



Conflict Solves Problems

Talk by Jordan Katcher with the Wallace Stegner Center's Environmental
Dispute Resolution Program at the University of Utah for the
National Association of Development Organizations
Annual Training Conference 2025

A scenic landscape of a mountain range. In the foreground, there is a vast, green, grassy valley with scattered small evergreen trees. In the background, a large, rugged mountain with steep, rocky slopes rises against a clear, light blue sky. The mountain's face is characterized by horizontal rock layers and some sparse vegetation. The overall scene is peaceful and majestic.

Welcome to Utah

*The ancestral homeland of the Ute, Piute,
Goshute, and Shoshone Nations*

Purpose:

To reframe conflict to liberate each of us in our professional and personal lives

What is one word you think of when you think of
conflict?

Who has experienced conflict in their work?

Who has experienced conflict in their
personal life?

Who typically finds dealing with conflict to be easy and comfortable?

Who tends to feel anxious, tense, or nervous when dealing with conflict?

Let's start with a little exercise...

Thumb wrestling!

Goal: Score as many points as you can in 15 seconds

NO TALKING before or during the round

Who thinks they scored the most points?

Thumb wrestling!

Round 2:

Goal: Score as many points as you can in 15 seconds

Talk with your partner for 30 seconds **BEFORE** the round
NO TALKING during the round

Who thinks they scored the most points?

What did you do?

Lessons from Thumb Wrestling

- Some issue of **mutual concern** (an opportunity or challenge) brings people into interaction with each other
 - “Score as many points as you can” = issue of mutual concern
- People have **different needs and concerns** (i.e., interests) related to the issue of mutual concern
 - They have conflict!

Lessons from Thumb Wrestling

- People often assume the situation is **zero-sum**, but it isn't
 - There is potential to **create value** for all parties (i.e., mutual gains) through working together on the issue of mutual concern
- There is potential for all parties to **lose value** by not working together on the issue of mutual concern

Lessons from Thumb Wrestling

- To create mutual gains, parties must reach agreement on and implement an **effective joint strategy**
 - I.e., they must **negotiate**
- **Effective communication** is key to identifying and implementing a joint strategy
 - Talking is not enough; you must talk about the right things
- Parties must have confidence in each other to **follow through**
 - If one party does not follow through, it will erode confidence, and future dealings will likely be more difficult

What is conflict?

What is conflict?

The intersection of different perspectives, wants, or needs that are in tension with each other and not easily reconciled

A black and white photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there is a field of tall, dry grass and some low-lying shrubs. A wire fence with wooden posts runs across the middle ground. In the background, a road stretches towards the horizon under a cloudy sky.

POINT 1

Conflict just is

Conflict just is

- No matter what kind of work you do – whether you are a policy-maker, attorney, planner, resource manager, developer, scientist, advocate, or otherwise – **you are going to encounter diverse perspectives and interests**
- The question **isn't whether you will** encounter conflict – the question is **what you will do when you do encounter conflict**

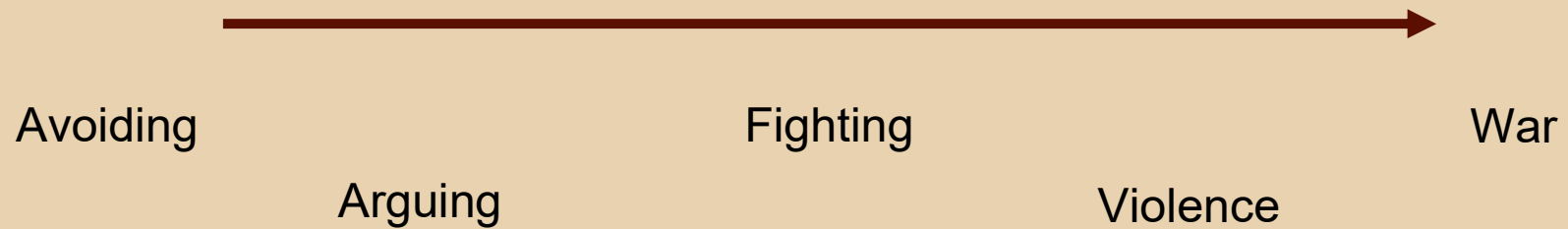
Why is conflict so difficult for us?

