Conflict Management
and Negotiation

What is Conflict?

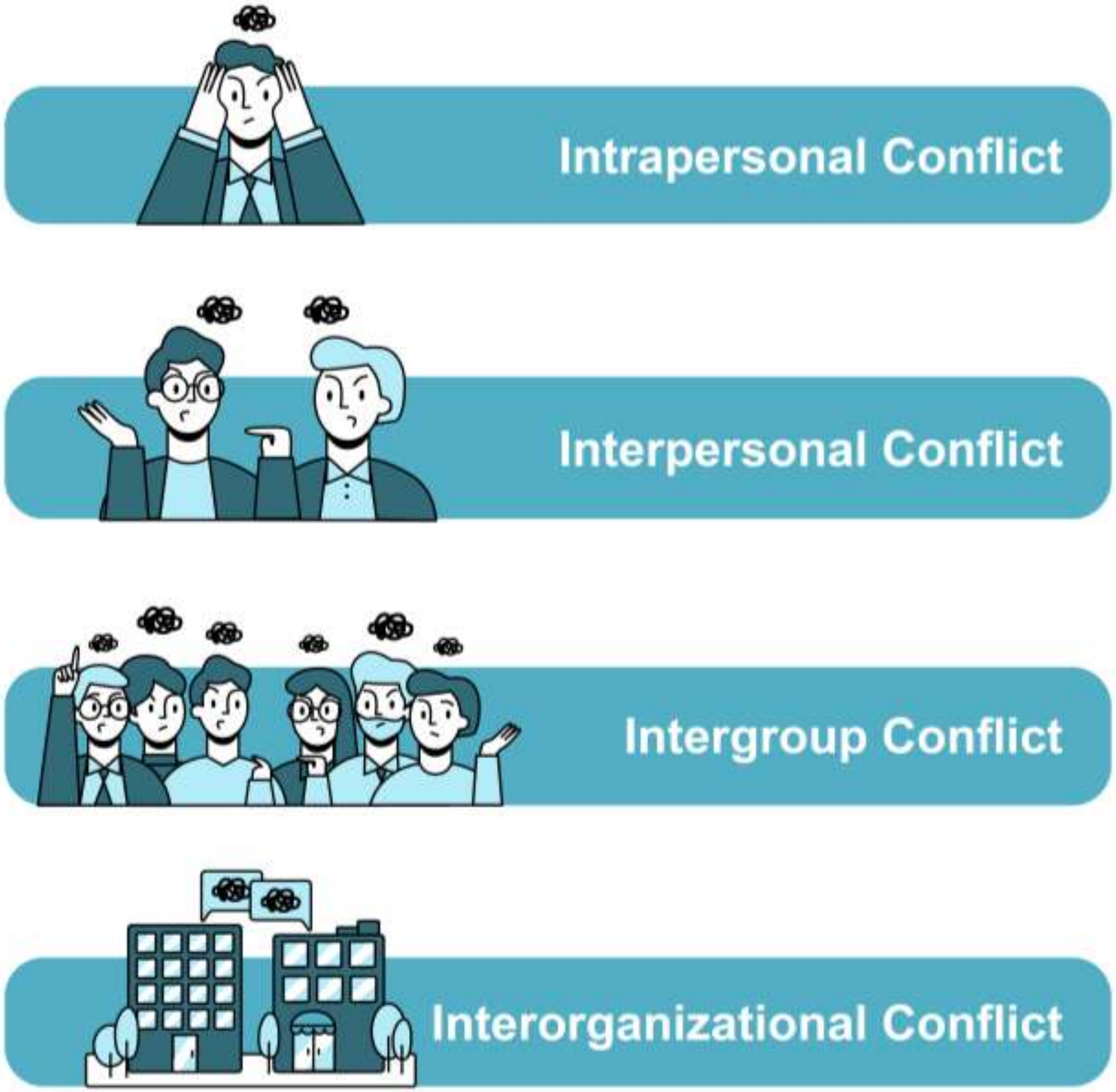
“Conflict is a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something the first party cares about.”

— *Robbins & Judge, Organizational Behavior*

Key aspects:

- It starts with **perception**, not necessarily action
- It involves **interdependence** among people or groups
- It can be **functional** (improves performance) or **dysfunctional** (harms collaboration)

Different Levels of Conflict



Intrapersonal Conflict

Interpersonal Conflict

Intergroup Conflict

Interorganizational Conflict

Types of Conflict

Individual & Cultural Dimensions

Interpersonal
Internal struggle between duties or values.

Cross-Cultural
Arises from communication or value differences across cultures.

Core Academic Types (Jehn, 1995)

Task
Disagreement over goals, ideas, or technical work.

Relationship
Arises from personality clashes or emotions.

Process
Disagreement on methods, timelines, or roles.

Extended Organizational Types

Role
When responsibilities or reporting lines are unclear.

Value
Differing beliefs or ethics.

Inter/Intra-group
Between or within teams/departments.

Organizational
Structural or policy-level disagreement.

Perspectives on Conflict

Traditional View(1930s–1940s)

Taylorism and classical organization theory

- Conflict is **harmful** and should be **avoided**.
- Source of inefficiency, poor morale, and breakdowns.
- Managers focused on **control and suppression**.
- 💡 *Example:* Early industrial-era factories discouraged all forms of disagreement.

Human Relations View (1940s–1970s)

Hawthorne Studies

- Conflict is **natural and inevitable** in groups.
- Can be **managed** but not eliminated.
- Recognition that diversity of thought can cause friction.
- 💡 *Example:* In tech teams, differing opinions are normal and can improve outcomes.

Interactionist View (1970s–present)

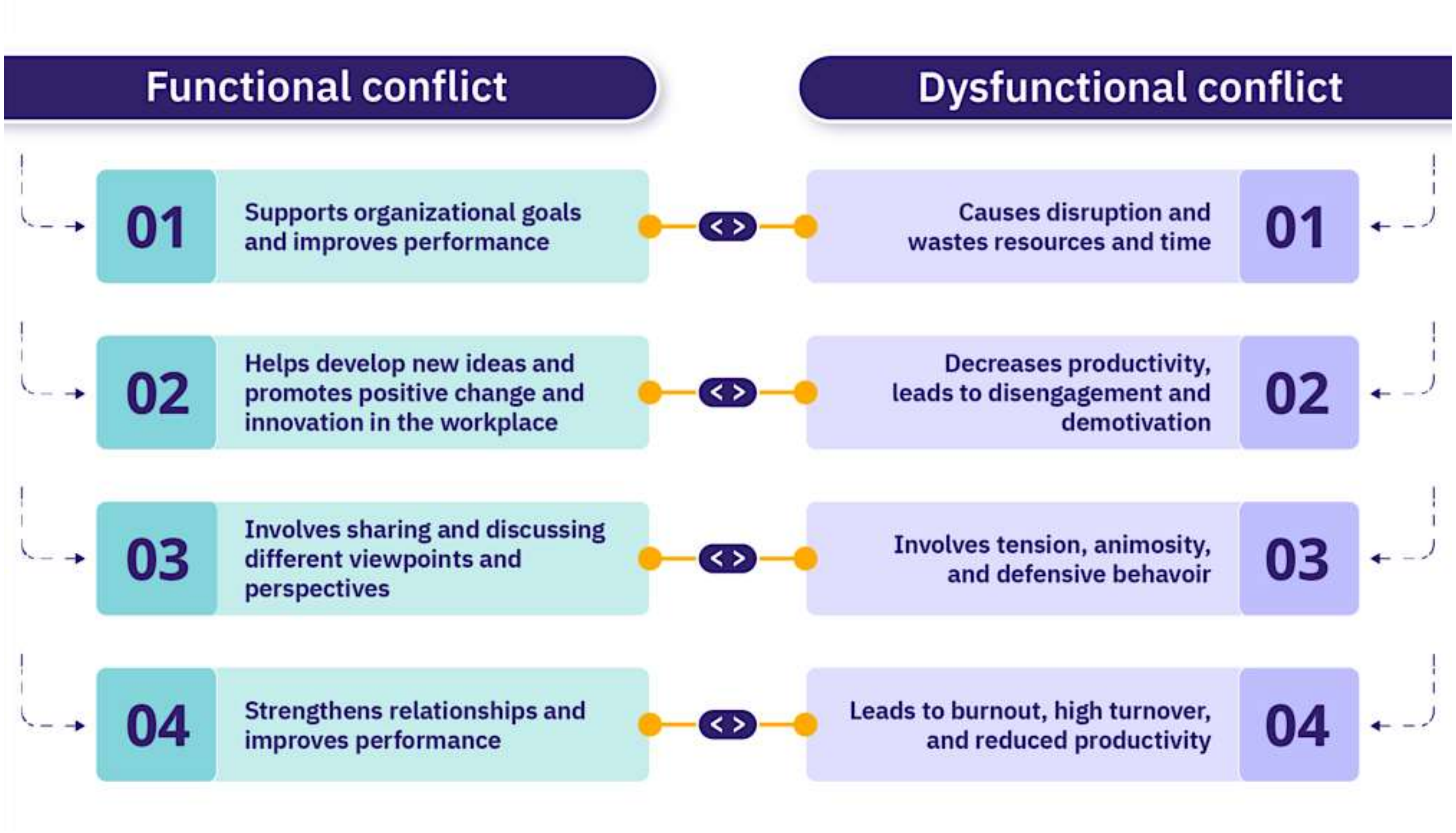
Robbins, 1974; contemporary OB theory

- Conflict can be **positive and necessary** for innovation.
- Encourages **constructive debate** to challenge assumptions.
- Healthy conflict = energy that drives performance.
- 💡 *Example:* Amazon's "Disagree and Commit" culture promotes open debate before decision

Amazon Leadership Principles

- Customer Obsession
- Ownership
- Invent & Simplify
- Are Right, A Lot
- Think Big
- Hire & Develop The Best
- Have Backbone; Disagree & Commit
- Insist On The Highest Standards
- Bias for Action
- Frugality
- Earn Trust
- Dive Deep
- Deliver Results
- Learn & Be Curious
- Strive to be Earth's Best Employer
- Success & Scale Bring Broad Responsibility

Functional vs Dysfunctional Conflict



	Functional conflict	Dysfunctional conflict	
01	Supports organizational goals and improves performance	Causes disruption and wastes resources and time	01
02	Helps develop new ideas and promotes positive change and innovation in the workplace	Decreases productivity, leads to disengagement and demotivation	02
03	Involves sharing and discussing different viewpoints and perspectives	Involves tension, animosity, and defensive behavoir	03
04	Strengthens relationships and improves performance	Leads to burnout, high turnover, and reduced productivity	04

Conflict Management Theories & Frameworks

1. **Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)**
   - Thomas, K.W., & Kilmann, R.H. (1974). *Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument.*
2. **Dual Concern Model (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986)**
   - Pruitt, D.G. & Rubin, J.Z. (1986). *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement.*
3. **Interest-Based Relational (IBR) Approach (Kenneth Thomas, 1976)**
   - Kenneth Thomas (1976). *Conflict and Conflict Management.*
4. **Pondy's Model of Organizational Conflict (1967)**
   - Pondy, L.R. (1967). *Organizational Conflict: Concepts and Models.*

Conflict Management Theories & Frameworks

Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)

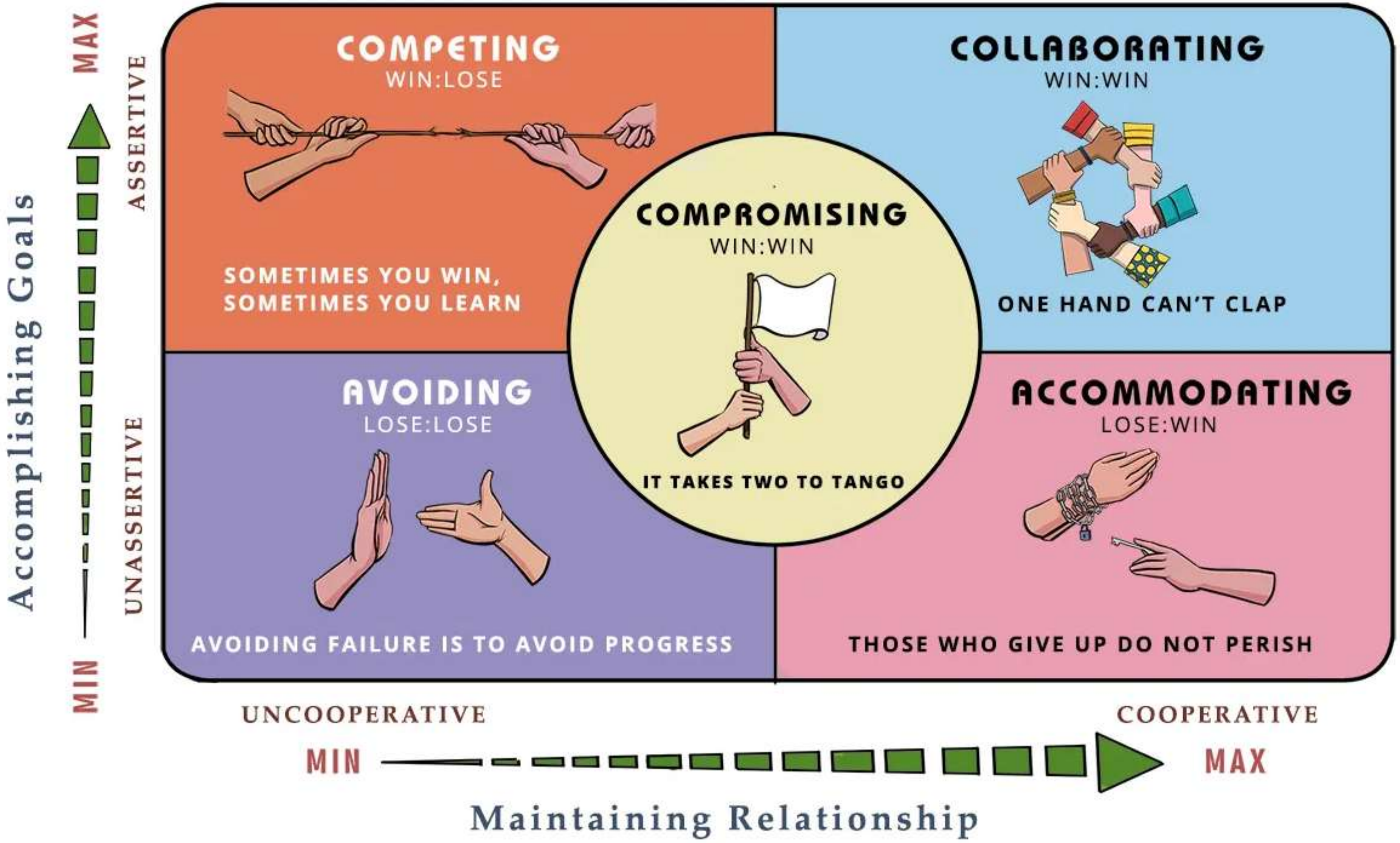
Two behavioral dimensions:

- **Assertiveness** – focus on your own needs/goals
- **Cooperativeness** – focus on others’ needs/goals

Together they create **five conflict-handling styles**

Conflict Management Theories

Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)



COMPETING
WIN:LOSE
SOMETIMES YOU WIN, SOMETIMES YOU LEARN
COLLABORATING
WIN:WIN
ONE HAND CAN'T CLAP
COMPROMISING
WIN:WIN
IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO
AVOIDING
LOSE:LOSE
AVOIDING FAILURE IS TO AVOID PROGRESS
ACCOMMODATING
LOSE:WIN
THOSE WHO GIVE UP DO NOT PERISH
Accomplishing Goals
MIN
MAX
ASSERTIVE
UNASSERTIVE
UNCOOPERATIVE
COOPERATIVE
MIN
MAX
Maintaining Relationship

Conflict Management Theories & Frameworks

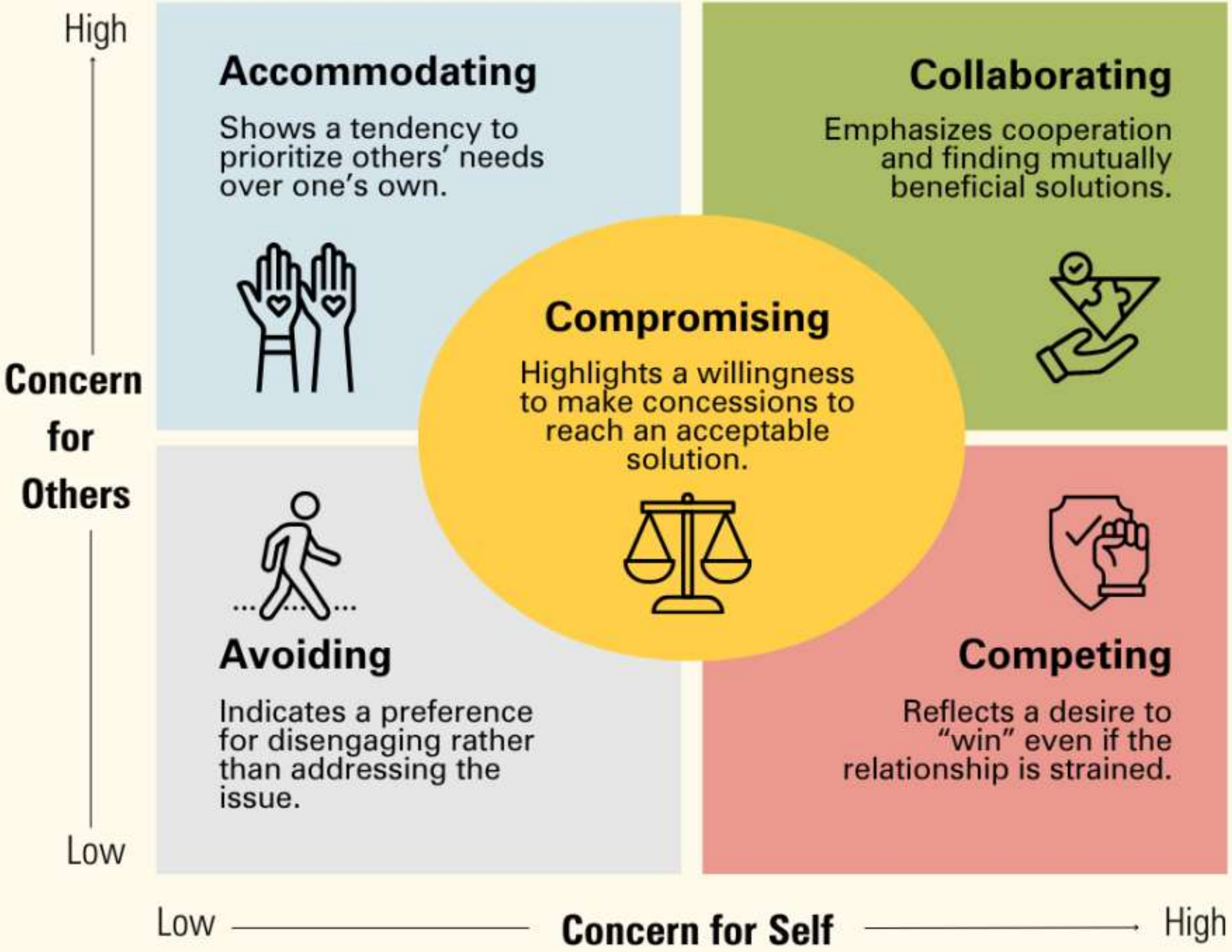
Dual Concern Model (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986)

Focuses on **concern for self** vs. **concern for others.**

- Aligns closely with TKI but used more in negotiation psychology.
- Suggests conflict style depends on the perceived importance of **relationship** and **outcome**

Conflict Management Theories & Frameworks

Dual Concern Model (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986)



Accommodating

Shows a tendency to prioritize others' needs over one's own.

Collaborating

Emphasizes cooperation and finding mutually beneficial solutions.

Compromising

Highlights a willingness to make concessions to reach an acceptable solution.

Avoiding

Indicates a preference for disengaging rather than addressing the issue.

Competing

Reflects a desire to "win" even if the relationship is strained.

Interpersonal Techniques for Conflict Resolution

- LIsten and be understanding
- Manage emotions
- Be polite and gentle
- Avoid negative words
- Use ‘I’ statements

Building peace in complex conflict

- Showing empathy
- Honoring differences
- Apologize sincerely
- Respecting others
- Negotiation and mediation

Structural Techniques for Conflict Resolution

Direct Problem-Solving Approaches

Problem Solving (Collaboration): Open discussion between conflicting parties to identify the root cause and find a mutually beneficial solution.

Compromise: Each party gives up part of its demand to reach a middle-ground agreement.

Avoidance: Ignoring or delaying confrontation to let emotions settle or when the issue is trivial.

Smoothing(Accommodation): Emphasizing shared goals and minimizing areas of disagreement to maintain harmony.

Resource & Structural Adjustments

Expansion of Resources: Provide additional budget, staff, or time to remove resource-based causes of conflict.

Altering the Human Variable: Change team members, provide training, or adjust roles to improve compatibility.

Altering the Structural Variables: Modify reporting lines, workflows, or reward systems that fuel tension.

Communication & Mediation Techniques

Communication: Increase transparency, feedback, and clarity to eliminate misunderstandings.

Bringing in Outsiders (Mediation / Arbitration): Use a neutral third party to mediate or arbitrate differences objectively.

Filtering: The sender manipulates information to make it more acceptable to the receiver.

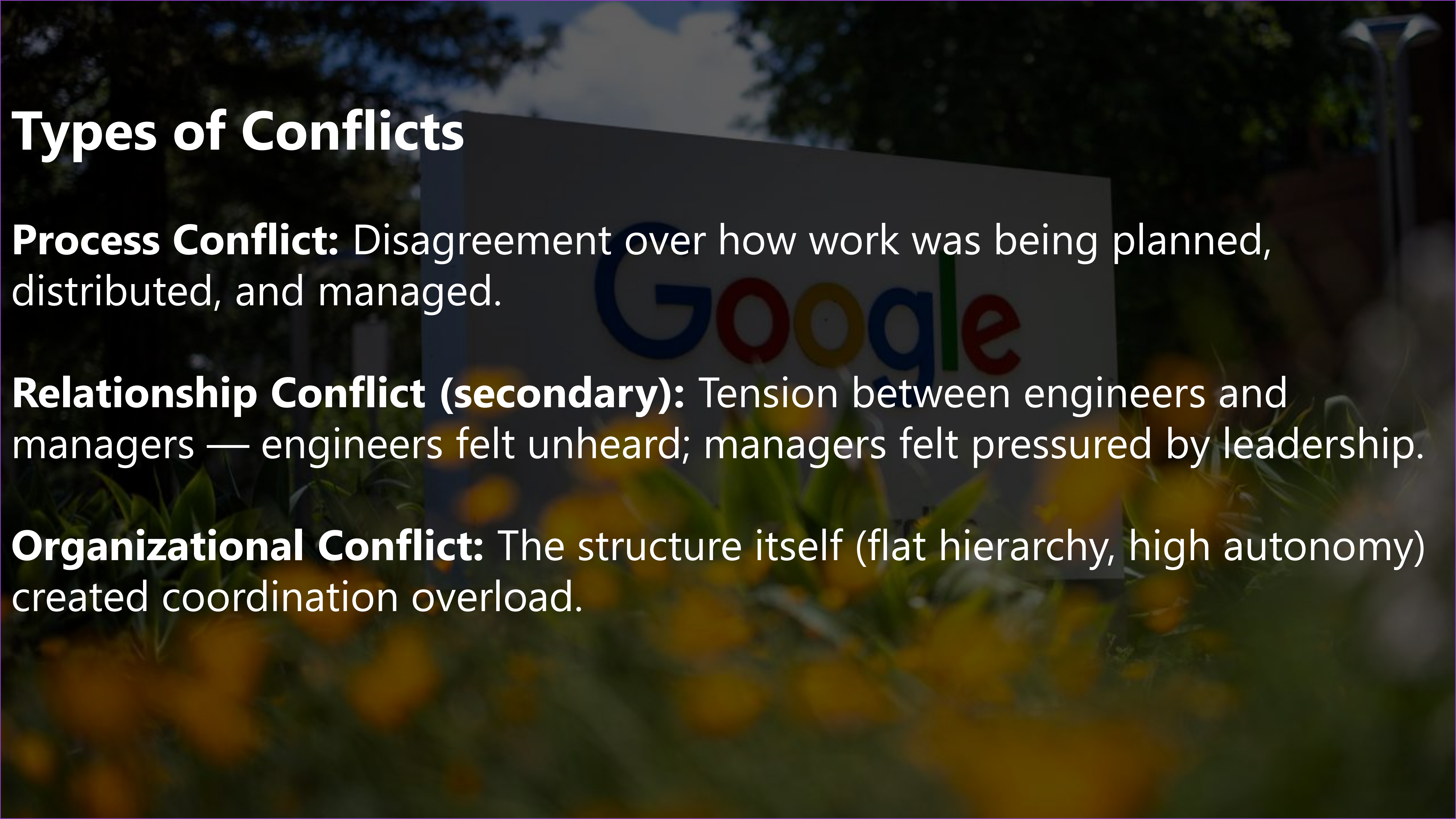
Organizational Restructuring

Restructuring the Organization: Redesign departments, teams, or processes to remove systemic conflict points.

Managerial / Authoritative Actions

Authoritative Command: Manager or leader makes a binding decision to resolve the dispute.

