



Negotiation

A View from Impact Factory

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Negotiation

"Heads I win, tails you lose." That's the way to handle negotiations, isn't it?

Well, no. Good negotiation isn't about winning and it isn't about someone else losing. Good negotiations are about both sides leaving feeling they got what they wanted, or at least better off than when they went in.

Unsuccessful negotiations are when either side feels they've compromised too much, given way when they didn't want to, felt undue pressure; felt threatened; made sacrifices they didn't want to.

In those situations the other party might believe they've won and go away feeling good about themselves; but that's not really successful negotiation. They may have won, but the other party will never trust them again and may not want to repeat the experience. As the cliché says, they may have won the battle, but they won't have won the war.

Indeed, negotiations can often feel like war (more on the differing types of negotiations below), which is why there is an inevitable expectation of win/lose in so many of them.

Well, we at Impact Factory believe that the best negotiation skills don't have to have such an inevitability about them.

It's never the same twice

There are many good books written about negotiating. A lot of them hold the view that there is a right or good way to run negotiations; that there is a model you can follow that will get you better solutions. This view may be a good starting point, however, there are several flaws to this way of thinking.

Firstly *negotiations* are never the same twice. Sometimes they are not even similar.

Even if you have to go back and deal with the same person about the same issue, it will be different. Time will have passed, things will have shifted, something new might now be involved.

Secondly *negotiators* are never the same twice. Even when you get the same person they could well be in a different mood. *You* could be in a different mood. One or both of you may have re-thought your position and, furthermore, you are almost certainly not a standard, regulation model human being with no idiosyncrasies and foibles.

Finally, things *should* change. You know how the press bleats on and on about political u-turns, as though they were a sign of weakness? Well, they aren't. Changing your mind is part of being an idiosyncratic, real person, therefore negotiations can change in mid-stream and become something completely different from where they started.

Know why you're there

Now, not only are negotiations and negotiators different, the reasons for entering into a negotiation can differ widely as well.

There are at the very least five types of negotiation that most people will be involved with in both their personal and their working lives:

Adversarial: fight, opposite ends, polarisation.

In this type of negotiation it can feel as though you need to go in armed and armoured; well defended and prepared for a fight.

Consensual: team model.

In this type of negotiation it feels more like give and take, a co-operative working out of strategy, roles and rewards.

Non-adversarial: everyone has an interest in making it work.

Here negotiation is often about what's the best way to arrive at a mutually agreed outcome.

Brainstorming: talking issues through, a 'drains-up'.

With this type of negotiation people bat around ideas to see what's there, what needs to be done and who's to do what.

Diplomatic: sensitive issues that need to be handled as though walking through a mine field.

With diplomatic negotiations there are usually hidden agendas and a need to be aware of the politics and ramifications of any decisions made.

We know that people will sometimes go into one kind of negotiation, discovering as they go along that it's quite another. For instance, we've recently seen a team meeting disintegrate into mayhem because one person came along anticipating a fight (and therefore creating one), when everyone else was expecting co-operation. It took a lot of diplomacy to get it back on track!

The thing is, these five types of negotiation are neither right nor wrong. There *can't* be a right or wrong when it comes to negotiations. What's important is that you know why you're entering into a particular negotiation and that you prepare for what you might encounter along the way. You're never going to be able to second-guess everything.

Develop your own approach

Really good negotiators are able to read the other person/people. They are able to let go of their positions, giving up one want and choosing another. They can take the role of an Objective Observer, retaining a calm, inner state of mind. They can fight tooth and nail and yet lose with good grace when necessary.

Though this may be something you aspire to it is certainly not the place to start.

Start with the idea that it's a game. And in the game there are a few rules and some skills that you can learn. However like all games it's more about tactics and playing to your strengths.

Before we get into that let's say a word about "good" negotiating. Any advice that starts with "It's a good idea..." is likely to be of little help in the heat of a negotiation unless it happens by chance to fit in with your personal rules and patterns.

Here's an example. "It's a good idea to pitch your opening price a little above what you are willing to settle for". Sounds good? Not if your negotiating style is to stick to your guns or give way too soon it's not.

What *would* be a good idea is to start with what your negotiating style is and work from there. Notice we don't say "Define your strengths and weaknesses" or "Work out what you do well and use that". No. Just work out the patterns and rules you follow when negotiating.

If you realise that you habitually either fight too hard and refuse to give way or give in too easily, then you can create some additional rules of your own that will help you immensely.

For instance, you could decide to set your opening price too high and then give them anything they ask for, or you could set your price too low and then not give them anything.

Because it suits your style you will be happy working this way. What's more you will be happy even if it goes wrong. In the first instance, you could get more than you thought you would; and in the second you will probably lose work from someone who doesn't value your services very highly.

What if negotiating were about giving away as much as you possibly could, without feeling unhappy about it? What do you have, that you're willing to give away, that the other side wants? What pressures can you bring to bear that won't feel like pressure, but rather will feel more like good hard bargaining.

As in all Impact Factory work, we think good recovery is far more important than getting it right the first time, or even getting it right at all!

Using the approach outlined here you can start to develop a negotiation style that is easy to do and works well for you.

If you are interested in talking to us further about our work on negotiation, please phone: 020 7226 1877 or e-mail: enquiries@impactfactory.com