



*Coach's Corner:*

## How to be persuasive

*Do you wish you were better at persuading others: your colleagues, your employees, your boss? In this issue of Coach's Corner, Sharon tells the story of a client who became more persuasive by using a simple technique available to all of us - and shows you how to apply the technique to your own persuasion challenges.*

Recently my client Greg asked me for advice on how to be persuasive. "I'm having a conflict with one of my colleagues, Nancy," Greg explained. "She has a really talented employee named Carlos who is bored out of his mind because he doesn't have enough work to do. Meanwhile, my group is short-staffed and falling behind on orders. If we don't process our backlog by the end of the quarter, we won't make bonus. So, I'd like to bring Carlos over to my group. We'd keep him busy, and with his help we'd get through our backlog. It's a perfect solution, but Nancy is resisting. How can I persuade her to let Carlos go?"

I knew right away that Greg was headed for trouble, because he was solving the wrong problem.

### ***The wrong problem:***

*How do I get Nancy to let Carlos go?*

"I think you're trying to solve the wrong problem," I responded, and shared a classic negotiation story, from [\*Getting To Yes\*](#) (Fisher, Ury, and Patton). Sisters Rita and Dalia are fighting over an orange. Unable to agree on who should get the orange, they decide to split it in half.

Rita eats the fruit in her half of the orange and throws the rind away. Dalia carefully shaves the rind off her half of the orange, uses it to bake a cake, and throws the fruit away. Alas, each girl is left with only half of what she wanted, when she could have gotten all. What happened?

The twins were focused on their positions (*what* they wanted) instead of on their interests (*why* they wanted it). Imagine if instead of asking themselves, "How do I get my sister to give up that orange?", Rita and Dalia had asked themselves the following question: "How can we allocate this orange in a way that gives Rita fruit to eat and Dalia flavoring for a cake?" That question would naturally lead to a win-win solution where Rita got the fruit and Dalia got the rind.

Greg saw the parallel right away. "So, my trying to persuade Nancy to give up Carlos is like Rita trying to persuade her sister to give up the orange," he said. "I'm trying to get her to abandon her position in favor of mine. If she's resisting, it's because she has interests that are being met by keeping Carlos on her staff. I need to find out what those interests are and come up with a problem statement built around solving *both* of our interests."

Greg scheduled a meeting with Nancy for the next morning and called me when they finished.

"How did it go?" I asked.

"Very well," Greg responded. "We started by talking about our interests. I learned that, like me, Nancy is concerned about Carlos not having enough work to do. She is also concerned about getting through her busy season, which starts next quarter. She'll need her entire staff, including Carlos, in order to handle the load."

"Once I understood Nancy's interests," Greg continued, "I could see why she wouldn't want to let Carlos go. I stopped pushing for that. Instead, we worked together to create a problem statement built around both our interests."

***The right problem:***

*What can we do to ensure that Nancy will be sufficiently staffed for next quarter's busy season, that Carlos won't be bored this quarter, and that Greg gets his back orders processed this quarter?*

Having reframed the problem in this way, Greg and Nancy were able to identify two different win-win solutions to their dilemma:

- Have Nancy "loan" Carlos to Greg for the current quarter.
- Work out an arrangement where Nancy and Greg permanently share Carlos, having Carlos work on Greg's backlogs whenever he isn't busy with Nancy's work.

Notice that Greg's initial problem statement (How do I get Nancy to let Carlos go?) would not have naturally led to this solution. The win-win outcome emerged only when the problem was defined as meeting *both* parties' interests.

**Summary**

It's difficult to persuade someone to abandon their position in favor of yours if doing so would put them at a disadvantage. To increase your chances of a positive outcome, let go of your position as the only possible solution to a problem and look for a solution that addresses your interests *and* theirs.