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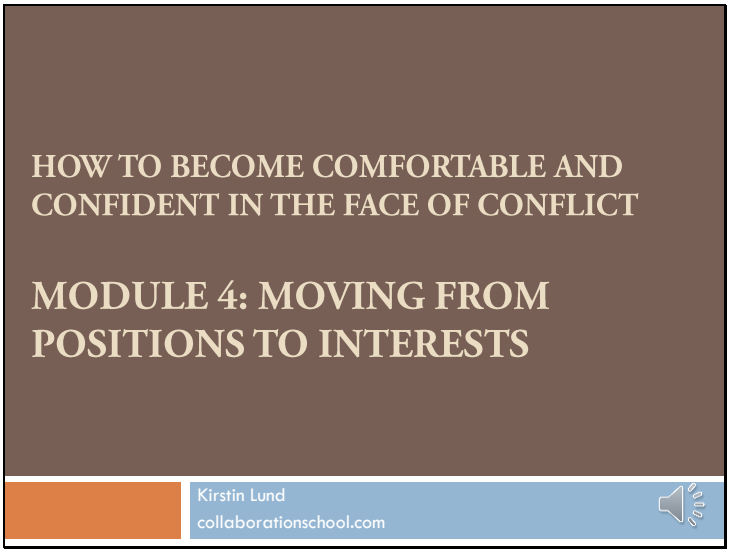
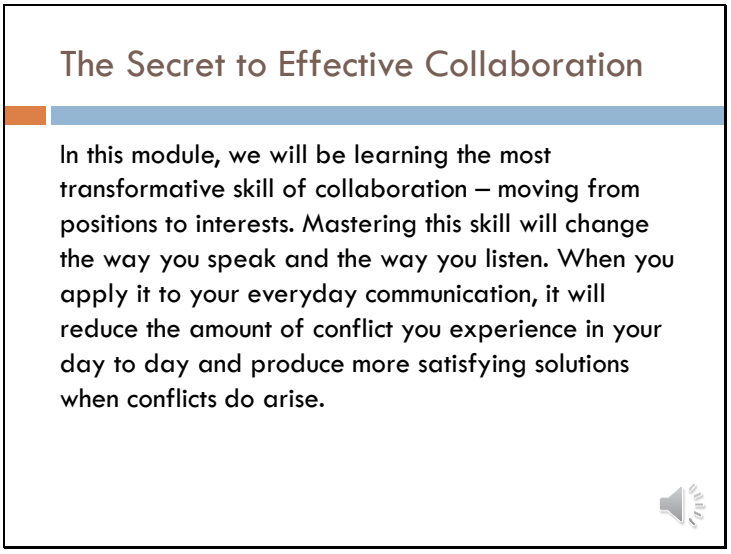

HOW TO BECOME COMFORTABLE AND CONFIDENT IN THE FACE OF CONFLICT
MODULE 4: MOVING FROM POSITIONS TO INTERESTS
Kirstin Lund
collaborationschool.com

Slide 2


The Secret to Effective Collaboration
In this module, we will be learning the most transformative skill of collaboration – moving from positions to interests. Mastering this skill will change the way you speak and the way you listen. When you apply it to your everyday communication, it will reduce the amount of conflict you experience in your day to day and produce more satisfying solutions when conflicts do arise.

