

## **Sample PEARL**

### **Thinking about how to realize Joint Gains in a mundane task like hiring a babysitter!**

The idea of “joint gains” is intriguing. If negotiations can result in benefits for both parties (beyond simply ending the pain of non-agreement), there would seem to be no good argument for avoiding negotiations. Ideas often sound better in theory than in practice, however.

Let’s test the idea with a practical situation that arose recently.

I needed a babysitter. Generally, I ask one of the high school kids down the street to watch my 9 year old daughter for \$5/hour. “Susie” often plays with “Jimmy”, our neighbor who is also an only child. Wouldn’t it make sense for Jimmy’s parents and us to offer Abbie, the kids’ favorite sitter, \$8/hour for watching the two kids at the same time? Jimmy’s parents and we would each save \$1/hour; Abbie would pull in \$8/hour, and the two kids could have fun playing together. Wouldn’t this arrangement create joint gains for everyone?

I think it would, assuming that the two kids play well together. If they do (as they often have), Abbie could conceivably be “freed” to watch her favorite tv shows, read a book, or talk on the phone to her friends. That would seem to be a real bonus for Abbie, who when sitting each child alone, generally has to be the playmate.

However, if the kids get into a spiff, then what? Then Abbie will first need to try to settle the fight. If the kids stop fighting but remain angry, then Abbie has two kids to entertain, separately and at the same time. As a teenager, maybe she does have limitless energy, but it may seem harder than having to deal with each kid on different nights.

So, this “joint gain” arrangement has some hidden risks that are borne by Abbie.

Let's think this out further: Will the "party" be held at Jimmy's house or ours? Under good conditions, this is not a worry. But, what if the kids get wild, have a food fight, or end up not wanting to play with each other? Whose house can best accommodate these circumstances? And, will the evening snacks be equally provided by the two families?

Although I don't think these risks are trivial, with our solid, good relations around the neighborhood, I don't think that the risk-bearing concerns are insurmountable. They can probably even be dealt with simply by trying the arrangement out. Since our neighbors and we have a long-term, ongoing relationship, we won't sweat the smaller issues (like who pays how much for what kinds of snacks!) For me, the bigger question is with whom do I raise this idea with first, and how much of my thinking here should I share? And a bigger question yet, why is \$8/hour fair to Abbie, rather than \$9 or \$7?

I liked the chapter by Lax and Sebenius. Their suggestions about where to look for joint gains is helpful. However, I also suspect that there are hidden costs and risks associated with many gains that could get overlooked in the enthusiasm to "find something for everyone" at the table.