Case Study: “Code Yellow”

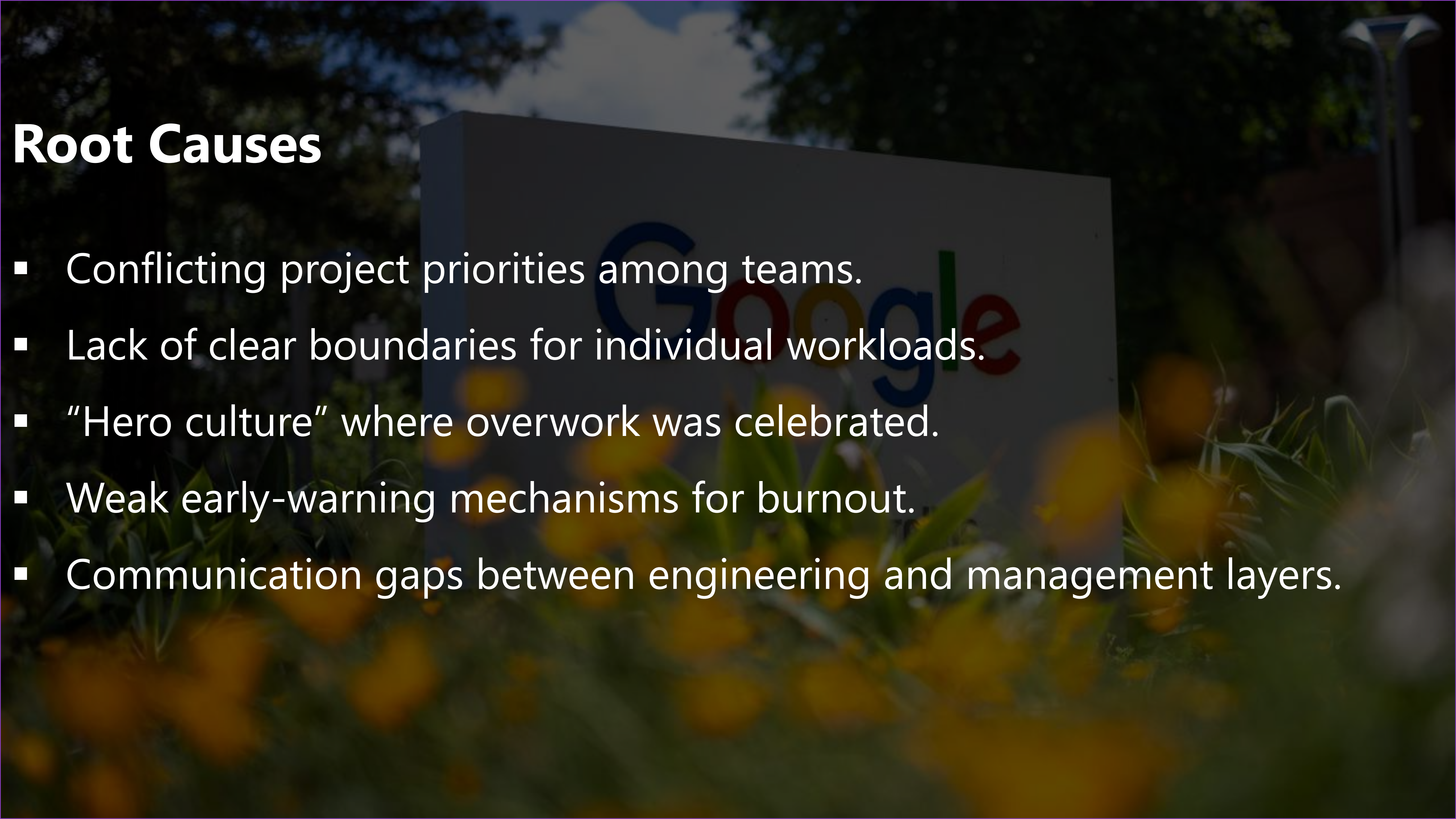


Types of Conflicts

Process Conflict: Disagreement over how work was being planned, distributed, and managed.

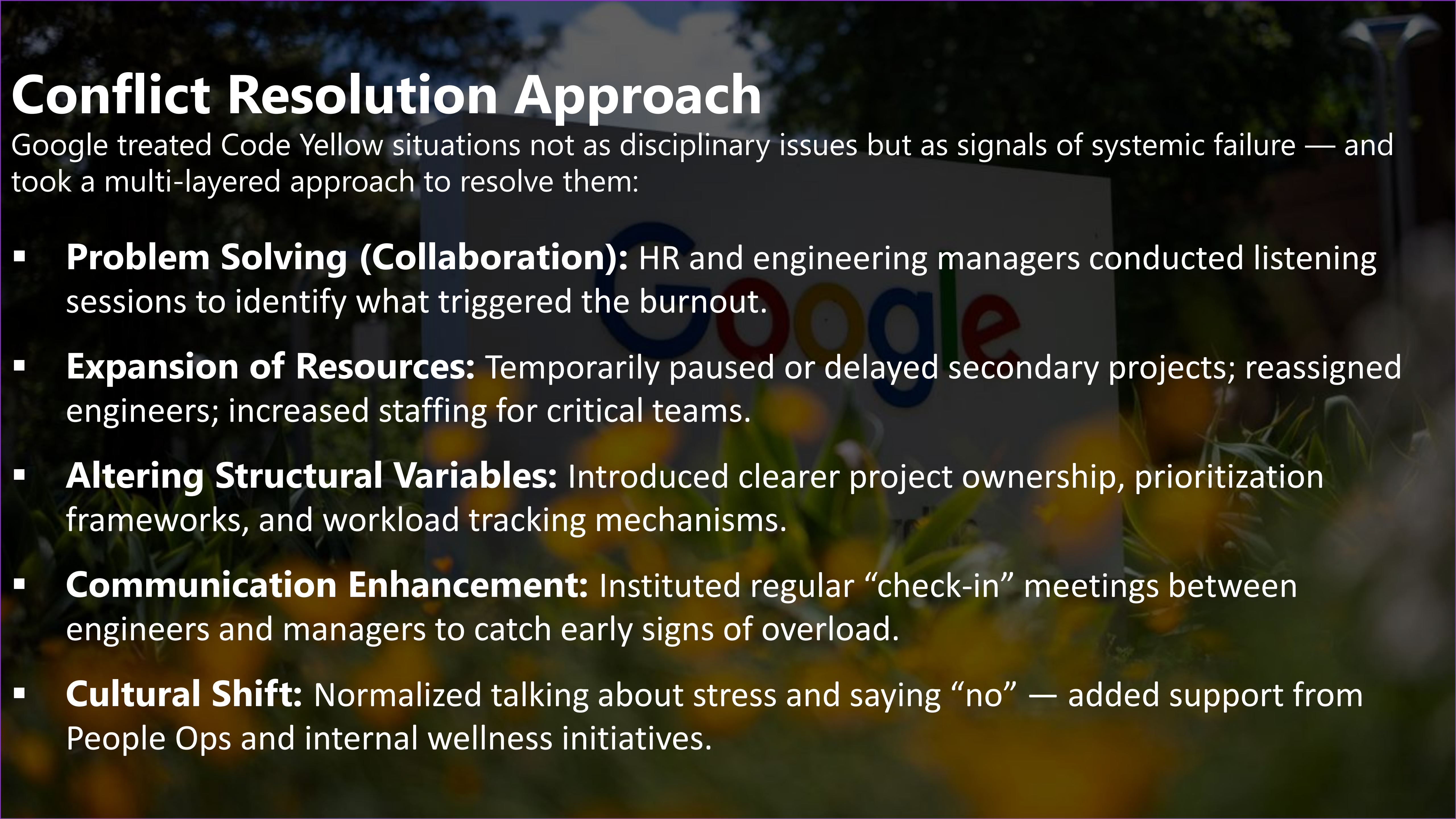
Relationship Conflict (secondary): Tension between engineers and managers — engineers felt unheard; managers felt pressured by leadership.

Organizational Conflict: The structure itself (flat hierarchy, high autonomy) created coordination overload.



Root Causes

- Conflicting project priorities among teams.
- Lack of clear boundaries for individual workloads.
- “Hero culture” where overwork was celebrated.
- Weak early-warning mechanisms for burnout.
- Communication gaps between engineering and management layers.



Conflict Resolution Approach

Google treated Code Yellow situations not as disciplinary issues but as signals of systemic failure — and took a multi-layered approach to resolve them:

- **Problem Solving (Collaboration):** HR and engineering managers conducted listening sessions to identify what triggered the burnout.
- **Expansion of Resources:** Temporarily paused or delayed secondary projects; reassigned engineers; increased staffing for critical teams.
- **Altering Structural Variables:** Introduced clearer project ownership, prioritization frameworks, and workload tracking mechanisms.
- **Communication Enhancement:** Instituted regular “check-in” meetings between engineers and managers to catch early signs of overload.
- **Cultural Shift:** Normalized talking about stress and saying “no” — added support from People Ops and internal wellness initiatives.

What is Negotiation?

“Negotiation is a process in which two or more parties exchange information and influence each other to reach a mutually acceptable agreement.”

— *Lewicki, Barry & Saunders (Negotiation, 2020)*

Core Idea:

Negotiation is **not about winning**, it’s about **aligning interests**.

Why It Matters:

- Resolves disputes constructively
- Strengthens relationships
- Creates opportunities from disagreements
- Essential for professional success — from job offers to project contracts

Staking out the Bargaining Zone

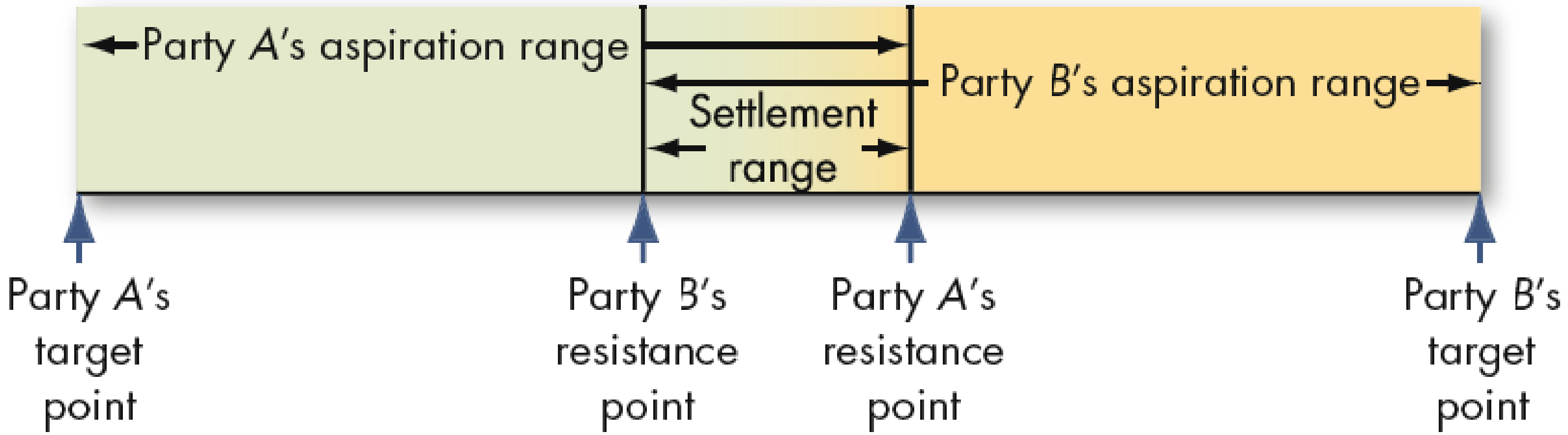
Distributive Bargaining

Negotiation that seeks to divide up a fixed number of resources; a win-lose situation.

Integrative Bargaining

Negotiation that seeks one or more settlements that can create a win-win solution.

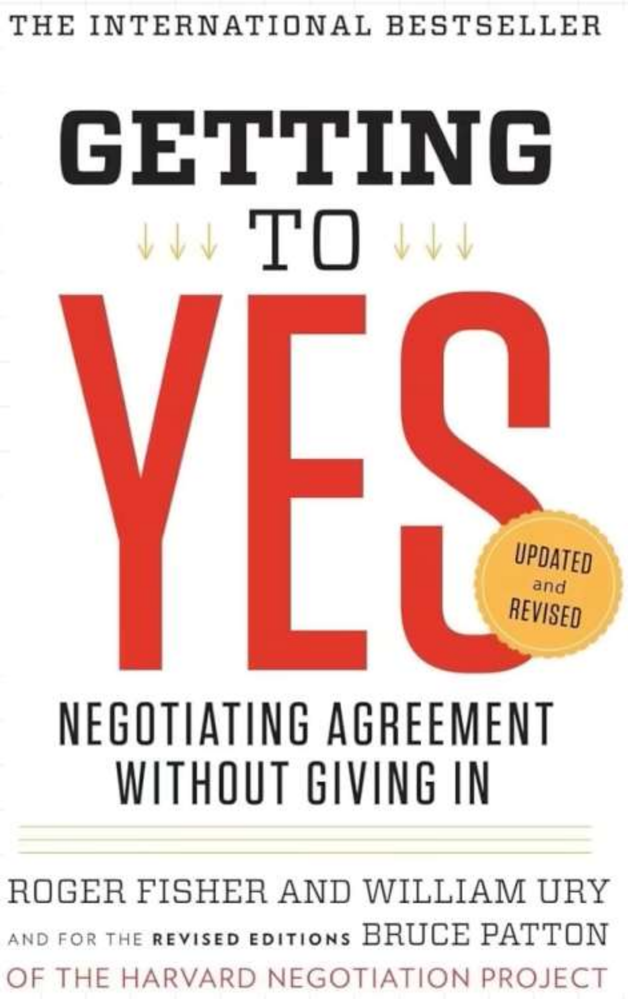
Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA)


Party A's aspiration range
Party B's aspiration range
Settlement range
Party A's target point
Party B's resistance point
Party A's resistance point
Party B's target point