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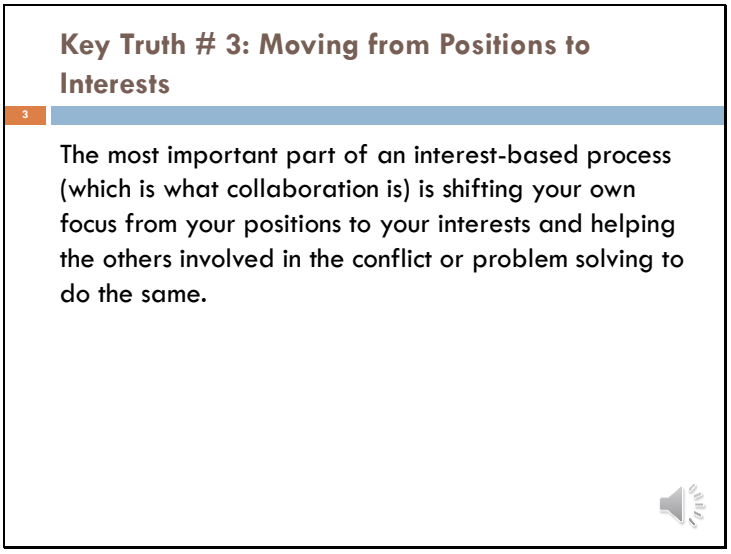
Key Truth # 3: Moving from Positions to Interests
3
The most important part of an interest-based process (which is what collaboration is) is shifting your own focus from your positions to your interests and helping the others involved in the conflict or problem solving to do the same.

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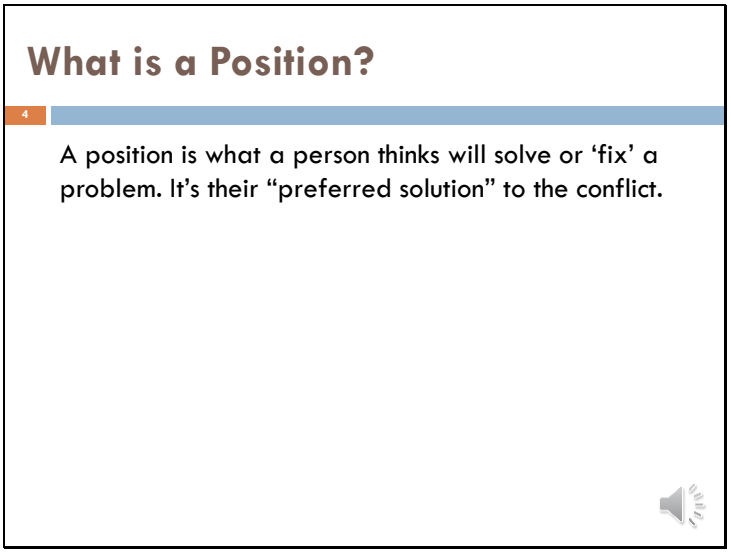
What is a Position?
4
A position is what a person thinks will solve or 'fix' a problem. It's their "preferred solution" to the conflict.

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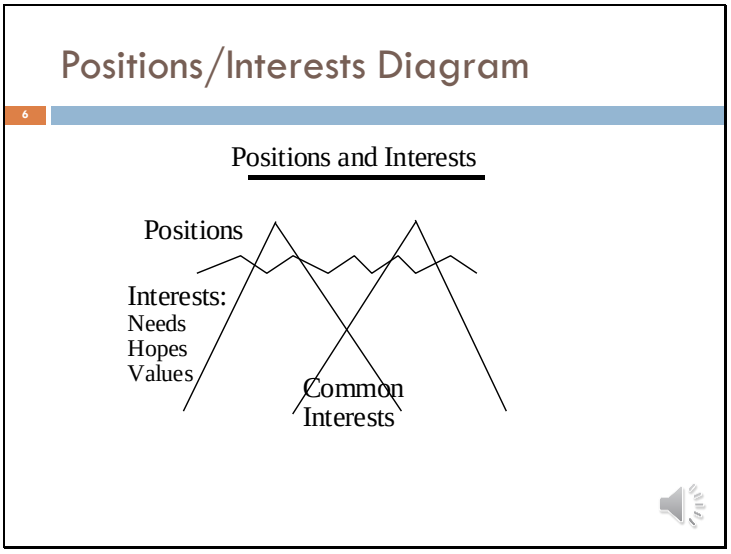
What are Interests?

5

Interests are the **needs, hopes** and **values** *underneath* the solutions people think will fix a problem. Interests are the basic answer to the questions "why?"; "what is really important to me?"

Interests are what motivates you to find a particular solution appealing.