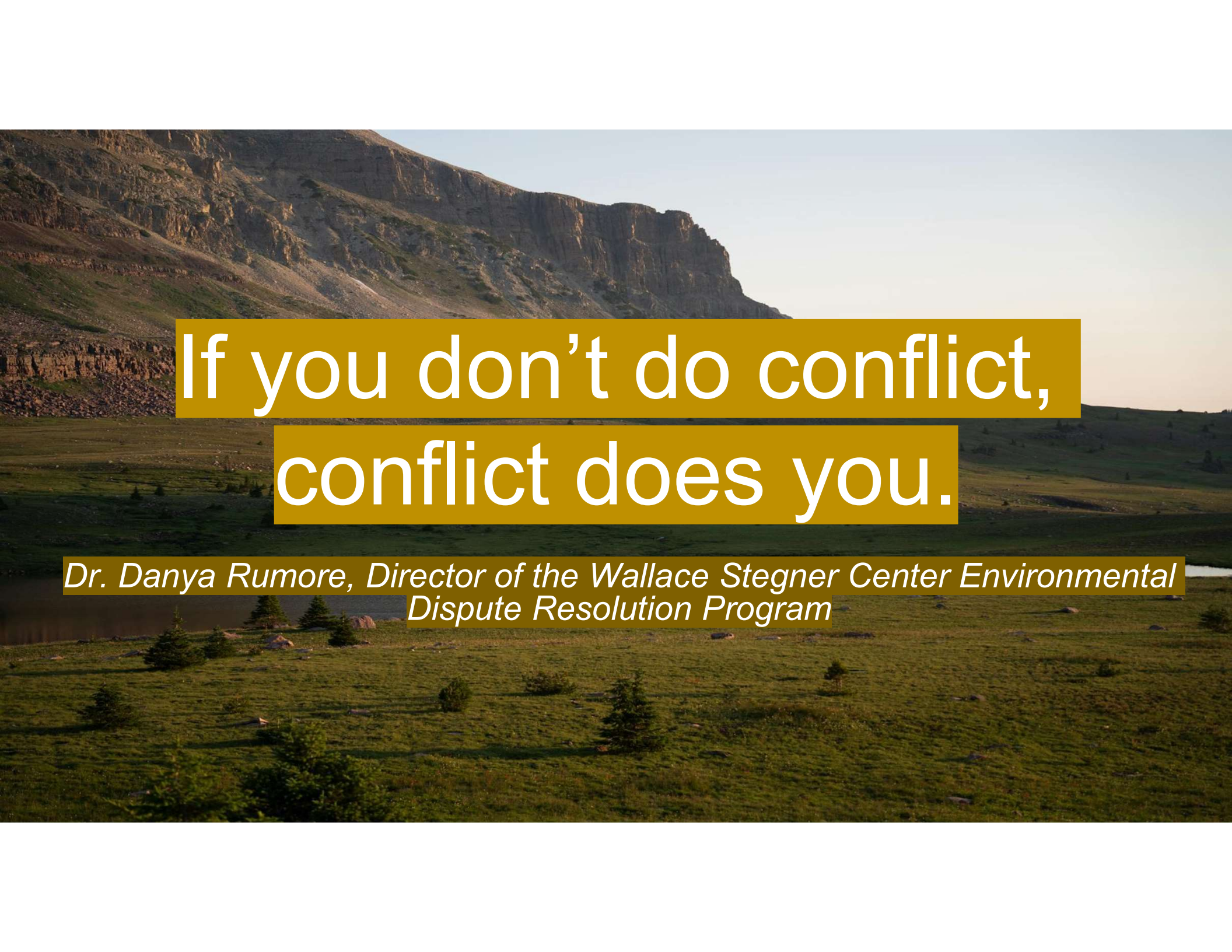
The fact that we see conflict as a problem
is a problem

Why is seeing conflict as a problem a problem?

