

Keys to a win-win approach

Partners not opponents

The win-win approach is about changing the conflict from adversarial attack and defense, to co-operation. It is a powerful shift of attitude that alters the whole course of communication.

One person consistently applying a joint problem-solving approach can make the difference. You, the reader, will probably be that person – redirecting the course of the conflict. Therefore, the first person you have to convince is yourself.

Until we give it attention, we are usually unaware of the way we argue. We often find ourselves with a knee-jerk reaction in difficult situations – based on long established habits combined with the passing mood of the moment. When challenged, we experience separateness, disconnectedness from those around us – a feeling of “you or me” – a sense that there isn’t enough for both of us and if one person is right, then the other person must be wrong. Often, we haven’t taken even a moment to consider what is the best approach in the circumstances.

We need to change the agenda of the conversation. We need it to shift to:

I want to win and I want you to win too.

That’s the win-win approach. The challenge becomes how exactly to have this happen.

Go Back to needs

The most important win-win manoeuvre you can make is to change course. Back off your fixed position and begin to discuss everyone’s underlying needs, including your own. You take the focus off solutions for a while and look at why people want what they are saying they want. Ask questions such as:

- “Why does that seem to be the best solution to you?”
- “What’s your real need here?”
- “What’s important to consider while working on this issue? Who needs what?”
- “What values are important to you here?”
- “What’s the outcome or result you want?”

The answers to these questions are vital for co-operative problem-solving. This is the solid ground on which to build collaborative teams. You create the opportunity to say what you need and for others to say what they need too.



Whatever you call it – collaborative teams, co-operative problem-solving, partners not opponents, win-win – the knack is to build solutions that acknowledge and value each person or group’s needs, rather than denying them.

This win-win approach rests on these strategies:

- Go back to underlying needs
- Recognise and respect individual differences
- Attack the problem, not the people
- Listen for the needs. Collect the information.
- Be open to new attitudes and more inclusive solutions.

Win-win describes your mindset. It is not dependent on a particular outcome. Wins all round may not be possible, but searching for them is a better way to travel on your conflict road. The win-win approach is certainly ethical, but the reason for its great success is that IT WORKS. Where both people win, both are tied to the solution. They feel committed to the plan because it actually suits them. When it fits well into a bigger perspective, it is unlikely to backfire. It’s a successful strategy for mutual gain.

When we solve problems together like this, everyone feels quite differently about the outcome, even if some compromises are necessary. It’s not about winning or losing. It’s about finding viable solutions to shared challenges, seen from a bigger perspective.

Win-win awareness

Win-win is about collective thinking. Use it within the family. Use it to nurture a workplace team. Use it to influence policy for the wider society and sharing resources with others who are disadvantaged. Think ‘we’ and ‘our’ rather than ‘mine’ or ‘yours’.

Win-win is also about our responsibilities to that connection. We expect and offer respect. We expect and offer mutual care-taking. We expect and offer flourishing within the requirements of long-term sustainability. Win-win awareness means we address climate change and stop unchecked exploitation of the natural world. Win-win is a sound approach for little picture and big picture planning. It’s all connected. Wherever we are in the world and whatever we do, we are responsible.

