Mentor Training Program: Mentoring on Negotiation Skills, presented by John Beck  11/29/16

- The importance of context—factors and variables that effect the context of a conflict/issue
  - relationships
  - expectations
  - rules/organizations

  Ex: Issues and problem solving will be different in the MSU geology department as compared to MSU Vet Med because of these variables.

- Strategies to resolve conflict
  1) Avoidance: conflict will NOT go away and may get worse
     Sometimes it’s ok to do this (depends on situation) if the issue is not worth the trouble

  2) Accommodating: completely give in to get along.
     Sometimes ok to do this too, to keep the peace!

  3) Positional: 2 people each make claims about their needs to answer an immediate question.
     We will often inflate the claim to get what we want if we are forced to compromise.

     Ex: Negotiating the price of a used car. A range is established between the buyer’s preferred price and the seller’s preferred price. The middle ground, or ZOPA (Zone of possible agreement), is the range we will negotiate across, and it is bounded by two walkaway points (the buyer’s and seller’s). Walkaway point= the point at which no bargain is better than a bad bargain.

     - positional resolution is ok to use in some instances (like negotiating price and salary)
     - However, it narrows down the options (usually to two)
     - May produce winner and loser, or two losers
     - May harm the relationship
     - The arguers may not be equal in position, giving one a clear advantage

- COMPROMISING is not the answer. Instead, we should strive to OPTIMIZE our solutions through interest-based negotiation.

- Time is a factor, number of options decrease the longer the problem goes unresolved.

  4) Interest based
     - An active and collaborative negotiation
     - Can be done without the other party’s cooperation
     - Interests= things that must be observed and satisfied. They are NOT the answer, but they are what makes an answer good. Must be reflected in the solution to make it acceptable to both parties.
     - May protect/increase self-esteem, fairness, and financial security
A. Identify the issue! This is the question that needs an immediate answer. It may not be the only basis of conflict. Both parties must agree on what the issue is before a solution can be reached.

B. Identify your interests/rationales. (the reasons you want what you want, NOT what you want!) Some of these might be in common, so some schools of thought teach focusing on these similarities. Our approach is different; treat all interests as a finite list where all are equally important.

C. Generate options. Choices have attached consequences, and often the answer is not yes or no, it’s yes with conditions. One of the options must always be to keep things exactly the way they are—this might be the best answer.

Ex: Suppose a father and his teenage daughter are having an argument over her curfew. While the father may want his daughter home by nine, and his daughter may want to be out until midnight, they both have important rationales behind wanting these times:

Father= wants daughter to be safe, to go to sleep at a reasonable hour for school in the morning, trust

Daughter= wants independence, fun, trust from parents

Finding a compromise without identifying what interests are behind each position still leaves these issues unresolved. Using an interest based approach to generate options will help the father and daughter to address these interests at the same as solving the immediate problem.

D. Evaluation. Triage each option according to how well each serves the interests of both parties. Some interests may become less important as this triage process happens, but no interest should be ignored without that party’s consent. The best option will be the one that meets all/most of the interests.

Questions

1. Q: (Dr. Grooms) Does this approach assume that all interests have equal weight?

   A: No, the assumption is that all interests must be considered, but do not necessarily have to be satisfied. OPTIONS are usually black and white but INTERESTS rarely are.

2. Q: (Dr. Ewart) This method seems great for people who are comfortable with each other/know each other well, but how does it work when negotiation takes place in other scenarios? What if the negotiators have different ages, titles, levels of authority, etc.?

   A: Identifying the interests and clearly illuminating the problem will help this work, and remember you can make this work without the cooperation of the other party by identifying what interests/rationales are important to you and making decisions based on these.
3. Q: How is this different than a compromise?

A: NOT a compromise because defining the goodness of a solution by how it meets needs, not by agreeing to meet halfway.

4. Q: some of these potential options seem like they are never usually on the table in a real negotiation.

A: Articulating interests is HARD! And if there is a power differential across parties, those with less authority will be less willing to speak up for what they want. However, this is actually a bad strategy for the person with more power. When people believe that they are the decision maker they forget that they depend on their decision being implemented by those below them. By encouraging subordinates to speak their minds about their interests, they can increase buy-in. Better strategy: Don’t cram your position down throats! If your solution is the best it will rise to the top naturally and your subordinates will not feel like they are being ordered around.

On the same note, if people will not articulate their interests because they have hidden agendas, this approach will fall apart. “I don’t like it” is not an answer because in order to reach a solution all parties involved need to know WHY a solution does not work (i.e. what interests are not being met here?) and this is impossible if this information is kept to one’s self.

5. Q: How do we handle clear politics within a group trying to solve a problem?

A: Clear rules must be defined—is no answer better than a bad answer? Some interests are hard to deal with (Ex: I want to be first) because they are actually OPTIONS disguised as interests, or because people self-edit interests they do not want to say.

This is easy to understand but hard to put into practice. Why?
- we are trained to be solution oriented
- we are rewarded for defending our position well
- we might actually like fighting/arguing
- anger predisposes one to use a positional strategy and it is hard to ignore anger

6. Q: Could this evolve over generations? For example, in the car-selling scenario, people take out their cell phones nowadays and look up worth/facts/find cheaper options online. How does this affect the way we negotiate?

A: Definitely, digital natives will use new tools to make their points but information should never be used as a weapon. It should be shared to it can be evaluated as part of the decision making process, but it should not be taken into consideration without research or used for attack. When new information is introduced, we should ask ourselves what other answers might be out there and if the information is reliable. This also comes from experience and not the web.