The Breakthrough Tool:
Breaking Through Differences and Restraints

What

The Breakthrough Tool is a simple but very powerful tool that enables us to produce breakthrough from breakdowns. It helps us to look at opposing forces, conflicts, or apparently mutually exclusive positions in a new way by surfacing the thinking that underlies them. This, in turn, allows us to redefine/reframe the problem and search for a unifying solution.
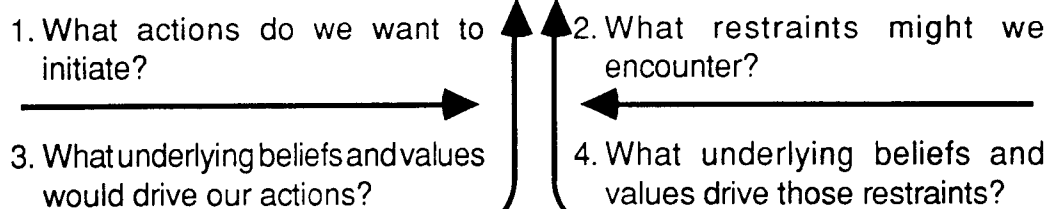
Why

We tend to experience conflicts as negative barriers and avoid them if possible. When we have to deal with barriers to our initiatives, we tend to try to overcome them, and we tend to resist the initiatives of others that seem to conflict with our needs. All of these approaches tend to polarize people and make things worse. When we understand the underlying forces/essential factors that shape conflicting behavior, we can find creative ways to blend them together and harness all the energy that is otherwise wasted in maintaining conflicting positions.

Effective use of the Breakthrough Tool can also:
- significantly reduce or eliminate the poor quality decisions, low commitment levels and ineffective actions that result from tapping only a fraction of the best thinking available in an organization.
- help prevent the failure of plans due to unanticipated restraints.
- enable a significant shift in culture with respect to valuing differences and breakdowns and turning them into opportunities for creating breakthroughs.

When

The Breakthrough Tool can be used in dealing with any conflict situation. Use in planning, whenever developing strategies to reach a target.

How

Conflict and breakdowns typically take the form of "either/or" or mutually exclusive positions. We need to convert these positions into their underlying interests or drivers, which ultimately are in the realm of values and beliefs. At this level, the conflict typically no longer exists, or can be creatively addressed in a "both-and" way that works for everyone. A thinking framework for doing this is:

1. What actions do we want to initiate?

2. What restraints might we encounter?

3. What underlying beliefs and values would drive our actions?

4. What underlying beliefs and values drive those restraints?

5. What approach or expanded context would permit satisfying both sets of beliefs and values, and allow unified forward movement?
Don't settle for compromise — Go for breakthrough!!

What It Takes to Use the Breakthrough Tool

1. Strong experience-based conviction that this is possible.
2. Skill in managing your own habitual defensive reactions.
3. Ability to hold those who differ with you as reasonable, rational, committed.
4. Skill in seeking out beliefs and values underlying entrenched positions.
5. A "both-and" versus an "either/or" mindset.
6. Ability to creatively unify differences into breakthrough.
7. Ability to use the breakthrough framework in decision-making, planning, problem-solving, building thoughts.

Process for Using the Breakthrough Tool in Live Conflict Situations

1. Get a clear statement of the positions (intentions/actions).
2. Identify what's important to the stakeholders (values underlying the positions).
3. Explore resolution through aligning beliefs
   - clearing up any misunderstanding
   - providing evidence for positions
   - providing logic
   - setting up tests/experiments where beliefs about the future differ.
4. Clarify the criteria for a successful resolution: What would it take to completely satisfy all stakeholders' values?
   - conditions of satisfaction/thresholds of acceptability.
5. Develop a solution that matches the criteria.