

“THREE DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO CONFLICT”

- Rick Schmidt (204-667-4292)

The Stolen Boots:

In their book, “*Getting Disputes Resolved*” (1988), **Ury, Brett, & Goldberg** describe their experiences when they were asked to intervene in the strike-crippled coal industry of the eastern USA. They tell a story about some stolen boots...

It started with a pair of stolen boots. Miners usually leave their work clothes in baskets that they hoist to the ceiling of the bathhouse between work shifts. One night a miner discovered that his boots were gone. He couldn't work without boots. Angry, he went to the shift boss and complained: "Goddammit, someone stole my boots! It ain't fair! Why should I lose a shift's pay and the price of a pair of boots because the company can't protect the property?"

"Hard luck!" the shift boss responded. "The company isn't responsible for personal property left on company premises. Read the mine regulations!"

The miner grumbled to himself, "I'll show them! If I can't work this shift, neither will anyone else!" He convinced a few buddies to walk out with him and, in union solidarity, all the others followed.

The superintendent of the mine told us later that he had replaced stolen boots for miners and that the shift boss should have done the same. "If the shift boss had said to the miner, I'll buy you a new pair and loan you some meanwhile, we wouldn't have had a strike." The superintendent believed that his way of resolving the dispute was better than the shift boss' or the miner's. (page 3-4)

Ury, Brett, & Goldberg say there are “Three Approaches to Resolving Disputes”

- 1) Determine **who is most powerful** - the miner's approach (wildcat walk-out)
or...
- 2) Determine **who is right** - the shift boss's approach (“company isn't responsible”)
or...
- 3) Reconcile **Interests** - the superintendent's approach (addressing concerns)

What do you think?

- 1) Was the superintendent right or wrong? Why?
- 2) In what ways are some dispute-resolving approaches better than others?
- 3) Which approach are you best acquainted with?

Distressed & effective systems, as described by Ury, Brett, & Goldberg:

