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## MUTUAL-GAINS NEGOTIATING

**D**o you have productive, synergistic relationships with the other professionals at your facility that benefit the whole organization? Or, instead, are the relationships contentious?

As the economic pressures on golf courses continue to intensify, effective collaboration among facility leadership is essential.

Mutual-gains negotiating is an effective tool that enhances collaboration. The traditional paradigm of negotiating focuses on winning and is, consequently, typically win-lose. Mutual-gains negotiating, on the other hand, is an attempt to get people to synthesize their aims rather than enter into win-lose competitiveness. There are four principles of mutual-gains negotiation.

**1. Focus on interests, not positions.** A position is a single answer or solution to a problem, one the other party frequently can't accept. An interest is a fear, a need, a worry, a concern, a hope, an aspiration that can be solved or resolved by numerous outcomes, some of which both parties can accept.

The idea behind focusing on interests is to clarify what's important to each party and find areas of common ground. The negotiator – you – must understand the other party's interests. Effective listening and empathy should replace hard negotiating skills. It's also important to discuss your own interests openly and candidly. Don't be misled by the lack of focus on competing. Mutual-gains negotiating also doesn't focus on accommodating. You must be open to the other party's interests and insistent the other party understands yours. Stephen Covey's habit of "seek first to understand then to be understood" is crucial.

When working with club leadership, there are many common interests: the facility's success, the enjoyment and well-being of golfers, the long-term health of the course, the community in which the course is located, and the personal and career development of the entire work force. This

principle places the focus on these common interests rather than personal positions.

To accomplish this principle, people must change the way they behave while negotiating. While power is the key to resolving traditional negotiations, empathy is the key to mutual-gains negotiations.

**2. Separate the people issues from the contextual issues.** I've struggled to understand this principle because at first it seems inconsistent with the key role negotiators play in mutual-gains negotiating. The importance of this principle emanates from the key role of people. If you're about to ne-



gotiate with someone with whom you have unresolved interpersonal issues unrelated to the negotiation, you must resolve those issues or agree to set them aside or they will tarnish the negotiation easily and perhaps make mutual-gains negotiation impossible.

My discussions with superintendents often include questions or complaints about ongoing conflicts with the golf pro or green committee members that began with a dispute about course layout, green speed, tee times, etc. Proactively confronting these people issues will enhance the effectiveness of superintendents collaborating on course leadership issues. What are the people issues that are reducing your effectiveness as a club leader?

**3. Invent options for mutual gain.** Focusing on interests makes it possible to identify numerous alternative solutions. The negotiators then can work together to

identify solutions that meet the interests of both parties. At golf facilities, the positions often relate to the course/superintendent versus the pro shop/pro versus the club manager. Creativity, collaboration and a focus on common interests often can invent options that meet the interests of all three. Brainstorming and identifying alternatives focused on common interests is the key.

**4. Insist on using objective criteria.** The reality is that interests will conflict. Through the first three principles, we almost always can fulfill the interests of each party better than through traditional negotiation or compromising. It is, however, easy to revert back to using power when negotiating the remaining conflicting interests.

The alternative is to resolve the remaining issues using objective criteria instead of power to preserve the benefits of mutual-gain bargaining. A common example of this principle is a negotiation between employees (or a union) and management. Let's say all issues have been resolved based on mutual-gains principles except the increase of wages. Instead of allowing the entire negotiation to fail, peg the percentage increase to an objective measure – the Consumer Price Index, average wage increase of other companies in the industry, etc.

When using mutual gains, you need not adhere exactly to each of the four principles to improve collaboration among course leaders, maintenance staff and in your personal life. Try using one or more – especially focusing on interest rather than positions – to enhance your collaborations and relationships. **GCI**