Willium Ury

PROGRAM ON NEGOTIATION
HARVARD LAW SCHOOL

Roger Fisher



THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

GETTING

TO

YES

UPDATED and REVISED

NEGOTIATING AGREEMENT WITHOUT GIVING IN

ROGER FISHER AND WILLIAM URY
AND FOR THE REVISED EDITIONS BRUCE PATTON
OF THE HARVARD NEGOTIATION PROJECT

Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In Paperback – May 3, 2011

by Roger Fisher (Author), William L. Ury (Author), Bruce Patton (Author)

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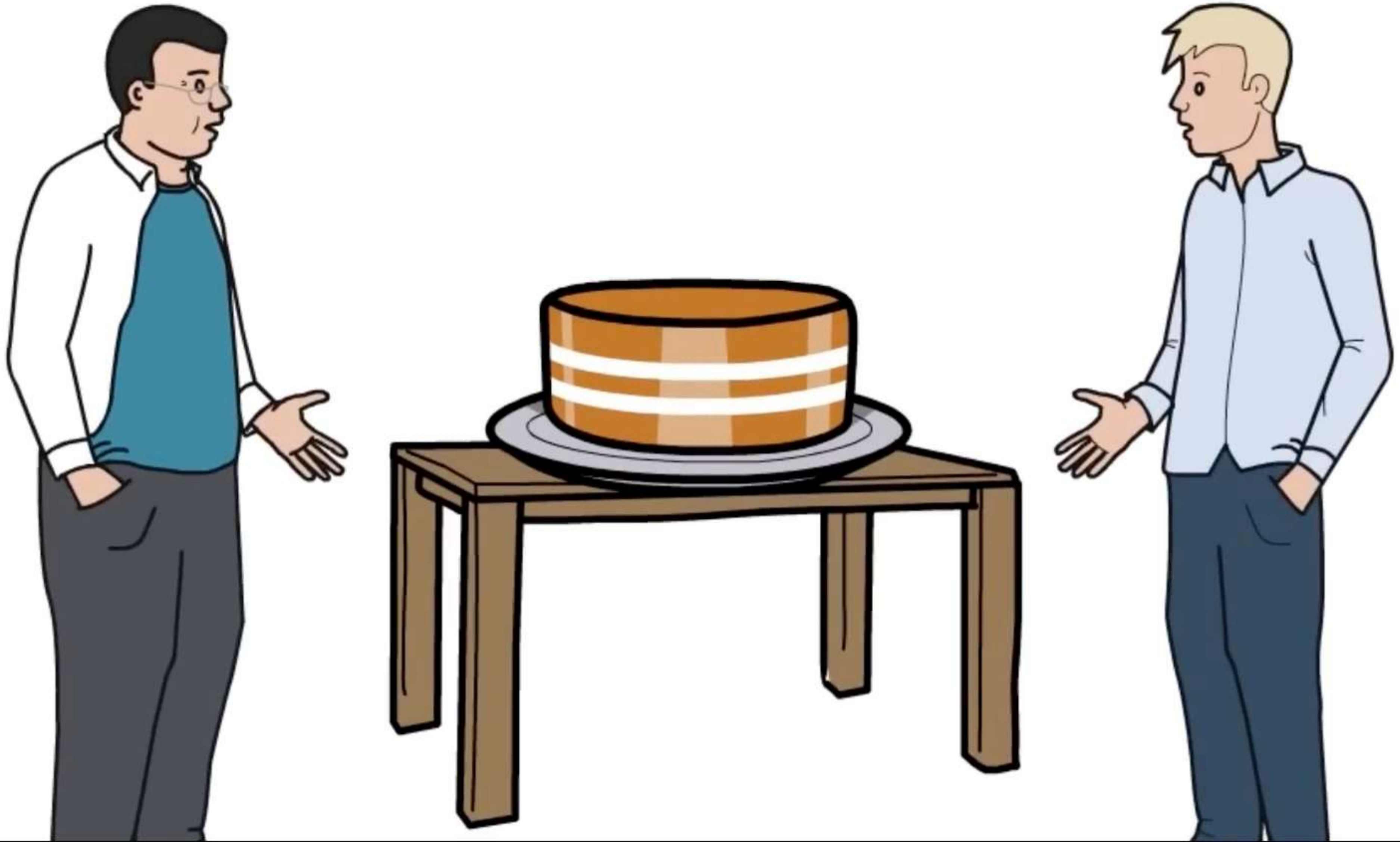
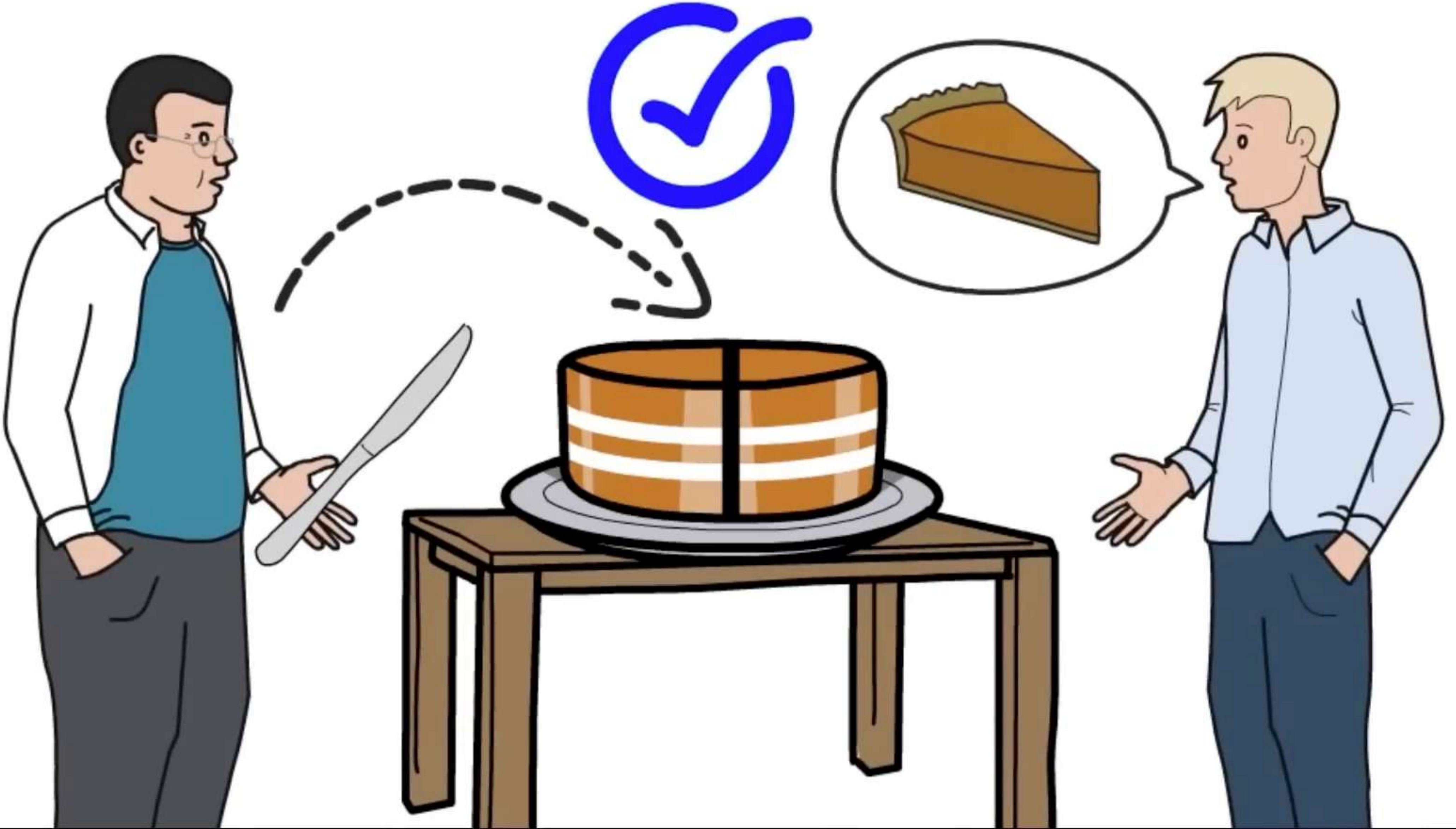
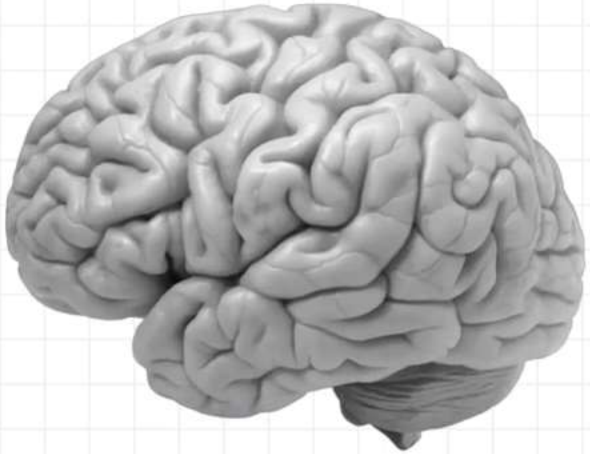
What do you do?