Slide 6

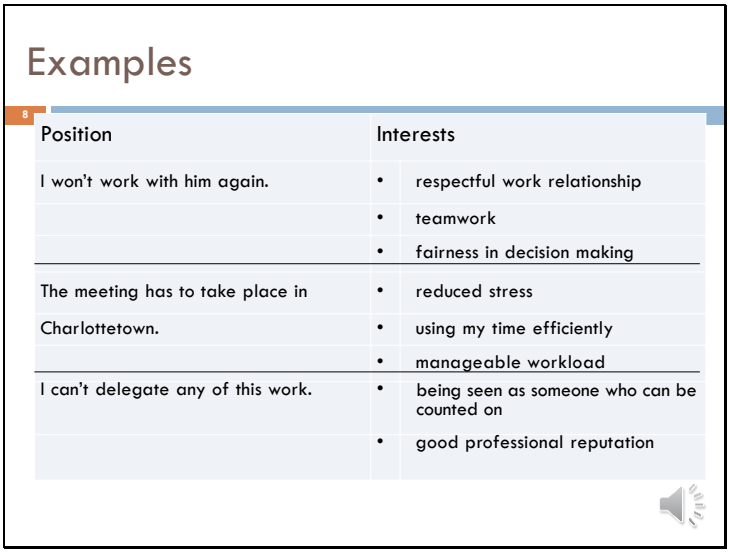

Positions/Interests Diagram
6
Positions and Interests
Positions
Interests:
Needs
Hopes
Values
Common
Interests

Slide 7

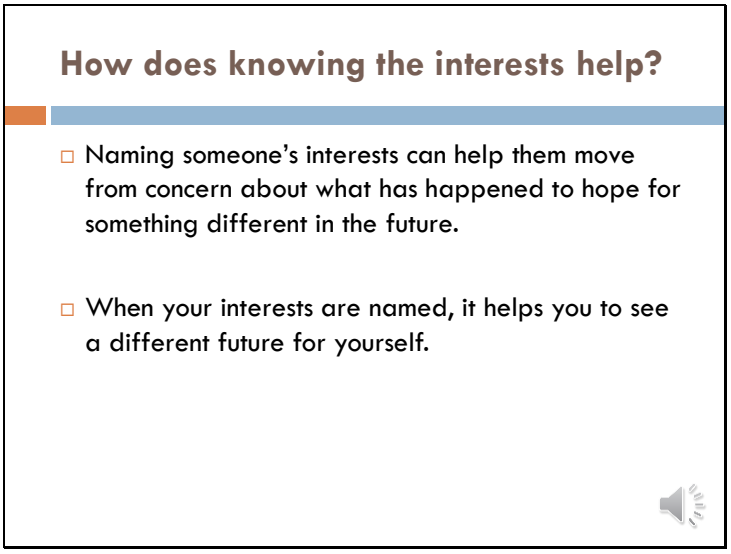
How to Tell the Difference

- A Position answers the question HOW? An Interest does not tell you HOW (it tells you WHY).
- A Position cuts off potential options. Options to meet an Interest are limitless.
- **Interests are not tangible. Positions are typically concrete,** tangible, and could be specific enough to appear on an action plan.

Slide 8


Examples
8
Position
Interests
I won't work with him again.
respectful work relationship
teamwork
fairness in decision making
The meeting has to take place in Charlottetown.
reduced stress
using my time efficiently
manageable workload
I can't delegate any of this work.
being seen as someone who can be counted on
good professional reputation

Slide 9


How does knowing the interests help?
Naming someone's interests can help them move from concern about what has happened to hope for something different in the future.
When your interests are named, it helps you to see a different future for yourself.

Slide 10

How does knowing the interests help?

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- It helps you to be clear about what results you hope to achieve so you can identify solutions that bring you those results.
- It helps people with different ideas about how to solve the problem to hear each other and find common ground.

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How does knowing the interests help?

11

- Conflict is often a difference of opinion about HOW something is done. When you take the focus off the HOW (which is what the solution or position is) and put it on the WHY (which is what the interests are), it reduces the conflict and helps people to hear each other and gain understanding about what's important to the other.