*We become **dysregulated** when we think conflict
is a threat*

Unproductive ways of dealing with conflict





If you don't do conflict,
conflict does you.

*Dr. Danya Rumore, Director of the Wallace Stegner Center Environmental
Dispute Resolution Program*

So how do you do conflict?

Develop conflict competence skills

The ability to deal with conflict skillfully
(i.e., to make conflict productive - and not destructive)

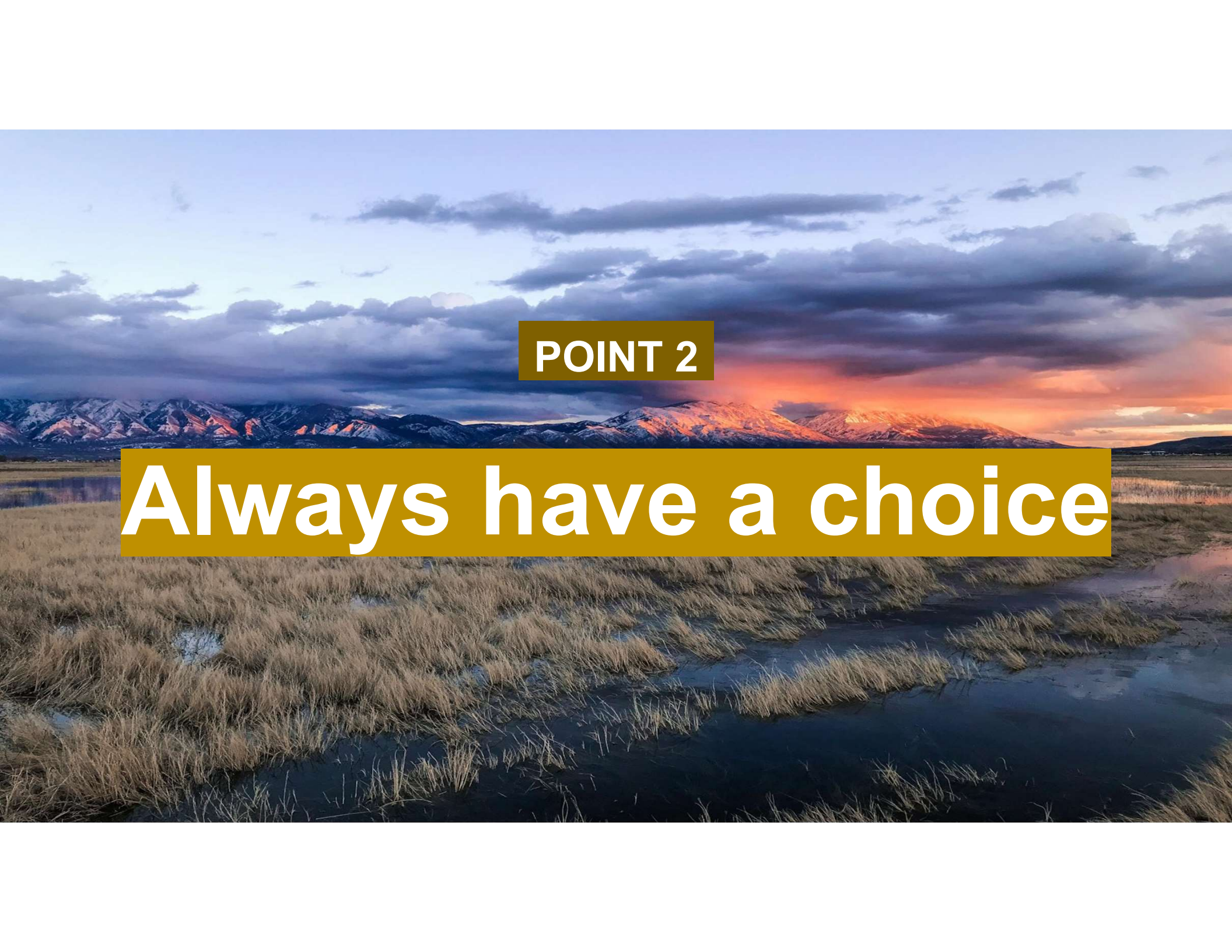
Conflict competence is NOT

Just being nice

Compromise

Disagreeing better

“Sit down, shut up, and get along”



POINT 2

Always have a choice

Conflict just is

Conflict can be destructive if poorly dealt with

Conflict can be productive and generative if skillfully dealt with

How parties deal with conflict will determine whether it is productive or destructive

Conflict competence is key to making conflict productive

Conflict competence also helps us avoid conflict becoming destructive and resulting in disputes

When we need to reach agreement on courses of action, we need to collaborate

Collaboration means “to co-labor” - it is all about working together to make conflict productive, and it is rooted in interest-based negotiation

Conflict competence and collaboration are pragmatic skill sets that anyone can learn (and everyone should know!)

How we view conflict shapes
how we navigate through it

Fight
Flight
Freeze
Fawn

How we view conflict shapes
how we navigate through it

