

## **Why is Genuine Win/Win So Hard to Achieve?**

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Imagine that a stranger comes up to you and issues this invitation: “I’ll give you a hundred dollars to split with Dennis any way you like. With no other dialogue, you report your offer to Dennis. He can either accept or reject.”

“If he accepts your split, you and Dennis each receive the amount of money you’ve proposed. If he rejects your offer, you both receive nothing.”

What offer do you make? Will you split it equally, \$50 each? Are you generous and offer the majority of the money to me? Or do you allocate a little bit to me and keep the majority for yourself?

It depends on what you define as a “win,” doesn’t it? Is it a win for you to obtain at least some money? Or do you desire a large portion? Think for a moment about what you would do in this situation.

Much of what we experience in life is “win/lose.” Sporting events, political campaigns, and legal disputes all have winners and losers. Even in an argument, aren’t you trying to prove that you’re right and the other person is wrong?

Unfortunately, some people define “winning” as “beating you!” They want to win so much that they don’t mind making the other person look or feel bad, just so they come out on the upside of the comparison. And win/lose always involves comparison. “Or” is the operative word in “win or lose.”

The operative word in “win/win” is “and.” “You’ll benefit from this arrangement and so will I.” Yet win/win arrangements seem so hard to actually generate.

Okay, let’s jump back to the opportunity described above, which comes from *Bargaining for Advantage* by Richard Shell. What offer would you make?

Would you suggest we split the unexpected opportunity equally? Or would you take a chance that I’d approve a large percentage for you, since I’d wind up with at least a piece of the prize? Maybe you’d offer me a majority of the money, hoping I’d be pleased with the split and you’d get at least a little.

Hmm. What’s coming into play here is some evaluation not only of what a “win” might be for you, but also what a “win” might be for me. Will I be happy just to receive a portion? Or will I want to prevent you from winning more than your fair share? Hmm.

Let me add to the complication. Imagine that the stranger says, “I’ll give you two chances to offer a split to Dennis. Whether he accepts or rejects the first time, I’ll let you make a second offer.”

Does that change what you do the first time? Suppose I accept one of your three potential offers the first time? What will you do the second time? What will you do if I reject any of your first-time offers?

Can you see that it’s not very easy to know in advance what I will consider a “win” the first time you offer? It’s even more difficult if the opportunity is allowed to proceed to a second split proposal.

Ah, but in real life, the game continues beyond even the second offer. Though we may define “winning” for an event, life is a process. Our interactions with others continue for a long time. That’s why it’s appropriate to think about “winning” in terms of a relationship.

And a relationship cannot be established without deep communication with the other person. You have to understand what a “win” is for your customer, employee, or friend if you expect that the relationship will be healthy. And you have to check in frequently to determine whether your behavior measures up to what the other person considers acceptable performance.

It may not be easy to define a win/win agreement, but it’s hugely beneficial for both parties to put the creativity and energy into the effort! Ask! Avoid the mistake of assuming you already know!

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