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How does knowing the interests help?

- Positions (I want a position on the new project team) limit the outcomes and can create win/lose results. Interests (I want to be challenged and excited by my work) address underlying needs and hopes and open up a variety of options which can result in win/win outcomes, since the more options you can generate, the more likely it is that solutions can be found that meet everyone's interests.

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How does knowing the interests help?

- The sooner you uncover interests in a problem solving process, the better. Exploring interests before jumping to solutions can help you to better understand what the issues are to be solved, and can assist you to avoid discussions where parties come to an impasse because neither are willing to give up what they see as the solution to the problem.

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How does knowing the interests help?

- Taking time to think about what your own interests are before having a conversation with the other party can help you to put forth your concerns in a way that are easier for the other to hear.

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Things to remember

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- people in conflict are often not conscious of their interests
- even though people may suggest opposite ways to solve a problem, they will always have common or compatible interests
- once aware of their interests, people can often create better solutions than either started with

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Two Steps to Identify Interests

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These two skills in the following sequence are effective in identifying interests:

1. ***asking interest-exploring questions***
2. ***naming the interests***

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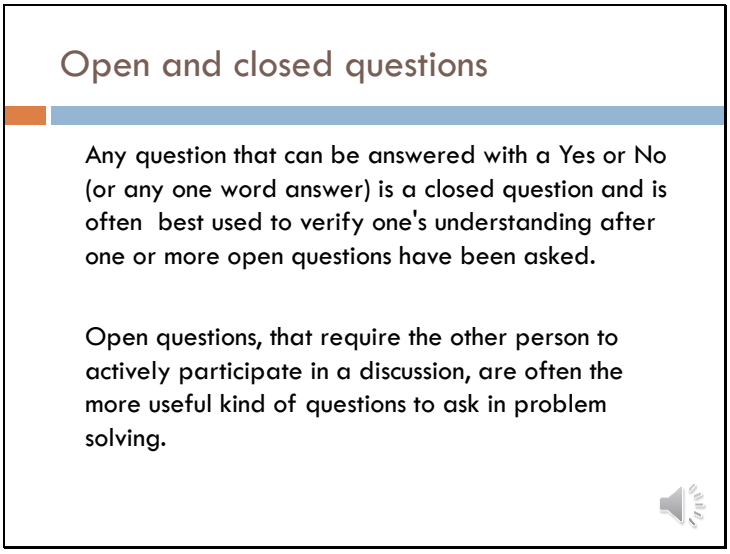
Open and closed questions
Any question that can be answered with a Yes or No (or any one word answer) is a closed question and is often best used to verify one's understanding after one or more open questions have been asked.
Open questions, that require the other person to actively participate in a discussion, are often the more useful kind of questions to ask in problem solving.

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Interest Exploring Questions

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Purpose: to specifically identify a person's interests (needs, hopes and values) and encourage understanding of their motivations for taking a particular position or action

Interest Exploring Questions are generally some variation of "what do you like about that?" or "what don't you like about that?" The idea is to ask the questions that help you get to the basic answers to the question, WHY?

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Interest Exploring Question Examples

When a person is advocating for a particular solution:

- What do you hope that will achieve?
- What do you value about that approach?
- What is it about that solution that is important to you?

When a person is resisting a particular solution:

- What concerns you about that idea?
- What do you worry will happen if we do it that way?

When conflict has arisen from the way something was handled:

- What would you have preferred instead? How would that have helped?
- What were you expecting would happen?

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Interest Exploring Questions

Some further examples:

- What would that accomplish for you?
- What do you fear will happen if (a certain thing is done)?
- How would it help if (a certain thing was done)?
- In what ways would that help address your concerns?
- What kind of (working environment/relationship) would you like to have?
- What do you feel are the most important elements of a good (working relationship, work environment, team, etc.)?
- What is it about _____ that bothers you the most?