Four Step Framework To Become a Smarter Negotiator



Step 1
Focus on Interests, Not Positions

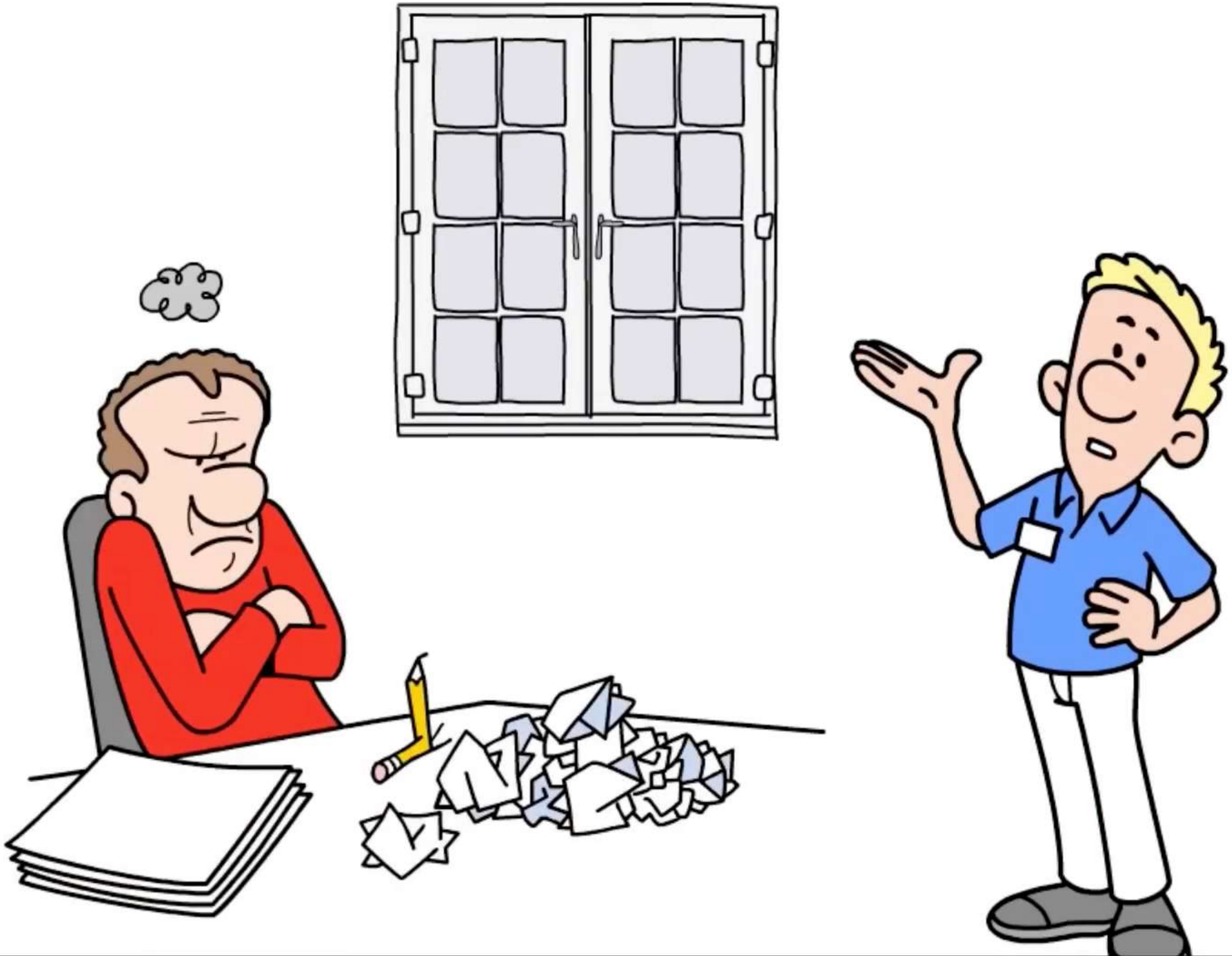
Step 2
Use Fair Standards

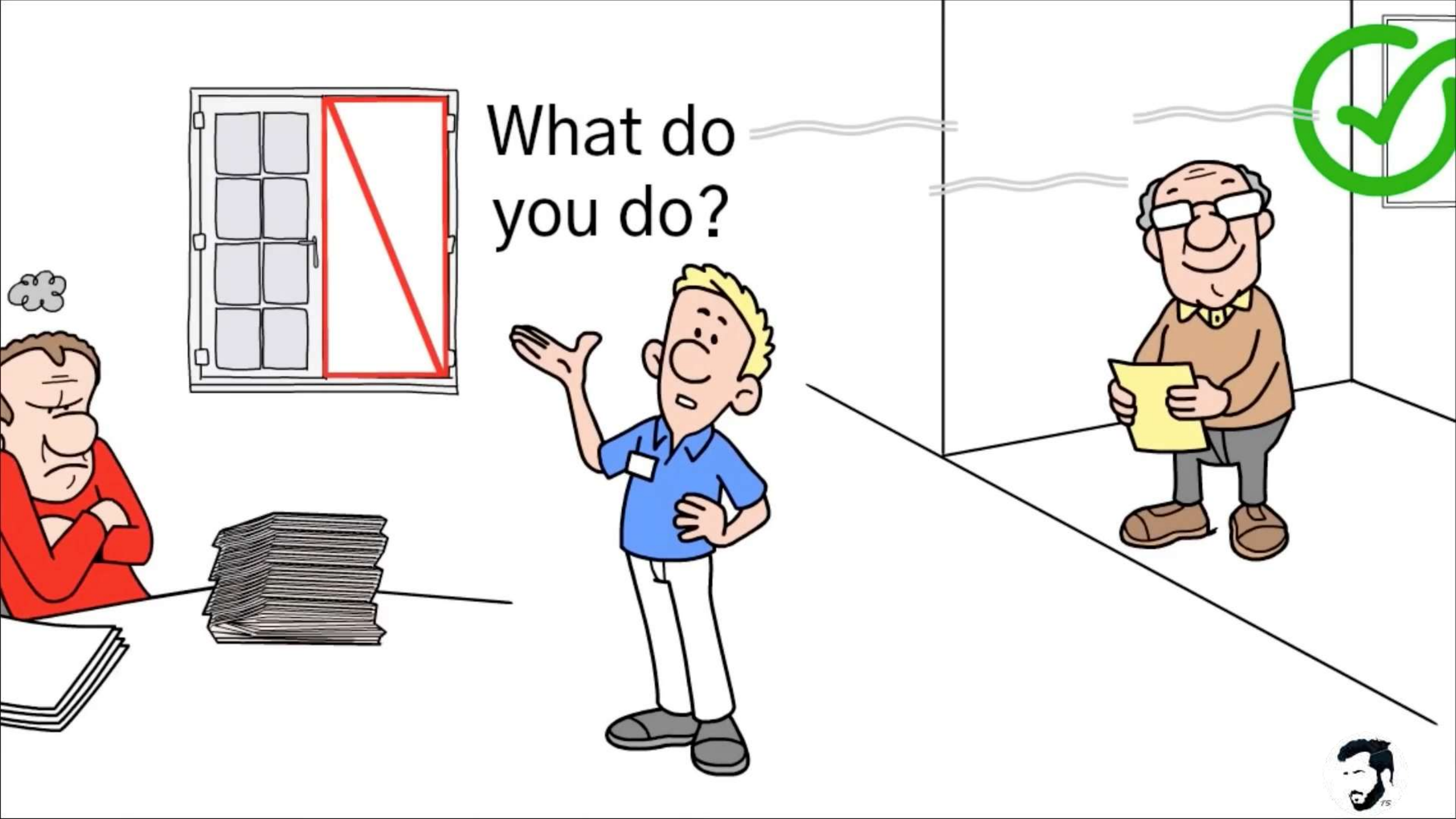
Step 3
Invent Options for Mutual Gain

Step 4
Separate the People from the Problem

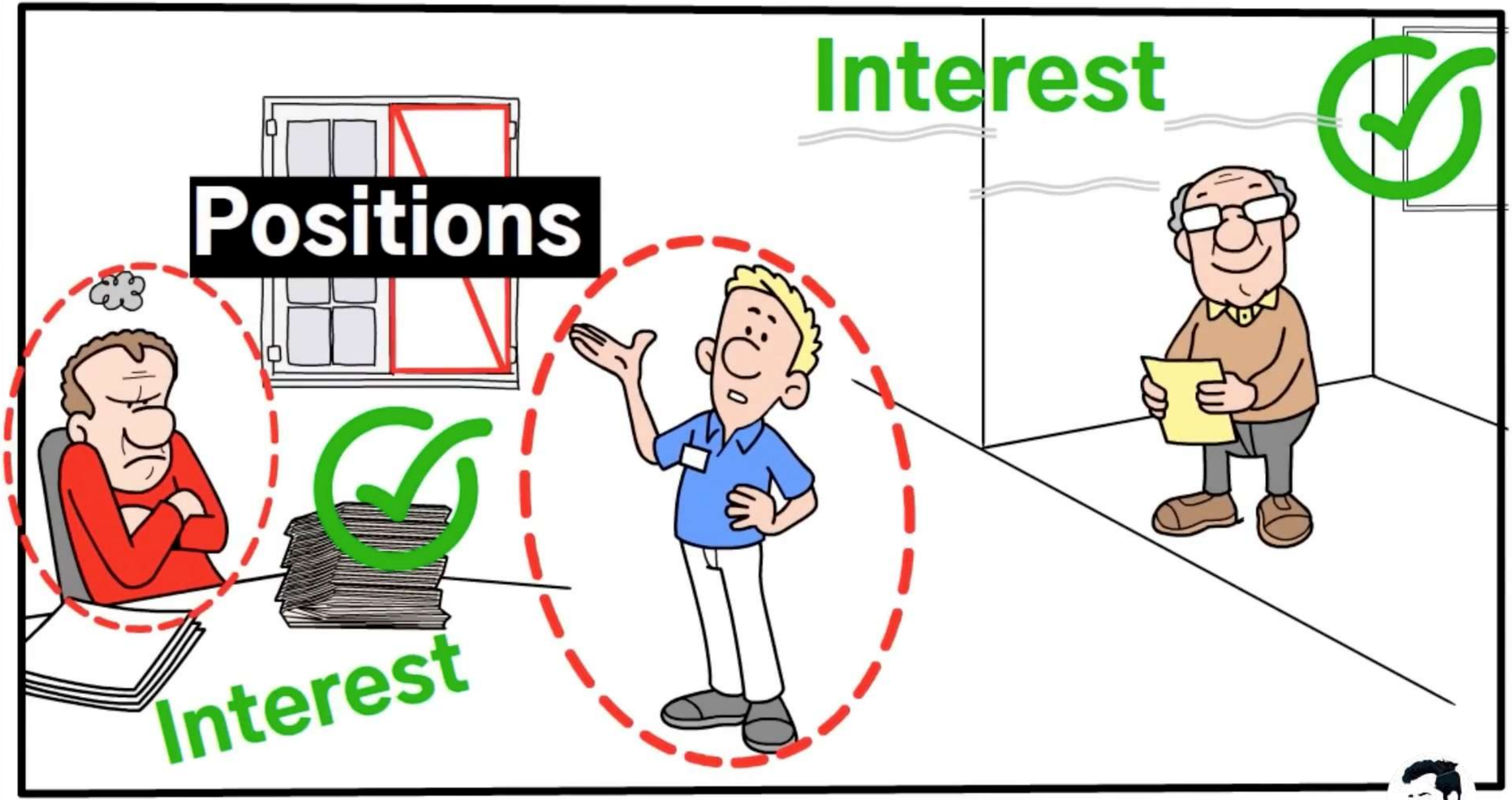
STEP #1

Focus on Interests, Not Positions





What do you do?


Interest
Positions
Interest

STEP #2

Use Fair Standards

Objective Criteria

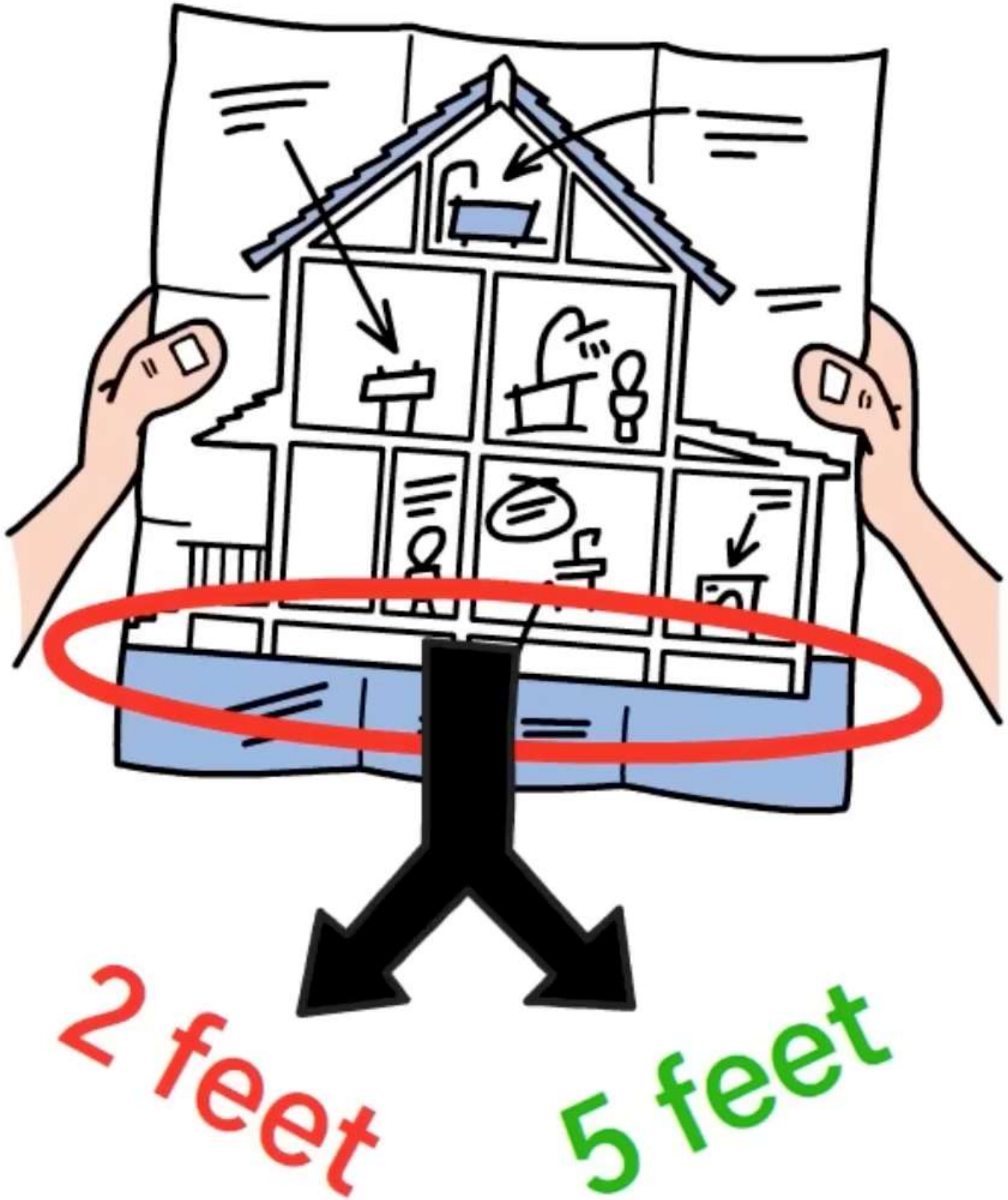
Unbiased rules that don’t depend on personal opinions

