

FAIRNESS

What is Fairness?

Fairness refers to the consistent demonstration of the ability to think from a “win/win” perspective, meaning that all relevant stakeholders’ needs are considered and honoured to the best possible extent.

Why is it important to be fair?

Fairness in a professional context means simply that all reasonable efforts are put into play to ensure that the needs of all relevant and appropriate stakeholders are known and considered when making decisions and demonstrating professional behaviour. The benefits of such an approach include:

- Increased satisfaction level of team members, vendors, partners and customers.
- Ensuring people feel “listened to” and that their opinions and needs are acknowledged.
- Strategic decisions are made wisely because multiple perspectives are included in the process.
- Business practices are often more sustainable because when various stakeholders’ needs are met, they are likely to continue to support the process and demonstrate loyalty.
- There is an increased level of “engagement” with staff and others because they feel welcomed in the environment and individually focused on in a way that supports them as well as the group.
- Decreased complaints and issues when the needs of others aren’t met.
- Less time and energy needs to be dedicated to clarifying needs after the fact, correcting commercial damage and attending to negative emotions.
- Developing a reputation for fairness attracts new personal and professional opportunities, whereas the reputation for being unfair can dramatically damage the professional environment.

Why is it so easy to slip up in the area of fairness?

There are six philosophies of human interaction, where “win/win” is just one of them. When someone is operating from the “win/win” perspective, things typically go well. However, when one of the other five philosophies is the operating framework, then fairness can go out the window (but not necessarily – it does depend on the context).

The six philosophies appear on the following page.

- **Win/Win** – People can seek mutual benefit in all human interactions. Principle-based behaviour.
- **Win/Lose** – The competitive paradigm: if I win, you lose. The leadership style is authoritarian. In relationships, if both people aren't winning, both are losing.
- **Lose/Win** – The “Doormat” paradigm. The individual seeks strength from popularity based on acceptance. The leadership style is permissiveness. Living this paradigm can result in psychosomatic illness from repressed sentiment.
- **Lose/Lose** – When people become obsessed with making the other person lose, even at their own expense. This is the philosophy of adversarial conflict, war, or of highly dependent persons. (If nobody wins, being a loser isn't so bad.)
- **Win** – Focusing solely on getting what one wants, regardless of the needs of others.
- **Win/Win or No Deal** – If we can't find a mutually beneficial solution, we agree to disagree agreeably – no deal. This approach is most realistic at the beginning of a business relationship or enterprise. In a continuing relationship, it is no longer an option.

Tips for being fair

- Achieving a “win/win” outcome is not about personality, but about the process one takes to explore the needs of others and our self, and facilitates/negotiates, so that everyone gets a fair chance to contribute to the solution/outcome.
- Consider starting with asking all the stakeholders what their realistic needs are.
- Create an environment where people feel safe and welcome to state their needs.
- Ask others what they think the solutions are, with the same interest, energy and intent you asked what their needs were.
- Acknowledge and reward “win/win” behaviours when you see them. Do not reward “win/lose” or other frameworks which are inappropriate to the situation.
- Celebrate “win/win” outcomes with all the stakeholders involved. You could include in the celebration the sharing of lessons learned from the process and ask questions about how those lessons could be applied to other situations. (Note: “Celebrate” doesn't necessarily mean throwing a party. It's more about marking the achievement in some appropriate and visible way so that people recognise the accomplishment, including recognising their own strengths as a contribution to that achievement.)

Characteristics and/or Behaviours of a person who is fair

- The person is known for their integrity and respect of others.
- The person focuses on the relationship and the needs of each party in the relationship equally.
- Expectations are typically defined, documented and honoured.

- The person is often asked to help resolve conflict because of the fairness in their approach and skills.
- The person is often asked for advice because of their wisdom and reputation for fairness.

Evaluate your own perspective on fairness

- What does “fairness” mean to you? How do you recognise the attitude AND behaviours when you see them in yourself and/or others?
- What are your strengths in terms of fairness? How do you leverage these and for what purpose?
- What are your opportunities for improvement in terms of fairness? What specifically could change and who would benefit from the change and how?
- What reputation do you have in terms of fairness? How did you earn this reputation, regardless of whether it’s positive or negative? How do you feel about this reputation?
- What feedback have you received from others about whether you are fair or not? What have you done with that feedback?
- What’s the greatest lesson, personally and/or professionally, you’ve learnt regarding being fair? What did do with, or how do you apply that lesson?

Improve your degree of fairness

After you have completed your evaluation, if you have noticed some room for improvement, you might like to try some of the following strategies:

- Seek out a person (or persons) who you believe consistently demonstrate “fairness”. Interview them and ask them questions about their own development process to get to where they are now. Consider that this is a mentoring session where it may be expected that you will make a commitment to this person at the end of the interview and that it’ll be necessary for you to follow through.
- Ask for feedback from your colleagues, staff, vendors, partners and customers about how they see your professional attitudes and behaviours as being fair or not. Give them permission to be honest, acknowledge and thank them for their feedback, and make commitments to them about what you will do with the feedback. You may need to prepare yourself for the possibility that you’ll be asked to make agreements with various stakeholders so that they can be more involved, be listened to, and that their needs will be met more consistently in the future.
- Consider getting coached or mentored on this area (or any other area you’d like to develop) and work with the coach to determine the actual habits which are effective and those which are negatively impacting your performance to give and/or receive feedback well. If you’re

not sure where to start to look for a coach or mentor, the High Ideals member directory includes members who offer these services, which may be a good place to begin your search as you'll know that those practitioners have also achieved the High Ideals credentials.