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Naming the Interest

Naming the Interest helps people to identify their underlying needs, values and hopes. When you name the interest, you are sometimes "hunching" or guessing at the interests behind a person's position in an effort to help them understand their motivations for taking certain positions or using certain unhelpful, positional language. When you identify your own interests, you are taking steps to understand your own motivations and shift yourself to language the other person will more easily hear.

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Naming the Interest

Purposes:

- Elicits information about the others interests
- Shows concern for the other person
- Changes attitude from antagonism to understanding
- Moves exchange from past to present /future orientation
- Can assist in overcoming process and communication blocks

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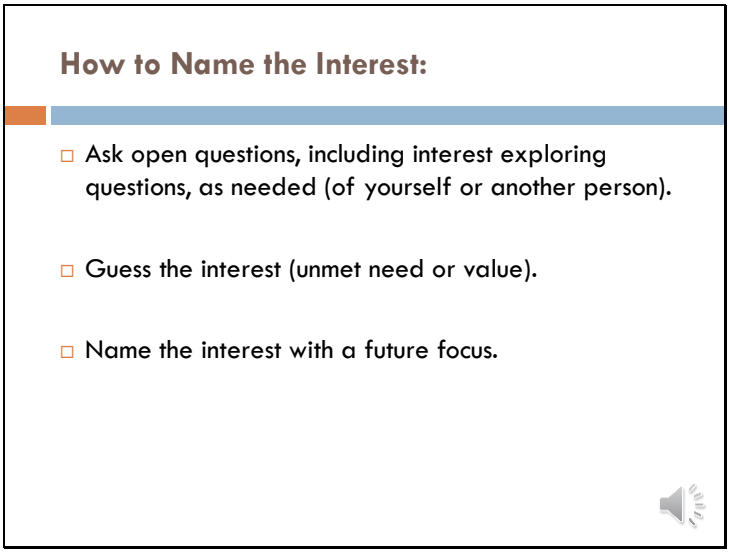
How to Name the Interest:
Ask open questions, including interest exploring questions, as needed (of yourself or another person).
Guess the interest (unmet need or value).
Name the interest with a future focus.

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The DON'Ts of Naming Interests

Don't

- include negative or blaming language
- include positions
- name the interest in the past tense (ex. "You would have preferred to be treated with respect.")

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The DOs of Naming Interests

Do

- clearly state the interest
- name the interest in a forward looking way (ex. "You want to be appreciated for your work.")
- use positive language (ex. Instead of "You want to avoid feeling unappreciated." say "You want to be appreciated.")

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Example

Mary: “Great, I do all the work while you get to go to the conference!”

You: “What concerns you about me going to the conference?”

Mary: “I’ve been busting my butt for the last couple of months, working without a partner! Now that I finally have one, and you go off to Toronto for the week? That’s hardly fair.”

To yourself: “Sounds like Mary wants some support to do the work. Also seems like fairness is important.”

You: “It sounds like you want to feel supported to do the project work. It also sounds like finding a way to decide about the conference that feels fair is really important to you. Is that right?”

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Layered Interest Exploring

Layered interest exploring is a way to deepen your understanding of your own and the other person's interests. It's a deeper dive that makes a transformative difference in developing mutual understanding. The deeper you explore the Interests, the richer the understanding of the conflict by all involved, and the more likely it is that solutions will be truly satisfying.

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Layered Interest Exploring

The metaphor of peeling an onion is helpful in thinking about how to layer interest exploring. The skin of the onion is the position, which needs to be peeled away to reveal the interest underneath. There are many layers behind that first interest, however, and peeling back more and more of the onion will help you reveal more interests.

