

GULLS SCREECH, THE OCEAN SWAYS, AN UNSTEADY HORIZON AND SALT SPRAY...
INKY FINGERTIPS, BAITED LINES, WIND-CHAPPED LIPS, A TIMELESS PASTIME...
SOME SEEK FOOD, FORTUNE, OR FAME, ALL FIGHT FOR KEEPS BUT WHO'S TO BLAME?
FOR THE DECLINE, REBOUND, AND UNCERTAIN FATE OF THIS CRIMSON SEA CREATURE
WE FISH FOR UNDERSTANDING, FISH FOR BALANCE, WE FISH FOR THE FUTURE.

by Nicole Casuso

The Art of Conflict Management

by Susana Hervas Avila and Nicole Casuso, NRLI Class XX Fellows

Session 2 DESTINATION

Only 30 days passed since we concluded our whirlwind introduction to a group of strangers at the Gainesville Garden Club and crash-course in what we could expect from being part of the NRLI Class XX these next 8 months. In the midst of a pandemic and growing accustomed to society's new sense of normal, the mixture of excitement and anxiety seemed almost palpable. With eager minds and maybe tired bodies, we found ourselves gathering together again in Destin. Many of us had not been to this area of Florida, nor have significant prior experience with Gulf Red Snapper fisheries management.



Triangle of Needs and Roots of Conflict

We often focus on the substantive issues or “what” the problem is but often overlook “why” the problem persists. We first try to paint conflict using logic and reason as the scientific people we are. We are trained to look at conflict management through a very objective lens and rely on structured frameworks to better understand not only how conflicts arise but also how we can overcome them. Like a great pointillist work, it is difficult to grasp the entire picture if we spend too much time looking closely at individual dots upon a vast canvas. The triangle of needs and circle of the roots of conflict are two of the illustrative methods we explored during Session 2.

They prompted us to step back and reflect on those competing interests and other intertwined forces that drive (and sometimes hinder) successful negotiations involved in Red Snapper Fishery management. We realized that no matter how you draw a conflict pie and the size of the resulting pieces, all join at a central point. It is human emotion that can either glue these pieces neatly together or create a sticky mess.

Perceptions and biases - the “human” factor

When we spoke to the stakeholder panel we saw how human relationships and how we treat each other can influence how we manage conflict. Despite having varying backstories that led to their own interest in red snapper, the panelists treated each other with respect. Perhaps the civility we witnessed was a result of the panelists already knowing one another in a professional and personal setting, but what happens when the stakeholders involved are prejudiced strangers? Or simply people with their own biases and perceptions of reality - like we all are? How do you engage people in dialogue? Well, here is when science needs the arts. Here is when the facilitation we experience during our sessions bring the necessary artistic elements that, like good shading in a painting, are subtle but essential. The art of facilitation is the greatest ally for dialogue; those subtle styles we see Jon and Joy employ during our own facilitation experience in the sessions at NRLI. This is the art that cannot be easily taught through



standardized lessons and that instead requires attention, reflection and intention.

Political Boundaries

After listening to NRLI Alumnus and scientist Ed Camp and having the chance to ask questions to the panelists, it was apparent that behind the red snapper conflict there is a strong political force. It drives the issue from behind closed doors, as well as overtly overrides established systems. This adds another layer to the issue and also begs the question: Is political power our boundary as practitioners of conflict management? Learning about these structural processes seems the job of a detective, so how do we involve interest groups/individuals who may not be interested in dialogue but instead are self-directed through political advantages? We can combine science and art to

analyze the issue thoroughly and facilitate it wisely. But is that the boundary to our potential contribution?

Vulnerability and Connection

We cannot finish without talking about the 2-minute introductions. We had the chance to peer



into each other a little bit more. Bringing part of ourselves - our shared humanity and personality - to the surface was another way to connect. Getting used to this fearlessness and openness can be another way of bringing creativity into what we do as well as being the example to those we serve to be courageous enough to let our guard down.