COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

This section outlines a conversation template, which illustrates the application of the alignment pyramid™ to problem solving. This conversation template applies to problem solving conversations at *all* levels in an organisation's structure.

Initiators tend to:
⇒ Start conversations with proposing a solution – "We should do X" or "I would like   Y!" (level 3 discussion – means/strategy)

Respondents tend to:
⇒   respond with "yes" or "no" answers – often "no" answers
⇒   often state counter positions (level 3 discussion – means/strategy)
⇒   stating reasons as to "why you/we can't do X"
⇒   stalemate or conflict ensues leading to frustration and lack of resolution

Respondents are more effective when:
⇒ holding back from responding to the surface proposal/request/demand, i.e. from engaging in the level 3 conversation about means/strategy;
⇒ instead seek to get to the intentions / the issue below the surface – *"What's the issue or problem you're **intending** to address?"* i.e. focus on interests (level 2 discussion – goals) not positions at level 3.
⇒ understand the importance of the issue/problem to the initiator – "I want to make sure I understand how significant this is . How does it impact you / others / work unit / customers etc." (level 1 discussion – values)

The **Initiator** is more effective when:
⇒   starting the communication with an explicit statement of intent "I'm aiming to address/resolve/improve situation X (level 2:goals), because … (level 3:purpose)
⇒   seeking to obtain information about the other's perspective on the issue
⇒   making explicit *their* reasoning – how they arrived at *their* conclusions/perspective
⇒   seeking information about the same from the others in the conversation *"Could you tell me about how you arrived at your understanding of the problem, and your proposed solution/ ideas about possible solutions?"*
⇒   using paraphrasing to secure accurate understanding of all information

Both Initiators and Respondents are more effective when:
⇒   managing emotions / aim to stay calm
⇒   practicing awareness of assumptions of intent
⇒ checking for accuracy of understanding with paraphrasing – *"What I understand from what you've said is …"*
⇒ leaving the last part of the conversation for jointly exploring and evaluating a range of solutions (level 3 discussion – means)

General Collaborative Problem Solving Principals

1. Focus on behaviour. Do not express your beliefs/theories about other's intentions and/or objectives. This is particularly important when the goal is to positively influence counterproductive behaviour. Allowing the other party to "save face" reduces the risk of disengagement and resistance.

2. Separate out nominated strategies from intentions. People generally identify with their ideas, so outright rejection of ideas can cause perceptions of personal rejection. Identify and acknowledge the value of intentions *prior to* evaluating the merits of nominated strategies.

3. Separate out feelings from behaviour.

   Counterproductive behaviours or requests/demands are nearly always expressions of negative feelings. Identify, acknowledge and seek to make sense of perceptions and feelings that underpin unhelpful ideas and behaviours, *prior* to communicating limits and expectations in your response. (Without accepting unacceptable behaviour such as aggression)

   Strong Feelings are signs that a person is discussing something of importance to them. Seek to understand why (level 1).

4. Use inclusive language when defining parameters and expectations – to depersonalise the message and reduce an overly authoritarian approach. E.g. "What *we* need to do here is …"

5. Define limits and expectations in terms of *business* needs, not *personal* terms.

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