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How to layer interest exploring:

1. ask an interest exploring question
2. listen to the answer and ask another interest exploring question about the answer
3. name an interest every now and then as you continue to ask more and more interest exploring questions and identify more and more interests
4. summarize all of the interests heard

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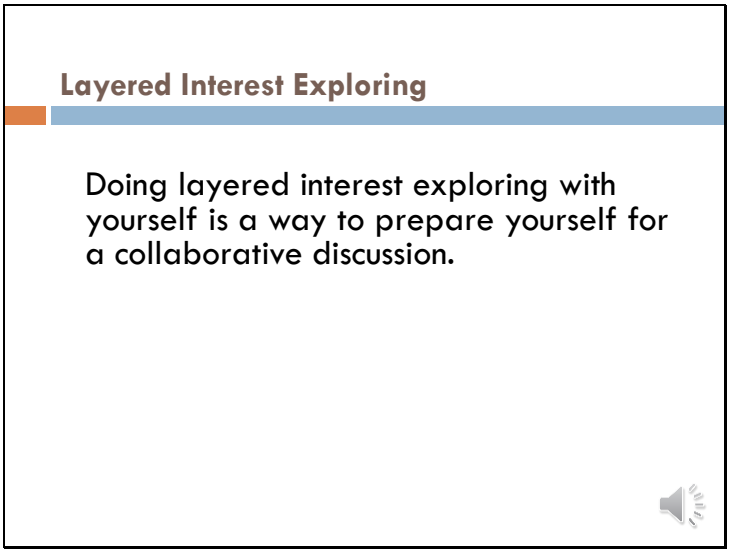
Layered Interest Exploring
Doing layered interest exploring with yourself is a way to prepare yourself for a collaborative discussion.

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Layered Interest Exploring Example

Kim: "I want to move to a new apartment."

Jan: "What do you like about the idea of moving to a new apartment?"

Kim: "We are just so far away from the school."

Jan: "What worries you about not being close to the school?"

Kim: "The bus ride is so long - I'd rather the kids use that time to play or do homework."

Jan: "If they were able to have that extra time to play or do homework, how do you think that could help?"

Kim: "They are so tired, and so cranky, which makes me tired and cranky - if they didn't have to rush to do everything maybe we would have a more peaceful home life."

Jan: "Sounds like you want to kids to feel relaxed about the work they have to do and to have a more peaceful home. Is that right?"

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Practicing Layered Interest Exploring

The more you practice this skill, the easier it gets. Part of your homework will be to do this layering with yourself. You could also ask for some help from family, friends and colleagues. Ask someone to take a position (or notice them in everyday conversations) and try to uncover as many interests as you can by asking the questions and naming the interests. I'll post some opportunities to practice in our Facebook group, as well.

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Two Goals in Collaboration

There are two goals in collaboration:

- good solutions that meet your interests and
- good relationships.

In order to accomplish those goals, you need to know the interests connected to both.

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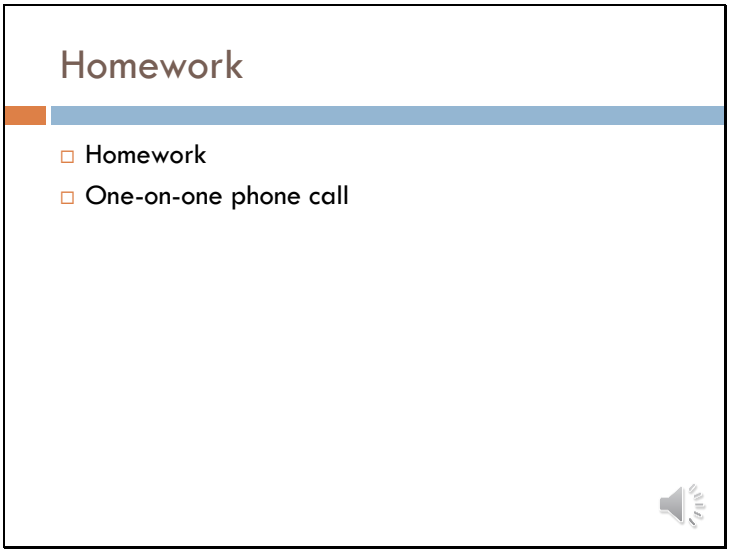
Three Main Tasks in Collaboration

As an interest-based problem solver you have 3 tasks:

1 Identify interests

2 Ensure everyone involved in the problem understands their own interests as well as those of the others

3 Ensure solutions you agree on satisfy interests

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