**Interests versus Positions**

We people often fail to distinguish what we say we say we want from what we truly desire. Somewhere deep in our minds we have a desired outcome or condition. I call these outcomes our ***interests.*** But we say we want, or need, whatever comes to mind that fits our theory about how to reach the desired outcome. These things that come to mind are often just what I call ***positions;*** they are just one of many ways to reach our desired outcome. Making the distinction is critical for actually getting what we desire and to feeling honored in our relationships. Knowing and articulating interests versus positions opens up a lot of room for creativity and enables people to see that they do, in reality, have common goals. I often give this example as an illustration, though I am not quite sure this conversation ever took place.

A conversation about where to eat…

Gail says to me: “Let’s go Red Lobster.” (her position). In reply, I offer my position: “Noway! Let’s go to Charleston’s.” And we are off… into our very sophisticated negotiations…

**Gail:** Red Lobster! ( thinking... if I insist, he will give in!)  
**Mike:** Charleston’s! (thinking… she is crazy!)

**Gail:** Red Lobster! (thinking… I never get my way. Well this time, I will!)

**Mike:** Charleston’s! (thnking... we can never agree, this is going to ruin everything!)

Then comes the insight… a shift to a discussion around our interests.

**Gail:** What is it that you think Charleston’s will give you?

**Mike:** Good food!

**Gail:** Oh, well all I want is seafood!

**Mike:** How about if find a place that has good seafood?  
**Gail:** That works for me!

**Mike :** Where can we go for good seafood?

So the next time you find yourself disagreeing about where to go eat, to go on vacation, where to hold your next meeting or about a project plan, take the time to understand each party’s interests. It is a great way to make progress quickly with a whole lot less tension.