Fight

Flight

Freeze

Fawn

How we view conflict shapes
how we navigate through it

Fight
Flight
Freeze
Fawn

How we view conflict shapes
how we navigate through it

Fight
Flight
Freeze
Fawn

How we view conflict shapes
how we navigate through it

Fight
Flight
Freeze
Fawn

Which responses have you
done in the past, if any?

Fight
Flight
Freeze
Fawn

“Between stimulus and response, there is a space.
In that space is our power to choose our response.
In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

- Attributed to Viktor Frankl



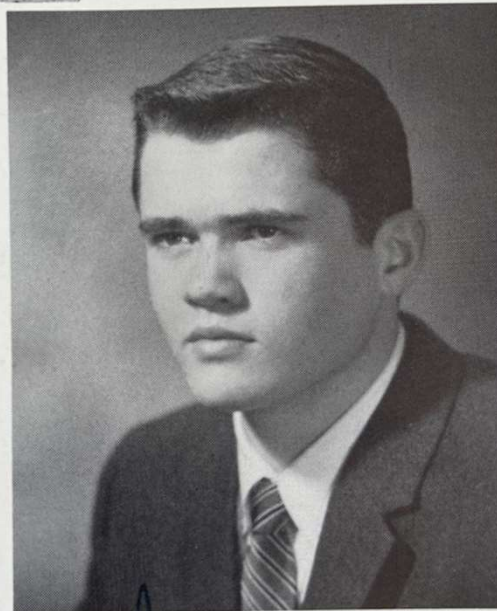
Best of Jim

all the

STEPHEN WALKER

"Steve" . . . Imitations . . .
Sense of humor . . . Tall
. . . One of the "Jokers".

Varsity Football
Booster Club
B-Hive Staff
Glee Club
Choir
Hi-Y
Variety Show
Track



DO
"Dot"
. . .
Flirty
humo
Hom
Asser
Ushe
Boos
Year



*Steve is the
greatest
guy I
ever had a
fun in our
member.
future school
as a*

RICH WESCOTT

"Whale" . . . Sports minded
. . . Full of fun . . . Many
friends . . . One of the
"Jokers".

J. V. Football
Varsity Football
Track
Basketball

*Have a good keep
year in
and you
always
there*



Miami Business Journal

MAY 10, 1987 PUBLISHED WEEKLY FOR THE GATEWAY OF THE AMERICAS 75 CENTS

Steve Walker's rapid growth puts ad agency atop billings list

By John Sugg

Twelve advertising agencies, including virtually all of South Florida's heavy-weight firms, recently were asked to vote for a plume of an account.