Legal Requirements

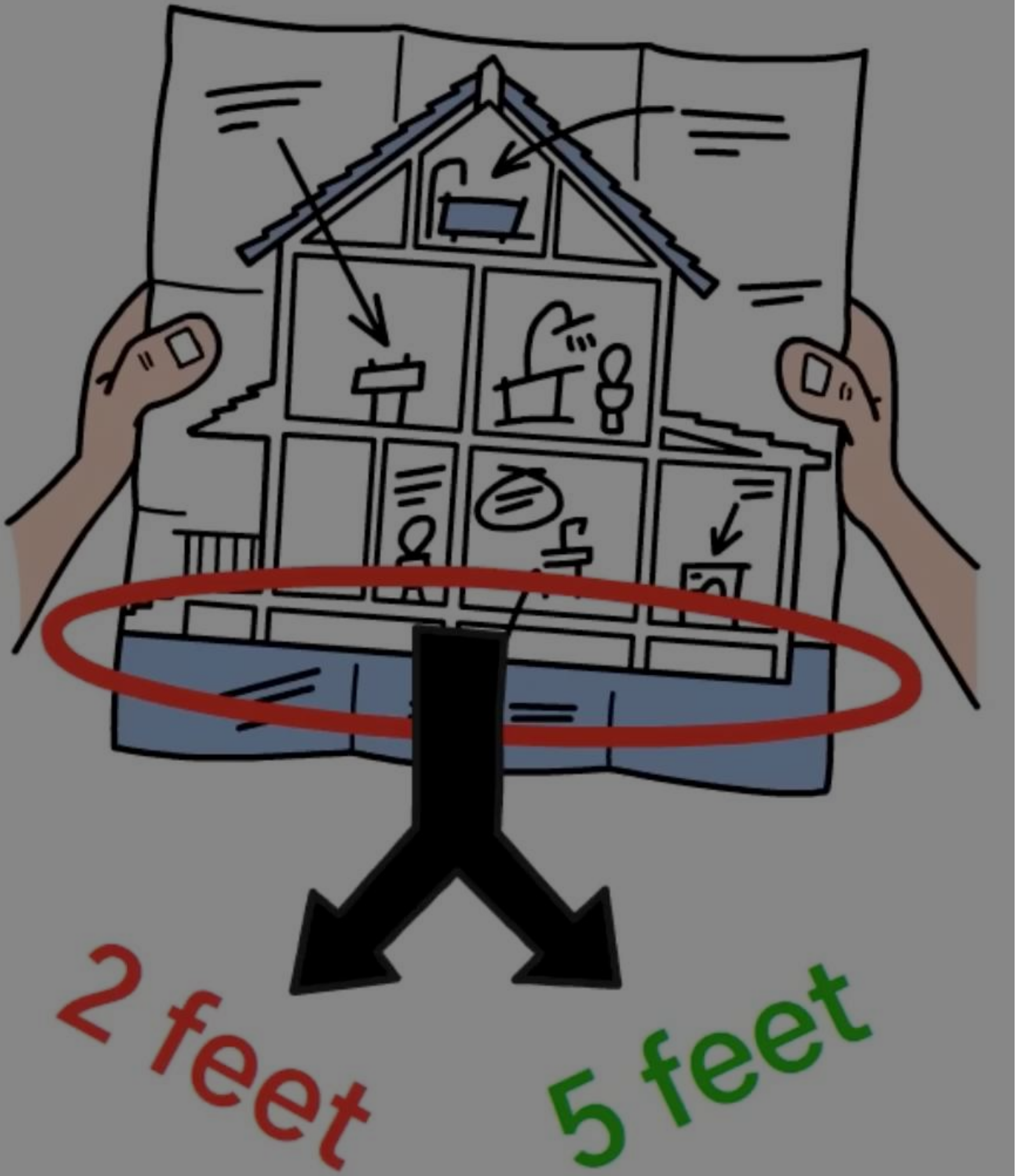
Standard Market Prices

COMPLIANCE

Expert Opinion/ Fair Standards


2 feet
5 feet

Where do
you suggest we
look for standards
to resolve this
question?



How to Apply This in Negotiation:

Prepare Standards in Advance – Know what fair benchmarks or data exist before you start.

Propose Standards Jointly – Ask the other side what *they* think is fair — build agreement around shared references.

Phrase Requests Neutrally – Use phrases like "Let's check the rules" or "What's the market average?" instead of "You should agree with me."

Be Open to Better Standards – If their criteria are more accurate or relevant, accept them — fairness builds credibility.

Document the Agreed Criteria – Helps maintain clarity and prevent future disputes.

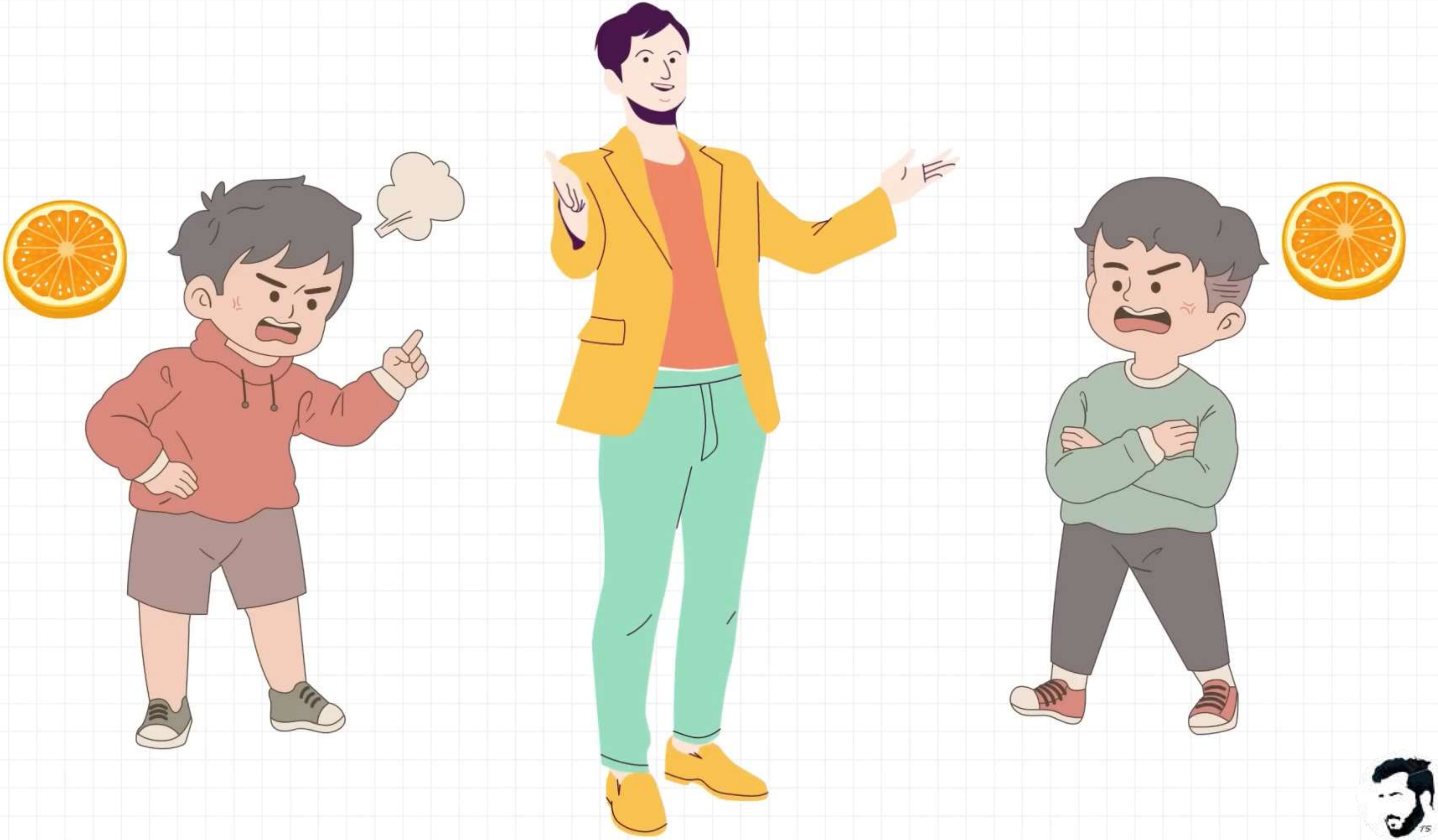
Case Study: Saudi Client Data SIM Issue

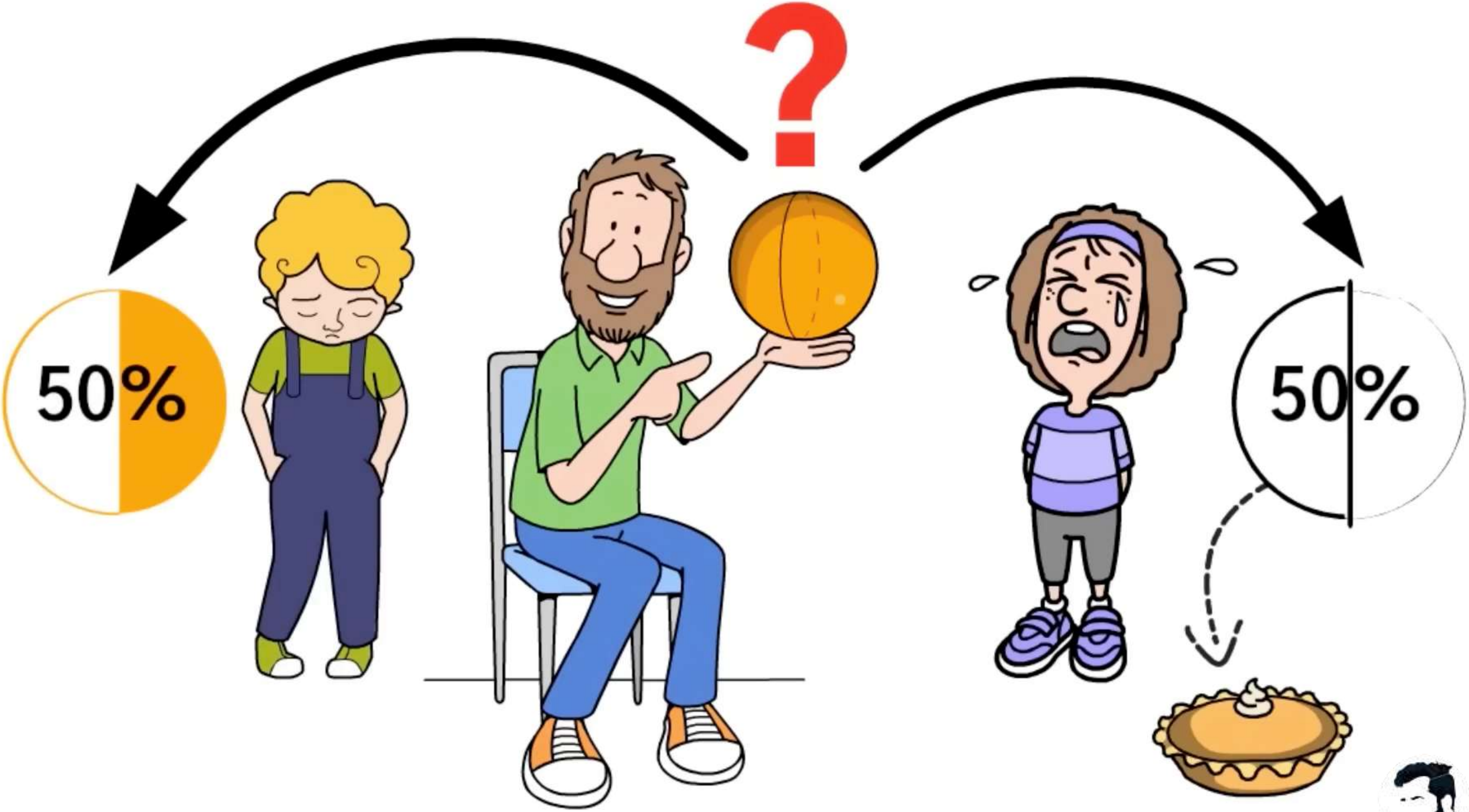
Step #3

Invent Options for Mutual Gain

How to Invent Options?

Brainstorm Freely – Get all sides together and list every possible idea without judging.
Separate Idea Creation from Evaluation – First generate ideas, then later analyze them.
Change the Environment – Make it informal and relaxed to spark creativity.
Define the Shared Goal – Keep focus on solving the *problem*, not defeating the other side.
Improve Promising Ideas – Once you shortlist options, refine them collaboratively.

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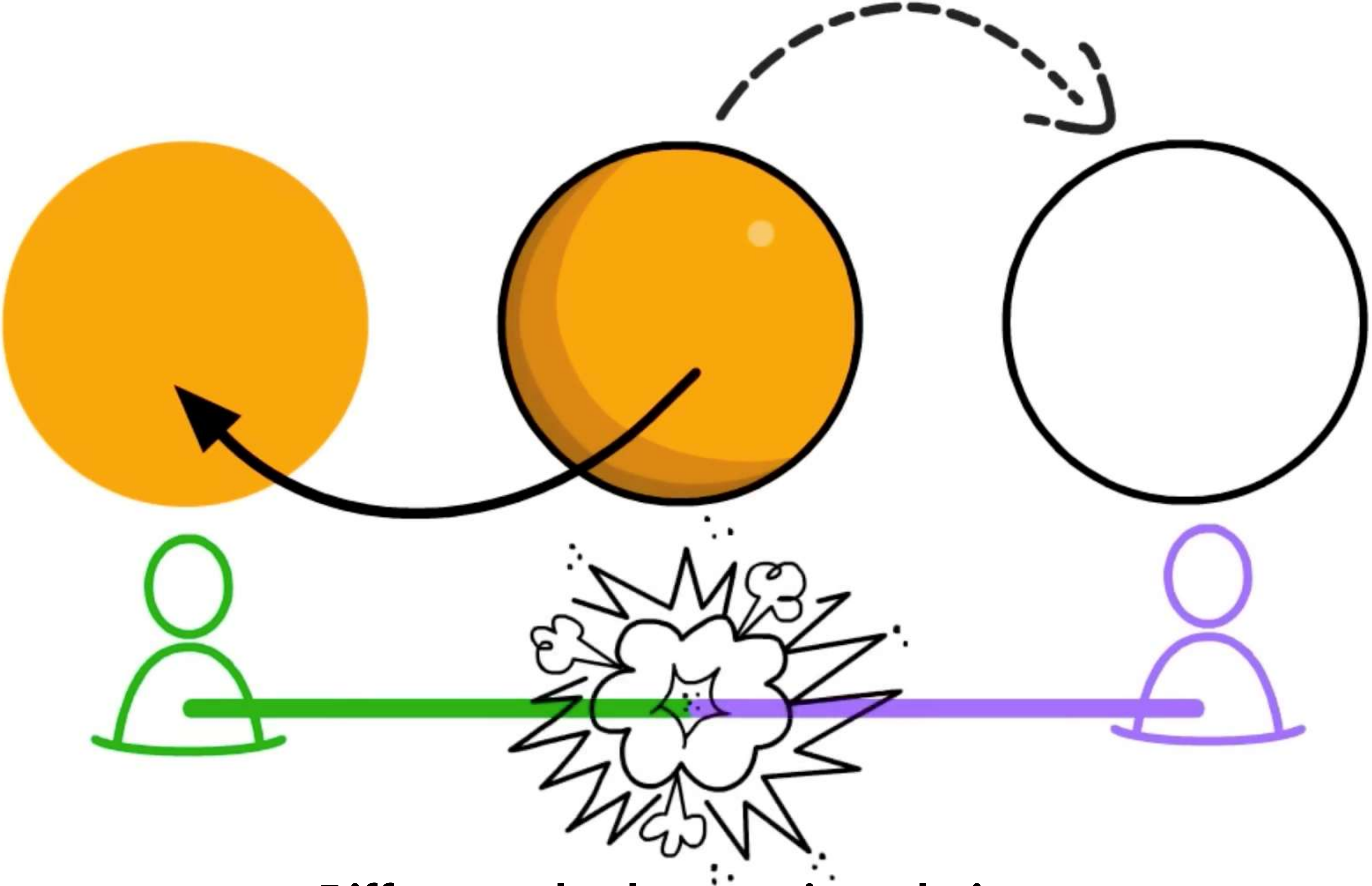
?
50%



