

TOOLS & PRACTICES

REFRAME DIFFICULTIES

How to befriend your nemesis

by Sylvia Cheuy

“Us” versus “them” is a luxury we cannot afford when we seek solutions to intractable problems. Reframing our perceptions of “the other” is challenging particularly with perspectives we don’t understand or trust. However, our capacity to do this enables us to enhance shared wisdom. This tool can be used by individuals or groups to reframe the actions of a perceived nemesis to build greater empathy and understanding.

In the first column, list irritating qualities of that individual or sector, things that really “push your buttons.”

Now list the opposite of each quality you named in column one.

In the third column, reframe each quality in column one as a strength. For example, what would your nemesis call this trait?

Finally, identify potential benefits of each “bad” quality from column one.

What irritates me most about X?	Some opposing attributes	Reframe irritations as positives	Potential benefits of X's attributes
Stubborn	Flexible	Persevering - won't give up	Keeps going despite resistance
Rigid - everything has to be done “properly”	Easy-going, laissez-faire	Methodical - orderly and logical	Keeps us organized and on track

Once you’ve completed the table, consider the following:

- Can you think of situations where the qualities in the fourth column could help you achieve ends that you value?
- How are you or your own sector perceived – either positively or negatively – by others?
- Are there any additional realizations or insights you've gained from this exploration?

This exercise was developed by Frances Westley and Brenda Zimmerman for the Graduate Diploma in Social Innovation at the University of Waterloo.