computer was outdated and barely worked. I have only been here two months. I refuse to take the blame for missing the deadline on that big project!

# I-Messages

I feel \_\_\_\_\_  
(State YOUR feeling)

When \_\_\_\_\_  
(Describe the specific situation or behavior that is of concern to you *in non-judgmental terms*)

Because \_\_\_\_\_  
(State consequence to you)

I would like it if \_\_\_\_\_

## RESPONDING TO AN ANGRY PERSON

1. Know and understand your own responses to anger. Anticipate the ineffective responses you might be inclined to give. **MANAGE YOUR OWN ANGER.**
2. Remember that an attack often comes from a person who is unhappy because of events or needs not related to the precipitating event. When you show interest in these events, the angry person will calm down.
3. Allow the angry person to talk and to let angry feelings spill out. When the anger is allowed to flow, it will usually dissipate quickly. The angry person is not going to feel good or be receptive to your help until the bad feelings are communicated and understood.
4. Accept the person's right to be angry and accept him or her as a person of worth, even though you may not agree with their stated reasons for being angry.
5. **THE ANGRY PERSON IS NOT FUNCTIONING WITH OPTIMAL ACCURACY.** Anything you say or do is likely to be misinterpreted. *This means your communication must be particularly clear.*
6. Seek something about which you can agree.

