

## ISN'T THE WIN-WIN APPROACH TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE?

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Research shows that seeking mutual benefit is not only desirable - it works. In fact, the win-win approach produces better results than a win-lose negotiating style. In a series of experiments, Robert Axelrod presented subjects with a bargaining situation called “prisoner`s dilemma” in which they could choose either to cooperate or betray a confederate. There are three types of outcome in prisoner`s dilemma: One partner can win big by betraying a confederate, both can win by cooperating, or both can lose by betraying one another. Although cynics might assume that the most effective strategy is to betray a partner [a win-lose approach], Axelrod demonstrated that cooperation is actually the best hard-nosed choice. He staged a tournament in which participants played against a computer that was programmed to represent several negotiating strategies. The winning strategy was one called “Tit-for-Tat”. It starts out by cooperating and continues to cooperate until the other party betrays it. After that, the program always does what the other played did on the previous move. It never punishes an opponent more than once for a betrayal, and it will always cooperate if the other player does. A win-win Tit-for-Tat strategy succeeds for several reasons. First, it is not a patsy. It responds quickly to betrayal, discouraging others from taking unfair advantage. At the same time, it is quick to forgive. It does not hold a grudge: As soon as the other party cooperates, it does too. Finally, it is not too sneaky. By making its behavior obvious and predictable, Tit-for-Tat creates an atmosphere of trust. There are certainly some conflicts that cannot be resolved with win-win outcomes. Only one suitor can marry the prince or princess, and only one person can be hired for the advertised job. Furthermore, it is impossible to reach a win-win solution when your partner refuse to cooperate. Most of the time, however, good intentions and creative thinking can lead to outcomes that satisfy everyone`s needs.

Соціально-гуманітарні аспекти розвитку сучасного суспільства : матеріали Всеукраїнської наукової конференції викладачів, аспірантів, співробітників та студентів факультету іноземної філології та соціальних комунікацій, м. Суми, 19-20 квітня 2013 р. / Відп. за вип. В.В. Опанасюк. — Суми : СумДУ, 2013. — Ч.2. — С. 72.