

Positions and Interests

In conflict situations, it is a good idea in the clarifying stage, to listen for the positions and interests of the persons in conflict. It serves two major purposes: to help you understand what is the true origin of the conflict and to help you begin to resolve the conflict by focusing on interests.

Position:

What the person says they want. Usually this is the action or solution that is insisted on by the person. “*I’m going to quit if I have to continue to work with her!*” Often this is the first thing a person says in regards to a conflict. Positions in a conflict are often mutually exclusive while interests are not.

Interests:

These are the needs of the individual, which are driving them to take a certain position. It is the critical “why” of the conflict. The most powerful interests are basic human needs: security, safety, economic well-being, a sense of belonging, recognition, and control over one’s life. Most frequently the person does not state these up front. Gentle open-ended questions can help uncover interests. Examples of good questions for uncovering interests:

“How does that help you?”

“What does that do for you?”

“What do you need/want?”

“What’s your biggest concern about that?”

“How does that affect you?”

“What would be the consequences to you if this does not happen?”

When reframing and using empathic listening skills, it is important to remember: **Do not restate or reframe the position.** Reframe and restate the interests.

Common Positions and Interests:

Position

Stop Discriminating
Stop talking behind my back
Stop putting me down
Stop lying
Leave me alone to do my job
You never follow through
He never does anything
Just tell me what you want me to do
Stop trying to control everything

Interest

Fair treatment
Open/direct communication
Respectful treatment
Accurate information
Working autonomously
Reliability
Fair distribution workload
Clear expectations
Input into decisions
Autonomy