

VantagePoint

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Relationships



How to Turn Argument into Partnership Every Time

by Noah Blumenthal

Do you ever get frustrated when someone else fails to realize that you are right and she is wrong? You lay out your case. It's iron clad. You've got the answer. She is clearly confused. Why can't she just see the wisdom of your point of view? Wouldn't everything be so much easier if people just realized when you were right?

This comes up with a lot of my coaching clients, and the challenge is one of perspective. They express frustration with their coworkers (or occasionally with their spouse). They explain to me the many ways that their idea is flawless. They provide a counterpoint to every possible critique of their idea. And they show absolutely no understanding or appreciation of the merits of the ideas presented by the other people involved.

When you get into an argument or disagreement there is almost always an underlying assumption that one answer is right while the other one is wrong. So you spend time arguing against the other point, bolstering your own position, and getting frustrated that the other person doesn't see it your way.

If you are fortunate enough to have the authority to make the final decision, you then choose your own answer and can't understand how the other person isn't 100% behind your choice. It's easy to fail to consider how you have spent the past 20 minutes fighting against her ideas. Perhaps you even showed your frustration during that conversation. After all, how is it possible that she doesn't see it your way?

The answer to that question is that there may just be two right answers. Most argument consists of two or more people trying to assert the case for why their opinion or idea is the "right" one. However, situations are almost never black and white.

There are always multiple ways to view things. You never have all the information. Even if you and the other person are working from the exact same facts, you each bring your personal history and ways of interpreting things to the table.

Think for a moment how conversation and language would change if, instead of arguing that one answer is right and the other wrong, your debate was between two right answers, two quality solutions. Imagine what it would be like if you and your conversation partner (not adversary) held the belief that you both had ideas with merit that constituted legitimate right answers.

You would be more respectful. You would listen better. You would ask more questions (the curious kind, not the kind meant to catch the other person's deficiencies). You would be more invested in whatever solution was chosen. You would be more eager to find ways to improve either idea. You would find better solutions and build better relationships in the process.

Shifting your perspective to see multiple right answers only requires a little open-mindedness and diligence. Try taking these steps to change your conversation and find better solutions and resolutions.

- Recognize that you have two right answers. Stop the conversation to point out that there is quality and value in each solution.
- Argue for each side together. Spend a set amount of time brainstorming the merits of one, then the other solution.
- Argue against each side together. Work together to identify the issues or challenges in each solution.
- Recognize again that you have two right answers. Reinforce that there is merit to both sides.
- Make a decision. You still may not have consensus, but you will have more respect and less animosity.

We've all felt the frustration of arguing with someone who doesn't agree with our point. Just stating that both ideas are right answers can have a huge impact on the conversation. It becomes more civil, more collaborative, and more fun. Whether you are arguing with your boss, your employee, your spouse or your kids, try finding the value in their ideas. Tell them they have a right answer too. If you disagree with me on this, you just might have a right answer.

Noah Blumenthal is president of Leading Principles, a coaching company that helps people find fresh perspectives in order to achieve dramatic changes in their work and lives. He was named by Leadership Excellence Magazine as one of the world's "Top 100 Minds in Personal Development," and his books, Be The Hero and You're Addicted to You, help readers build self-leadership and personal accountability.