The client, a 65-acre theme park called Atlantis now being built in Broward County, took great care in deciding which agency would handle its \$1 million-plus annual advertising budget. Hot-shot media warlords were brought in from New York to analyze the agencies' proposals.

The winner was Steve Walker & Associates, a Fort Lauderdale agency. The selection raised some eyebrows in the ad community.

"Yes, I was surprised," said one agency president. "I know Walker has some large accounts, but he's mostly known as an automotive agency, isn't he?"

The answer to that question is yes... and no.

Yes, Walker made his mark in South Florida by handling auto accounts. His biggest client, and perhaps the biggest account handled by a South Florida agency, is Southeast Toyota Distributors, with estimated annual billings in excess of \$14 million. He also has JM Pontiac ("We wrote the book on price"), the world's largest Pontiac dealership.

"There's nothing wrong with that," Walker shrugged. "After all, most of the advertising you see is for cars."

But Walker has become more than an automotive agency, starting a half dozen new and major accounts in the last few months. By the industry yardstick for measuring size, annual media billings, SWAA is a \$24 million outfit, running neck and neck with Miami's Beber Silverstein & Partners for the title of the area's largest agency.

"We've already demonstrated that it's possible for us to go against the big boys and be quite respectable," Walker said.

Several of South Florida's larger agencies are renowned for their self-name relatively unknown outside of advertising circles.

"We quietly came into the market," he said, "and we've been content to be a quiet giant. Actually, I don't want to be famous. I don't like to make speeches."

But that disdain for fame may be on the wane.

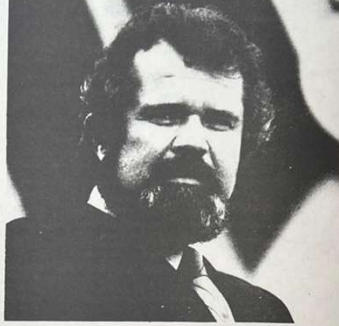
"We'd like to be really big time now," Walker said.

The agency president is a relative newcomer to South Florida. He began his career in Washington, D.C., first as a freelance copywriter, later with small agencies. While in Washington, he landed the Southeast Toyota account.

"That required so much time down here," he said, "it was only natural to open an agency here."

With a partner, since departed in a bitter agency reorganization, Walker in 1976 moved into tiny offices in the Dupont Plaza Hotel.

Walker said, explaining why he fled to Fort Lauderdale. Referring to the location of several major Miami agencies along a short stretch of Coral Way, he added, "Besides, why be on the same



street as everyone else. I don't need to be a member of the club to be successful."

That go-it-alone attitude has not won Walker the affection of many colleagues in the advertising community. When asked about Walker, several Miami ad veterans growled that he hadn't paid his dues hereabouts long enough to merit the size agency he runs.

But what Walker has won is a healthy list of accounts. Toyota and JM Pontiac still account for almost 50 percent of his business. However, he has steadily moved into other areas, ranging from spaghetti sauce, to swimming pool vacuum cleaners, to several resorts, to an airline.

"What's really significant," he said, "is that two-thirds of our client growth has been in the past year."

Walker is big and bearded. He wears severe black suits and likes to boast that he runs his office "very professionally here."

"You won't see blue jeans around here."

The professional angle is what he stressed when asked the secret of his success.

"We think professionally," he said. "and we treat accounts professionally. That's why we've grown. Many agencies when they grow and start handling \$1 million accounts don't have time for the Every account gets professional treatment."

Most agency executives, when queried about their firm's strong suits, would reply either "creative" or "marketing." Walker, too, likes to talk about expertise. But he believes it is important to put those talents within the framework of "professionalism."

"You can go out and buy the marketing ability," he noted, "and then de-

scribe the sophisticated capabilities of a new agency computer system." But the creativity has to be inbred. Creative is what is visible. After everything else, the clients only know that they saw it, the creative. And it had better be good."

