



MIIA Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

A Confidential Counseling and Referral Service

800.451.1834

Cooperation-The Fourth Dimension

We may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now. Martin Luther King

For a long time survival theorists agreed on “**fight or flight or freeze**” as the **three possible reactions** demonstrated by human beings in highly stressful situations. In the last few years, California researchers have proposed that women also tend to use a **fourth response in difficult, stress-producing situations, and that's cooperation**. Cooperation enhances the likelihood that everyone in a situation-- from a natural or manmade disaster to a boardroom brawl to an office on a tight deadline—makes it through with the minimal amount of damage possible.

A **reduction in conflict** and **better communication** in the workplace are inextricably linked to cooperation. When cooperation is the **guiding model** in every team, every department, and every institution, productivity, creativity, and quality of work-life are enhanced exponentially.

The following quote puts it well:

If you want to be incrementally better: Be competitive. If you want to be exponentially better: Be cooperative. unknown

Stephen Covey, with his **principle-centered** approach to personal and organizational effectiveness, calls a cooperative principle of leadership a “**paradigm shift**” away from one of competition. In order to understand the options for professional, as well as personal interactions it helps to be acquainted with Covey's six possible paradigms.

Win/Win seeks solutions to problems that benefit all stake holders. Covey says, the “my way or your way” mentality is improved by the win/win “**better way**.” In **Win/Lose** or **Lose/Win**, one person's win becomes the other's loss, and vice versa. In a **Lose/Lose** situation everyone suffers—individuals' motivations based on revenge or undercutting result in taking a loss in order to inflict a loss. In a straight **Win**, each individual is focused only on his or her own win, without negative or positive regard to others. In the **Win/Win or No Deal**, parties agree to disagree and don't do business together.



While at first it might seem as though the best value lies in a win/win, that isn't always true. **Five out of the six paradigms might be appropriate in some situations.** After all, for New Englanders at a Red Sox game, a Win/Lose mentality is appreciated. While Lose/Win sets someone up to capitulate and then feel resentment, there are larger contexts in which losing now may be necessary in order to promote future gain for everyone down the line. Selective self-sacrifice may be seen in some acts of heroism.

Applying any principle of leadership without regard to the specific variables impacting the situation will be doomed to myopia and misdirected efforts. Supervisors and managers will elicit and **create cooperative work forces** to the extent that they understand the **fundamentals of effective communication.** If supervisors make assumptions about their employees or engage in conversations that promote two or more unrelated monologues, the likelihood of understanding the scope and specifics of a problem is reduced.

The number one priority in excellent communication involves “**seeking to understand.**” Many people try to be heard rather than going for understanding. **Empathic communication** is not a warm and fuzzy method reserved for one's significant other. It is an essential part of an excellent communicator's repertoire. **Empathy is not the same as sympathy. Sympathy means agreement. Empathy means understanding.** It is, of course, possible to experience both at once. Only when a supervisor fully understands an employee's ideas and feelings, can he or she respond to any situation successfully. It is not only possible, but likely, that in any given situation, each employee will see and explain what's going on differently. Without understanding these individual “takes” on something, it is difficult to change things for the positive. Similarly, if a person goes to a doctor with a medical problem, appropriate treatment cannot be prescribed until an accurate diagnosis has been made.

You can create “ups” rather than “downs” by remembering the following:

<u>GOAL</u>	<u>DO</u>
Understand the perceptions and problems your employees bring.	Ask, restate, address.
Promote a win/win paradigm for your team or department.	Share recognition/credit/profit, etc.
Seek cooperation.	Value contributions and reward those who contribute.

No employer today is independent of those about him. He cannot succeed alone, no matter how great his ability or capital. Business today is more than ever a question of cooperation.

Orison Swett Marden (1850-1924)