Further resources

If you would like to develop further in the area of fairness, the following resources may be worth considering.

Please note that High Ideals does not endorse or receive any direct benefit from recommending the following resources. The list is simply a suggestive collection of materials that members of the High Ideals management team have found useful in their own development.

- **The Negotiator's Toolkit** by Allan Parker – This is a must-have book for all business professionals, written by one of the most respected mediators in the world. You can explore this book and other essential resources related to Fairness and other topics at his website: <http://www.peakpd.com>
- <http://www.mindtools.com/> is a site High Ideals often refers people to as it is an incredible resource to assist people in developing their own professional skills regardless of whether they run their own business or work for someone else. There are specific articles on "win/win negotiations" and "fairness" to explore.
- <http://www.selfgrowth.com/> is a site High Ideals often refers people to as it offers both personal and professional self-development information and resources. You can type in any search word you want, such as "giving and receiving feedback" and you'll get a list of articles, blogs, resources and links to other sites which could assist you in your own development.
- <http://www.high-ideals.com> – Check out the Member Directory section for High Ideals members who offer services which could support you, such as coaching, mentoring or consulting on High Ideals criteria/values.

Author and editor acknowledgement

High Ideals would like to acknowledge and thank Noel Posus for his work on this document. Noel Posus is the Director of Training, Research and Development for High Ideals as well as a professional coach, educator and author. To find out more about Noel, please visit his profile on the High Ideals directory by clicking [here](#) and search by name.

This document is part of the **High Ideals** Criteria Information Series, edited by Claire Stretch. For more information on Claire please visit her profile on the High Ideals directory by clicking [here](#) and search by name.

Disclaimers and Other Important Information

High Ideals Pty Ltd is committed to ensuring that all of our services, products and information we share is foremost designed and delivered in a manner which has the potential to support others. Our values are focused on giving, being supportive and making a positive difference in the world. We are also dedicated to ensuring that we are at all times ethical demonstrating integrity at all levels. Therefore this Disclaimers page is necessary to provide clarity on a number of key points, as follows:

- All **High Ideals Pty Ltd** documents are for information purposes only.
- Clients and all who read these documents are responsible for their own decisions and **High Ideals Pty Ltd** will never provide advice or direct you what to do. Our services include sharing these resource documents, which are focused on assisting clients to raise their own awareness, by which they can make their own decisions and be responsible for their own actions. It is the responsibility of anyone who receives an **High Ideals Pty Ltd** resource document, whether they are a direct client of ours or were forwarded this document from a third party, to read our full terms and conditions available on our website: www.high-ideals.com
- The client and/or reader of this document are responsible for engaging in their own research, further reading, and exploration. This document is simply an information sharing starting point only.
- All of our **High Ideals Pty Ltd** personnel and members can contribute to our Resource Library, and share the responsibility for writing all of these documents. As a collective, we have a huge range of backgrounds and areas of expertise. We also take great care when sharing information to ensure it is accurate, useful and a product of sound research as well as our own personal and professional experience. Therefore many of our comments are born out of our many years of experience in a large number of areas of endeavour or interest and the successes of our clients is the evidence behind these strategies and techniques. If we are providing personal opinion, we make that clear, and take care to validate why and/or how this personal opinion may be useful in the total picture of self exploration of the client/reader. When we do share personal opinion, it is typically in the form of sharing from our relevant experience, ideas of strategies we feel may be helpful, and potentially have been helpful for us personally. Personal opinion never includes giving advice or providing specific direction to the client/reader. If we are referencing the work, thoughts or opinions of others, we also make that clear and give full attribution and acknowledgement to those other sources of information. We also share our validation for why we feel this information may be of benefit to the client/reader.
- We adhere to the Harvard Referencing System in providing reference information and acknowledgement for all books, websites and other information sources. We are continually updating our documents to match this standard. If you ever notice a reference which you feel does not meet this standard, please let us know by writing to info@high-ideals.com with this feedback so we can attend to it immediately.

- **High Ideals Pty Ltd** never makes any endorsement or recommendation of any websites, books, companies, products or services. Instead, we provide ideas for the client/reader to explore certain websites and books in particular. We review and carefully select which websites and books we feel may have some potential value to our clients/readers. Then, when we raise these ideas with the client/reader, we also provide our justification for why we feel the idea may have some merit. For example, if we raise the idea to the client/reader to explore a particular website, we will indicate what it is about that website which we feel has the potential to be useful to the client/reader. It is then the responsibility of the client/reader to make the final assessment as to whether or not it is actually useful.
- We also take no responsibility for the content of any website other than **High Ideals Pty Ltd**. We cannot control the accuracy, security or technical performance of any website other than our own. Similarly, we have no control over the content of any books we raise ideas for exploration about, or the availability of those books. It is the total responsibility of the client/reader to determine whether this information is for them to pursue further.