Agency Vice President Lou Pomer illustrated Walker's point in explaining how the Atlantis account was nailed.

"The developer left it to the invited agencies to present whatever they wanted to present," Pomer said. "A total presentation wasn't required. But we showed them our complete marketing, media and creative capabilities. We offered them maximum dollar efficiency. And they were impressed with our creative work."

Walker projects a hefty influx of multimillion dollar accounts in to the area during the next decade and the emergence of the local ad industry from its hush-league size.

"There no longer will be room for the non-professional," he said, returning to his favorite theme. In explaining how he intends to become the dominant agency in the area, Walker said:

"We want to find the type of accounts that can generate and appreciate good advertising. We're not after accounts of a certain size, but rather we want accounts with the intention to be creatively viable."

Why stay in Fort Lauderdale rather than join the rest of the big agencies in "the club" on Coral Way?

"This city (Fort Lauderdale) is one of the great growth cities in the nation," Walker said. "It should have a great advertising agency. And I think we're the right agency for right now right here."



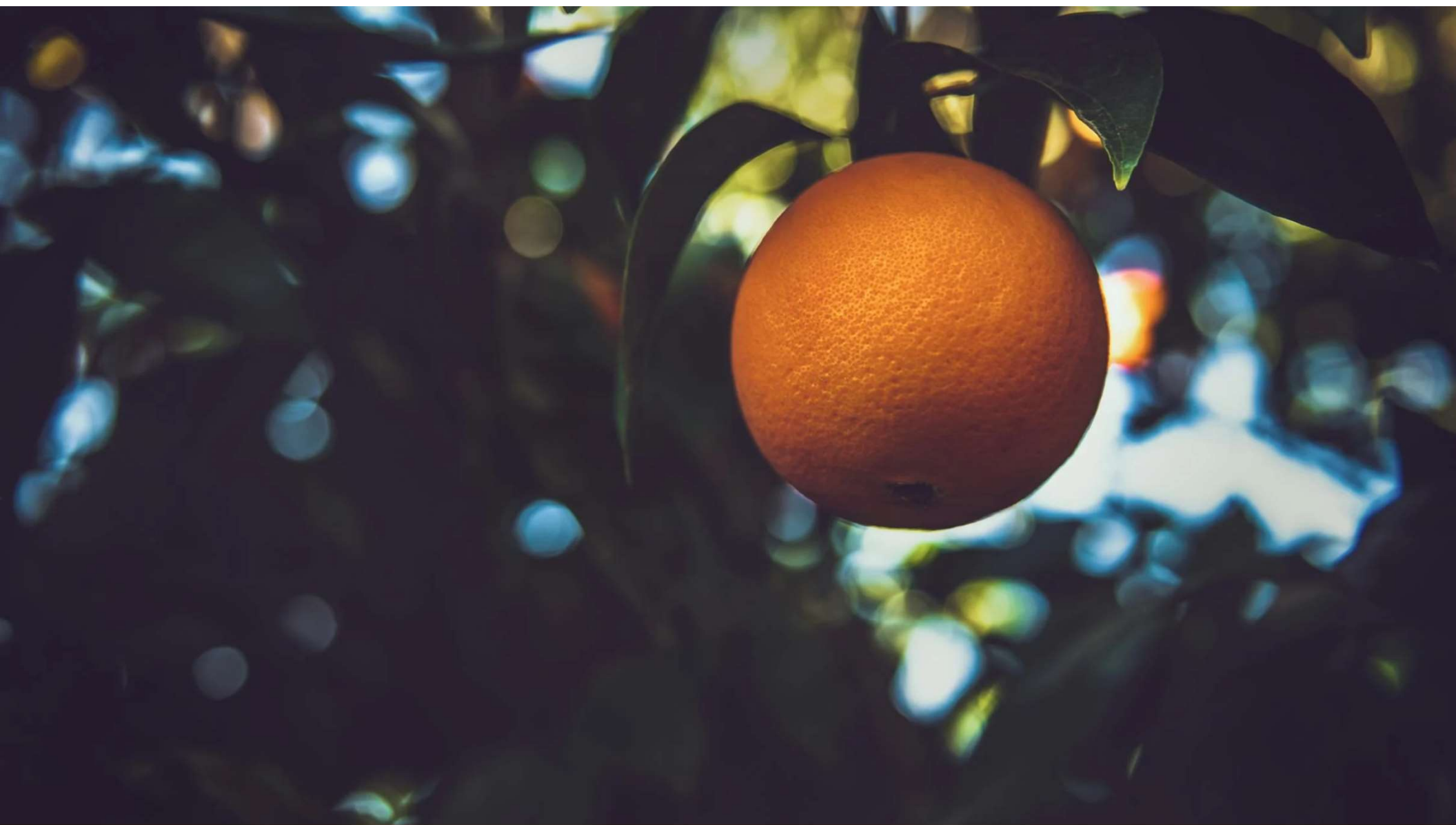




**The only way through is
within**

POINT 3

**Negotiate your interests,
not positions**



Focus on interests, not positions

Interests

The "why"

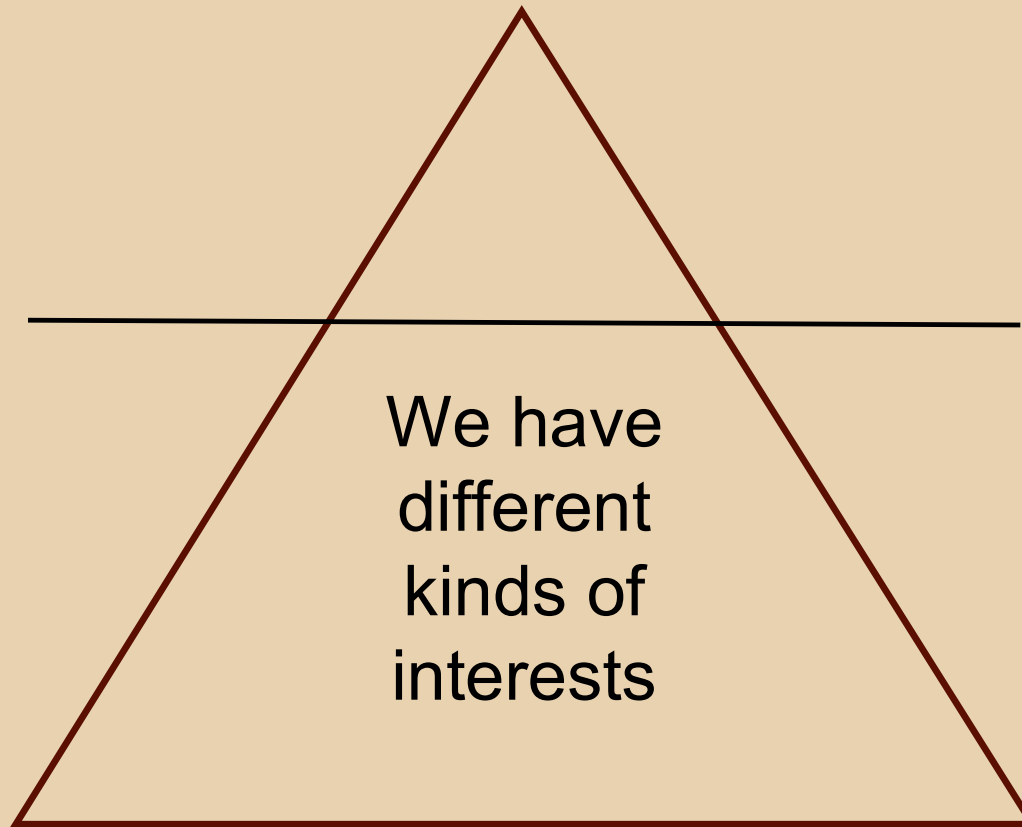
Fundamental needs or
concerns

Positions

The "what" or "how"

Specific solutions or strategies

Substantive



Procedural

Emotional/
relational

We have
different
kinds of
interests

Most people just want to be heard and considered!

