

The ability to move from positions to interests is the foundational skill of all effective conflict work. These exercises build that skill through analysis, questioning practice, and live application.

EXERCISE 1 — The Interest Map

Skill: Distinguishing positions from interests in a current conflict

Time: 20 minutes · Frequency: Once for any active conflict

What to do

Choose a current conflict — at work, at home, or in your community. Draw a simple table with three columns:

Column 1 — Party: List each party including yourself.

Column 2 — Position: What does each party say they want? What are they demanding or refusing?

Column 3 — Interest: Why do they want it? What need, value, or concern lies underneath the position? Make your best guess — you will not always know for certain.

Look at the interests column. Where is there overlap or compatibility that is invisible at the position level?

Reflection questions

- How different do the interests look compared to the positions?
- Where did you find yourself guessing? What would you need to ask to find out?
- What solutions become possible when you work from the interests column?

EXERCISE 2 — The Five Whys

Skill: Drilling below the surface to find the real interest

Time: 10 minutes in conversation · Frequency: As opportunities arise

What to do

When someone states a position — in a meeting, a negotiation, or a personal conversation — ask 'Why does that matter to you?' Listen to the answer. Then ask it again in a different way. Do this at least three times.

You are not interrogating — you are genuinely curious. Your tone should be warm and exploratory, not challenging.

Notice when the answers stop being positions and start being real needs. That is where the work begins.

Reflection questions

- How many 'whys' did it take before the real interest emerged?
 - How did the person respond to being asked about their interests rather than just their positions?
 - What would have happened if you had responded to the original position rather than the underlying interest?
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EXERCISE 3 — The Creative Options Exercise

Skill: Generating solutions from interests rather than positions

Time: 30 minutes · Frequency: When stuck in a conflict

What to do

Take a conflict where both parties seem stuck. Write down the interests of each party — not their positions.

Set a timer for 10 minutes. Generate as many possible solutions as you can that address the interests of both parties. Do not evaluate — just generate. Write everything down, including options that seem impractical.

After 10 minutes, review the list. Which options address the most interests? Which could be combined or modified to work better? Which surprised you?

Reflection questions

- How many options did you generate? Did quantity lead to quality?
- Which options would have been invisible if you had stayed at the position level?
- What would it take to bring these options to the actual parties?

EXERCISE 4 — Know Your Own Interests

Skill: Clarifying your own interests before entering a negotiation or conflict

Time: 15 minutes · Frequency: Before any negotiation or difficult conversation

What to do

Before entering a negotiation or conflict conversation, write down your own position — what you are asking for or refusing.

Then ask yourself the Five Whys about your own position. Why do you want that? What need does it serve? What are you afraid of losing if you don't get it?

Write your BATNA — your Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement. What will you do if no agreement is reached? Knowing this changes how you negotiate.

Reflection questions

- What surprised you about your own interests when you went beneath the position?
- How does knowing your BATNA change your confidence going into the conversation?
- Are there interests you have that you have not been expressing? Why not?

For coaching on interest-based negotiation and conflict, contact diazprinz@conflictmanagementspace.com