

NEGOTIATION SKILLS – PARTICIPATION AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE

PUSH OR PULL

Nobody likes being forced to do anything. Everyone wants to be given a good reason for why she or she should do as another person wishes. For conflicts to be solved innovatively and well, there needs to be mutual respect, consent, and commitment. There also needs to be mutual trust, and establishing this can take a lot of time and effort.

WHAT THE EXERCISE IS ABOUT

- Time: 5-10 minutes, plus time for discussion at the end
- In pairs, the students take up an arm-wrestling position. The pairs are promised a point (or some other reward) for each time the back of a hand touches the table top.
- The students in each pair will realize that there are quicker ways of collecting points than opposing – wrestling – each other.

THE GOALS OF THE EXERCISE

This short and simple but effective exercise shows that there are always at least two ways to get persuade another party in a negotiation to make some concession to us. We can either “push” them, which will most likely only cause resistance. The other option is to figuratively “pull” them towards us. The latter can be done in different ways, for example by sharing our view and explaining the reasons for why we want them to act in a certain way. “Pulling” – appealing to another person’s or group’s reason and goodwill – usually creates far less opposition, if any.

HOW THE EXERCISE SHOULD PROCEED

The exercise begins with the teacher asking half of the class to leave the room for two minutes (this exercise works best with an even number of students). When the others come back, ask those who stayed in the room to hold out one arm in front of them with the palm facing him- or herself.

Round one: Without any explanation, each student tries to wrestle his or her pair’s arm to the table top. The most likely, instinctive response is for the other to respond by pushing back in the opposite direction.

Round two: One student in each pair explains to the other why he or she wants the other to accompany the asker to the other end of the room. The most likely response is that the other party agrees, with no opposition.



THINGS TO DISCUSS AT THE END OF THE EXERCISE

It's entirely natural that if we are being forced without explanation to act in some way, our instinct is to oppose it. This becomes very clear in the first part of this exercise, in which one partner attempts to arm-wrestle the other into submission.

But in the second round, one party is given a reason for acting as the other wishes. That is, the motivator or "engine" that is acting in this case is not force but persuasion. In any conflict, giving the other party the option of consenting to some course of action, and an acceptable reason for doing so, brings about change with little if any opposition.