Interest-based problem solving

What is interest-based problem solving?
Interest-based problem solving (IBPS) is a way of solving problems at work collaboratively.

The key stages of interest-based problem solving
IBPS is a structured process. There are 6 key stages in the process:
1. Identify the problem, issue or opportunity
2. Identify the stakeholders and their interests
3. Extract the right information
4. Generate options
5. Develop criteria or standards
6. Seek consensus

Why interest-based problem solving?
IBPS recognises that people involved in disputes will have some competing interests and some shared interests. ‘Interests’ are the needs and concerns of people that lie beneath a dispute. They are different to demands or outcomes sought.

By focusing on interests rather than competing demands, the interests that gave rise to the dispute can be satisfied in innovative ways. Often problems can be solved in ways that are different from what the parties sought upfront.

On the other hand, traditional problem solving usually involves parties making demands to solve problems. Little, if any time, is spent looking into the needs behind the demands or different ways of meeting those needs.

How to get started
Are you willing to re-examine the way you deal with workplace disputes? It will involve examining your current patterns in disputes and how you can prevent or manage them better in the future. Everyone will need to be willing to open up, reframe problems and explore new possible solutions. IBPS methods may help you reach new breakthroughs.

Everyone involved in IBPS will need to be trained in the stages and be committed to respectful, creative and disciplined engagement. An independent facilitator can be used to help the parties get started.

• Find out more on our New Approaches webpage.
• Read the companion guide, A guide to interest-based problem solving.
• Have the parties undertake joint training in interest-based consultation.

How can the Commission help?
The Commission can assist with its training and facilitation services, customised to the needs of each set of parties. For further information email newapproaches@fwc.gov.au.

Apply for our help by lodging a Form F79.