Collaboration is *not* just “being nice” or “let’s all get along” or compromise

It is a pragmatic approach based on interest-based negotiation





Collaboration is all about:

Effective problem solving
&
Help me help you help me

Level of concern
for your own
outcome



Compete

Collaborate

Compromise

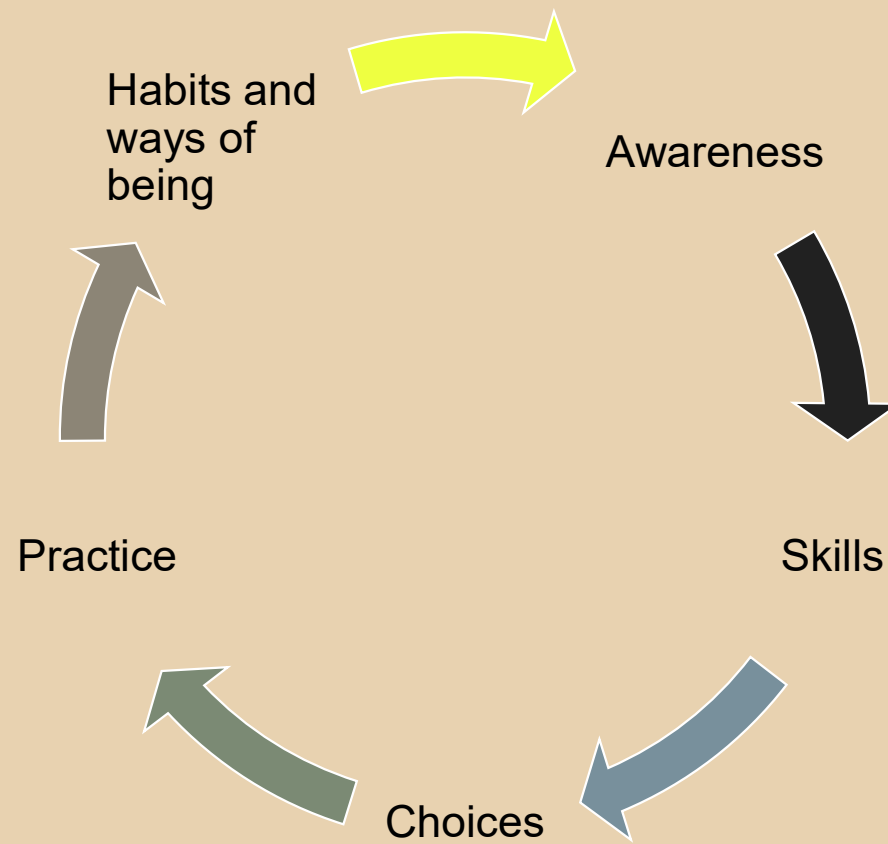
Avoid

Accommodate

Level of concern for others' outcomes



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Do you choose to see and treat conflict as a problem?

Do you choose to see and treat conflict as a
problem?

Or as an opportunity for growth, innovation, and
effective problem solving?

Do you default to unproductive conflict tendencies
(such as defend or protect behaviors)?

Do you default to unproductive conflict tendencies
(such as defend or protect behaviors)?

Or do you choose to deal with it skillfully (and learn
how to do so)?

Remember....

Conflict just is

Always have a choice

Negotiate your interests, not positions

Gateway + Natural Amenity Region (GNAR) Initiative Resources

GNAR Academy
Fundamentals:
Gateway Community
Leadership 101
online course

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www.law.utah.edu/stegner-center/edr/

www.extension.usu.edu/gnar/



Wallace Stegner Center EDR Program Resources

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EDR Blog



Free tools and
resources



Collaboration
Certificate
Course