Differences lead to creative solutions

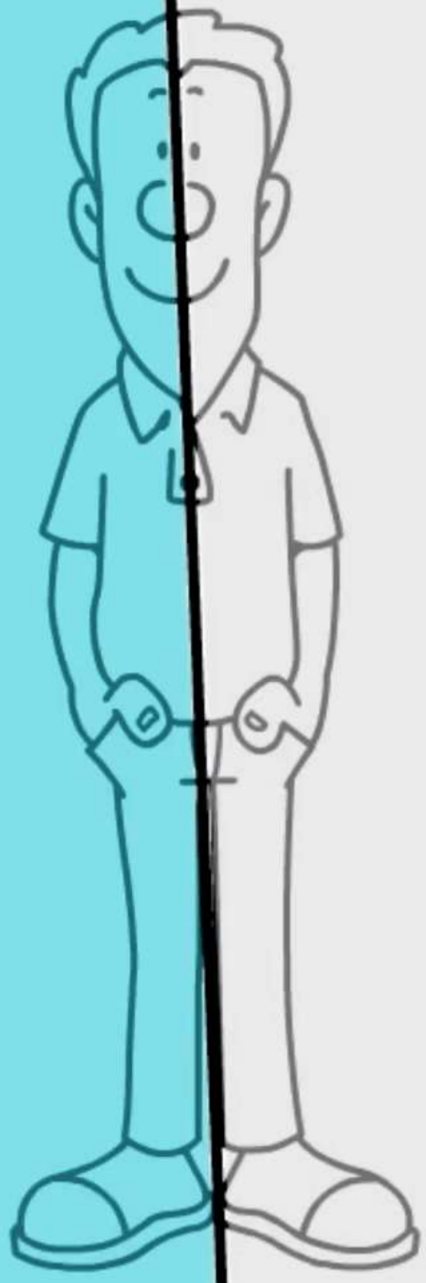
STEP #4

Separate the People from the Problem

Person

1st

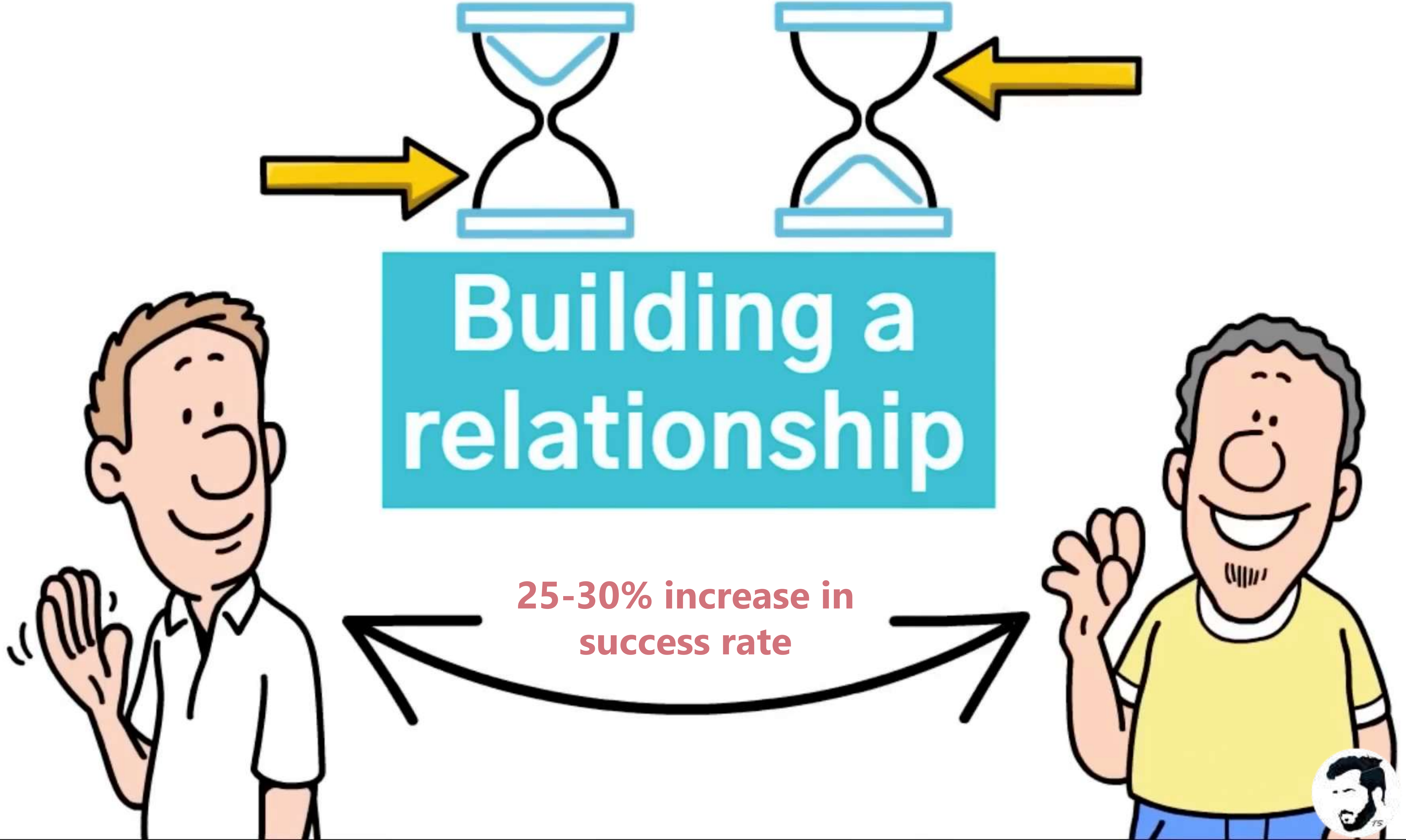
Your goal is to be soft on the people



Problem

2nd

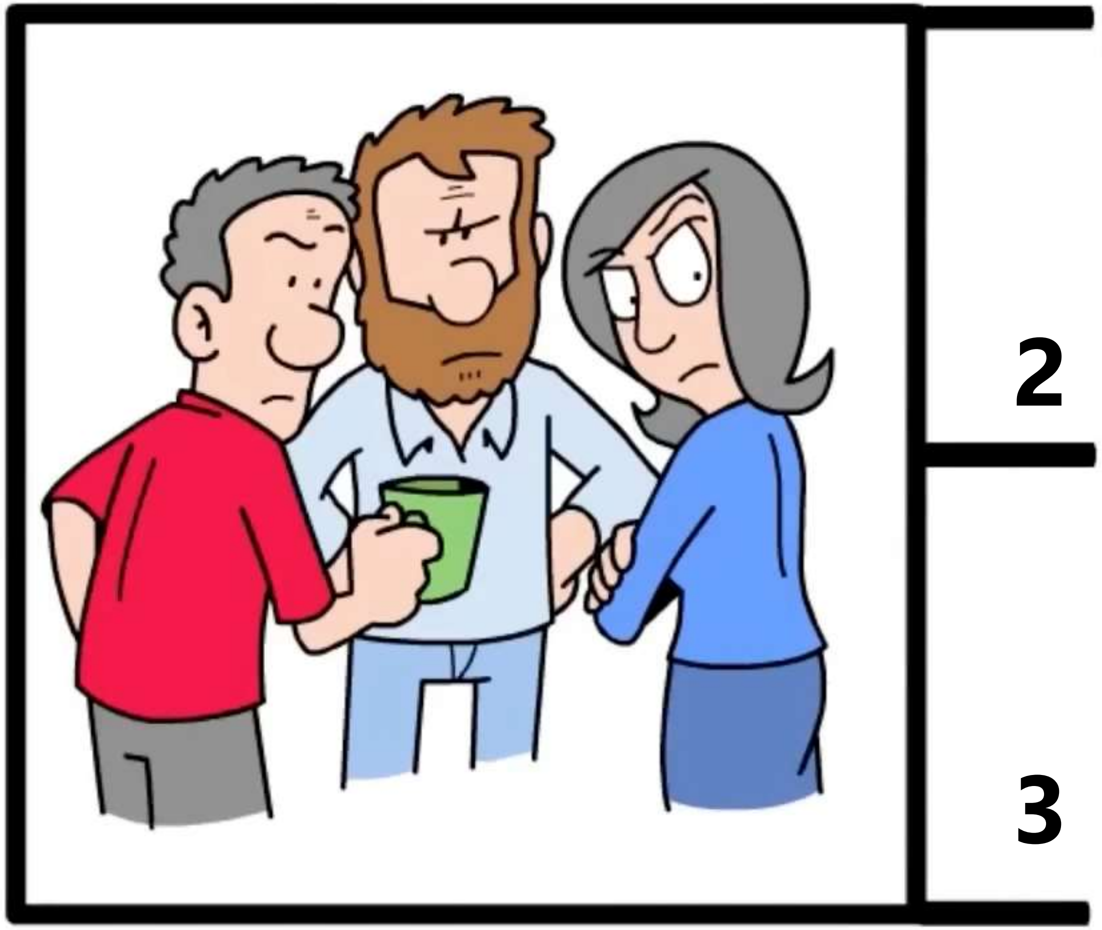
Your goal is to be hard on the problem



Building a relationship

25-30% increase in success rate

What if the other side isn’t



playing by fair rules?

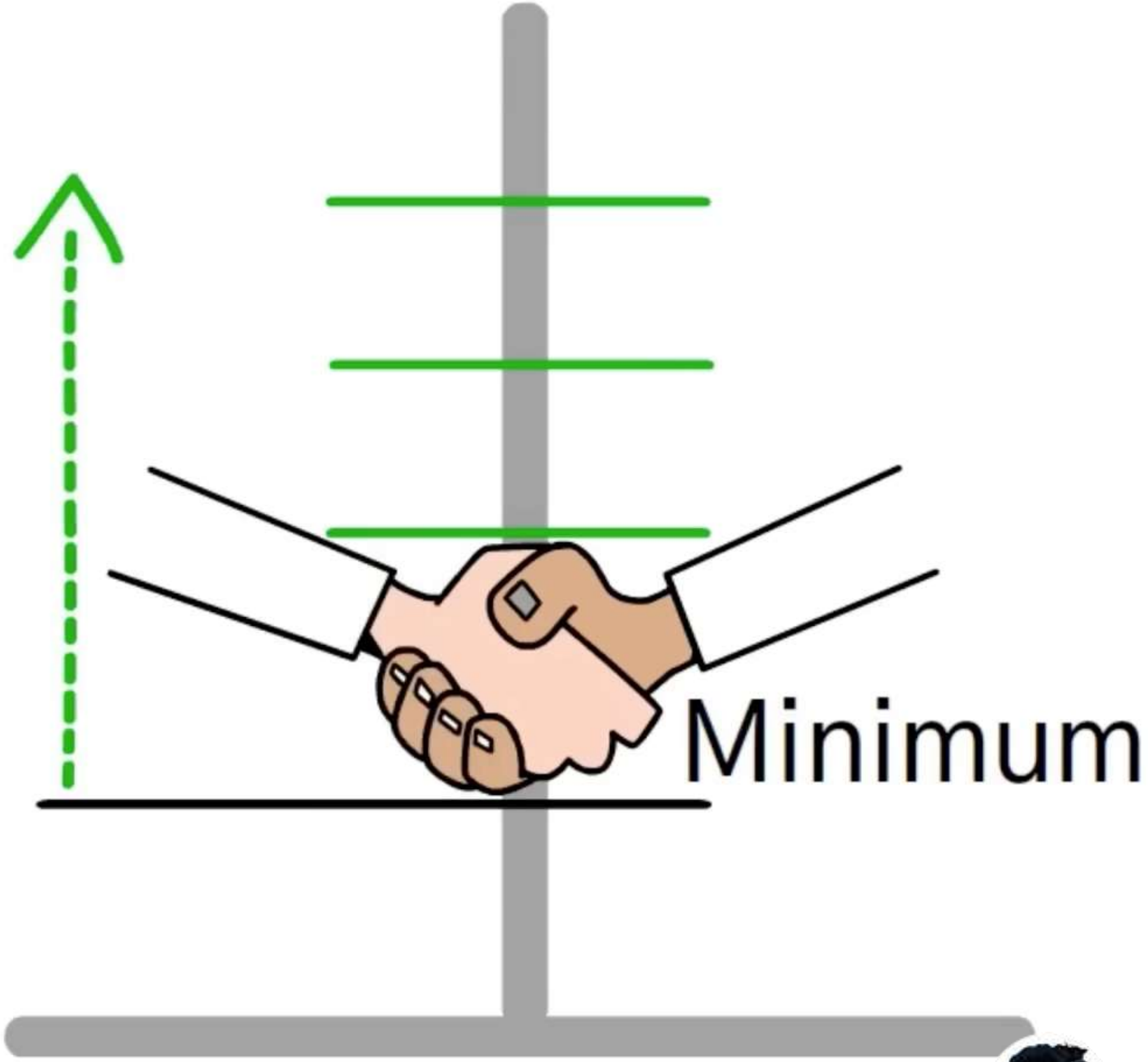
1. Use Dirty Tactics
2. Are More Powerful
3. Attack Me Personally

Solution to Dirty Tactics

People lie and use various **pressure tactics.**

Recognizing these tricks often **neutralizes** them.

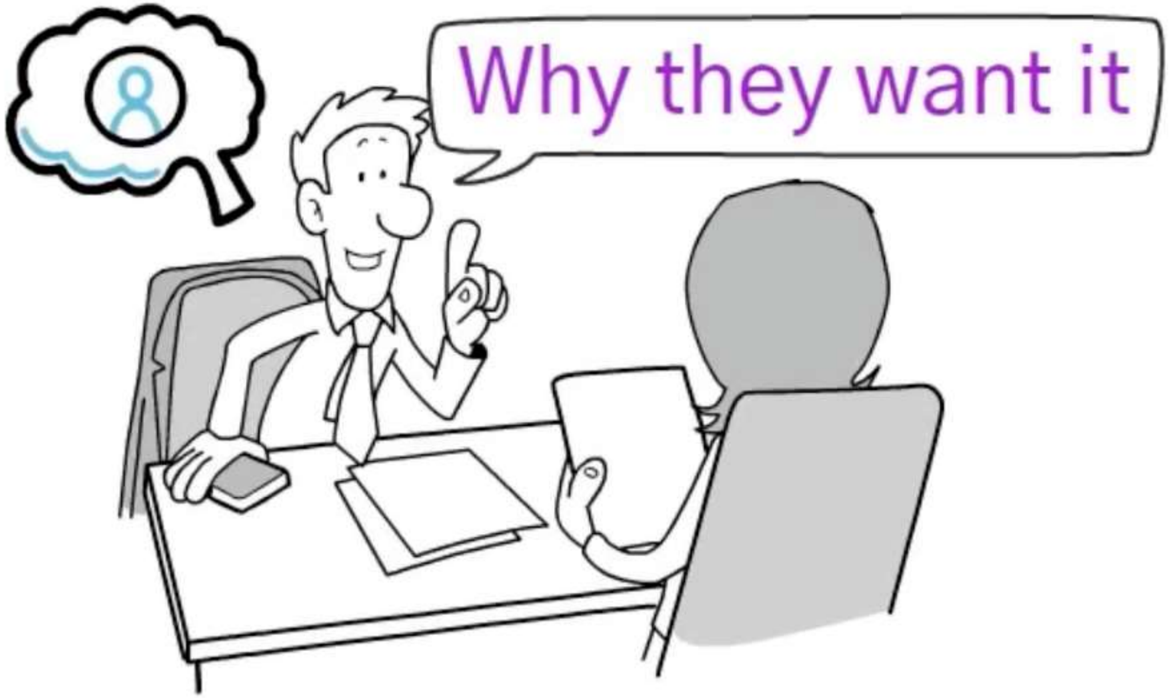
Best
Alternative
To a
Negotiated
Agreement



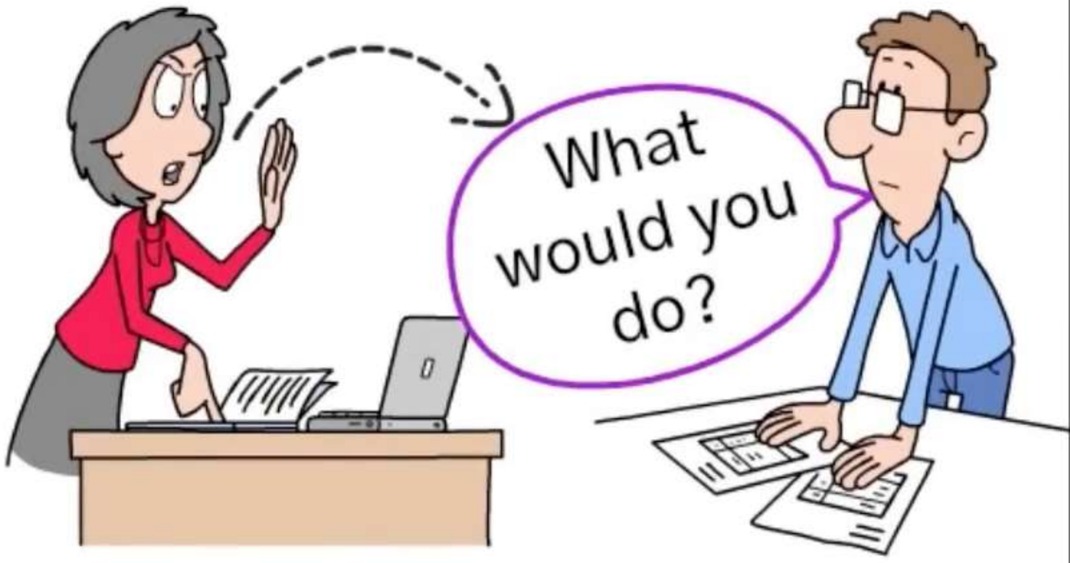
Solution to "Power"

Solution to “Personal Attacks”

1. Look behind their position

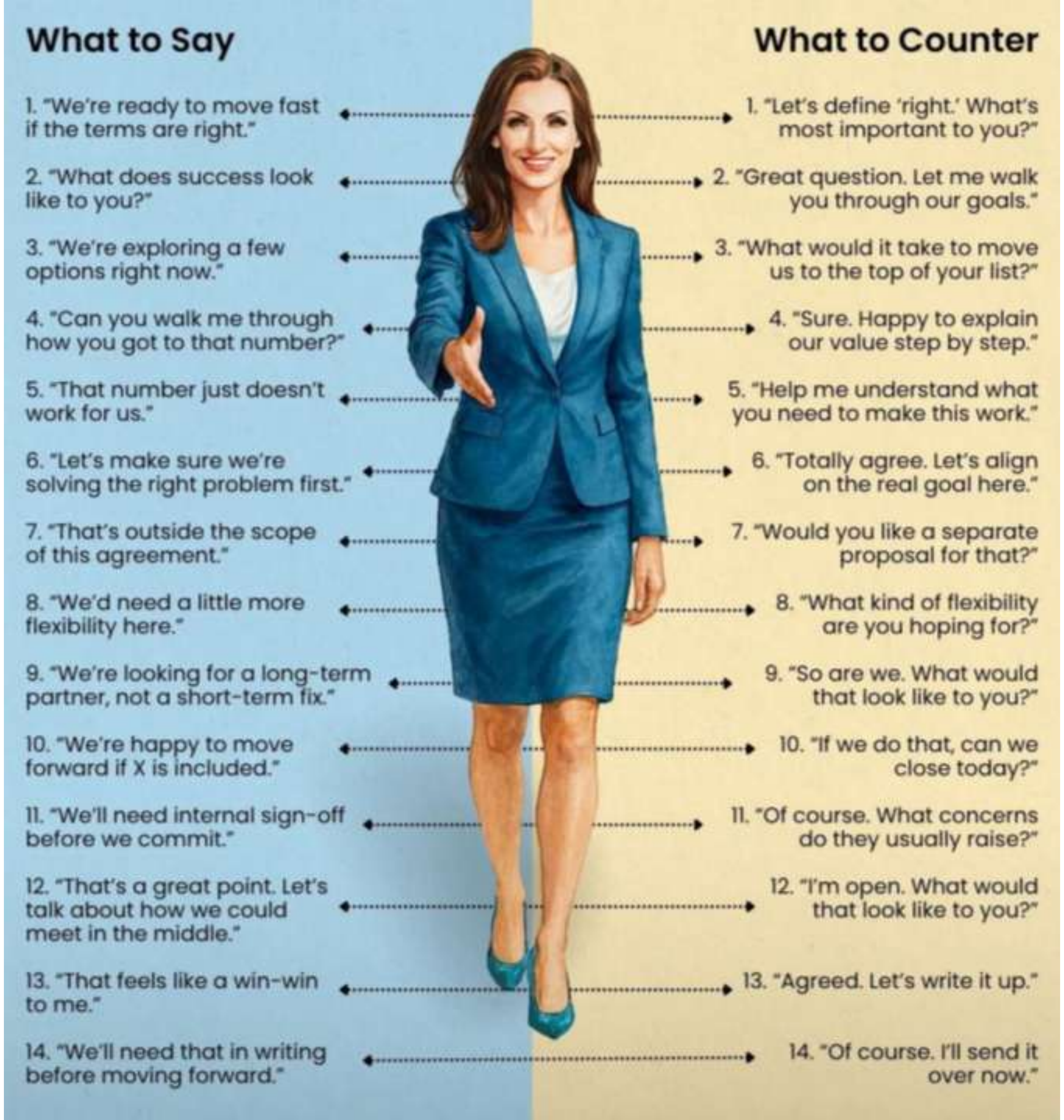

Why they want it

2. Ask for their advice


What would you do?

3. Invite criticism

Negotiation Jujitsu



What to Say	What to Counter
1. "We're ready to move fast if the terms are right."	1. "Let's define 'right.' What's most important to you?"
2. "What does success look like to you?"	2. "Great question. Let me walk you through our goals."
3. "We're exploring a few options right now."	3. "What would it take to move us to the top of your list?"
4. "Can you walk me through how you got to that number?"	4. "Sure. Happy to explain our value step by step."
5. "That number just doesn't work for us."	5. "Help me understand what you need to make this work."
6. "Let's make sure we're solving the right problem first."	6. "Totally agree. Let's align on the real goal here."
7. "That's outside the scope of this agreement."	7. "Would you like a separate proposal for that?"
8. "We'd need a little more flexibility here."	8. "What kind of flexibility are you hoping for?"
9. "We're looking for a long-term partner, not a short-term fix."	9. "So are we. What would that look like to you?"
10. "We're happy to move forward if X is included."	10. "If we do that, can we close today?"
11. "We'll need internal sign-off before we commit."	11. "Of course. What concerns do they usually raise?"
12. "That's a great point. Let's talk about how we could meet in the middle."	12. "I'm open. What would that look like to you?"
13. "That feels like a win-win to me."	13. "Agreed. Let's write it up."
14. "We'll need that in writing before moving forward."	14. "Of course. I'll send it over now."

Negotiation Techniques (Extended)

Prepare, Prepare, Prepare
Entering a negotiation without preparation is already a loss.
Be clear about what *you* want, understand the other side's goals, and gather all relevant data or expert input before you begin.

Pay Attention to Timing
Even strong arguments fail if made at the wrong time.
Read the situation—sometimes waiting, or choosing the right moment after a success, gives you better leverage.

Leave Behind Your Ego
Great negotiators care more about results than recognition.
Focus on solving the problem, not on proving you're right; make the other party feel the agreement was their idea.

Ramp Up Your Listening Skills
Listening is your most powerful tool.
Let the other side speak first, ask thoughtful questions, and use silence to uncover their real motivations and limits.

If You Don't Ask, You Don't Get
Set your highest justifiable target and don't be afraid to ask for it.
Aim high but stay credible—assertive opening positions often lead to better outcomes.

Anticipate Compromise
Negotiation is rarely all-or-nothing.
Plan your concessions ahead of time and never accept the first offer—every "no" opens room for creativity.

Offer and Expect Commitment
Trust holds deals together.
Demonstrate reliability through your words and actions, and ensure the other party commits equally to what's agreed.

Don't Absorb Their Problems
The other side's constraints aren't automatically your responsibility.
Listen empathetically but keep boundaries—help find solutions without sacrificing your own goals.

Stick to Your Principles
A deal that breaks your ethics or values isn't a real win.
Define your non-negotiables early and walk away if those lines are crossed.

Close with Confirmation
Always end with clarity.
Summarize the agreed points, confirm understanding from both sides, and follow up with written notes to prevent future disputes.

Thank You