



“ARROGANCE IS THE WORST”

INTERVIEW: Feelings must stay at home when you go into a negotiation, says Matthias Schraner. This former police officer, now international negotiation expert, reveals not only how to control your own emotions, but also those of your negotiation partner.

HBM March 2017

Modern executives should be authentic and show their feelings, at least according to recent trends. Does this also apply to negotiations?

SCHRANNER You can freely show your feelings privately, but not in a negotiation. Be authentic at home, and professional in the negotiation room. When negotiating, I show zero feelings - nothing positive, nothing negative.

So are positive emotions, such as joyfulness following a success, taboo?

SCHRANNER It is all taboo. In a negotiation, I place the emphasis on common ground; we're pursuing the same goal. I do not display happiness when I get my position through, and I do not display anger if things don't work out. Anything else would be unprofessional and could hurt my clients.

How can I use my negotiating partner's emotions?

SCHRANNER You should recognize your negotiation partner's feelings - but do not take advantage of them. I may come to a desirable result by using my counterpart's emotions, but it would not be a sustainable outcome. The art of negotiating lies in the ability to reassure your negotiation partners and calm them down emotionally, so as to proceed with the negotiations peacefully.

This sounds difficult - especially when dealing with anger or aggressiveness. With which strategy does one reassure his opponent?

SCHRANNER The police has a five-step model, which applies to both private and business

negotiations. It all starts with active listening, which means that I don't ask questions, I don't make comments; I simply let the other talk. When my negotiation partner is done talking, I proceed to the second step: I empathize and make a connection with the way they feel by relating to their situation.

Could you give us an example?

SCHRANNER Imagine that you are the boss and you are about to terminate an employee. He is in his mid 50's, not particularly successful, has two children still in school, and is paying the mortgage on his house. As you break it to him, he begins to cry uncontrollably. If your reaction is to say "I understand your situation," as you flash your Rolex around, you are doing nothing to relax the situation. You must, however, respond truthfully and with actual empathy, by saying for example: "Everything seems to be falling apart to you right now, I know this feeling."

So I have now created rapport. What is the third step?

SCHRANNER Now that I have built basic trust, my negotiation partner is confident enough to share information they would not have shared earlier because they did not trust me. That is the third step. Once trust has been established, I move on to the fourth step; I begin developing a solution with my negotiation partner. Here as well, emphasis is placed on commonalities – i.e. by using "we" and "us" rather than "me". Only then can I proceed to the fifth and final step: implementing the solution, and maintaining a relationship with my partner. A big mistake that many commit is to proceed immediately to the fourth step – trying to find a solution; they believe that the interaction should begin with finding a solution, which is a mistake.

You deal in difficult negotiations, meaning that you are often short on time. Isn't it a risk to let others talk as much as they need to in order to be calmed?

SCHRANNER When done correctly, the process to relax my negotiation partner doesn't take more than a minute. Sometimes, I've seen people let out a torrent words, and end it with "I had to get that out" – and then they are in a completely different mindset. When people enter a negotiation emotionally engaged, they tend to escalate issues; they act emotionally instead of strategically – and that's a problem.

What emotion or mindset is the most fatal in negotiations?

SCHRANNER Arrogance is the worst. Many people think that their negotiation partner should agree with them, and with all of their demands, simply because they assume they are right. This is very common in the German-speaking culture. In terms of negotiations, it is the most

disastrous mistake one can make: to go to trial without negotiating, just to prove that the other party is wrong.

“The art of negotiating lies in the ability to reassure your negotiation partners and calm them down emotionally, so as to proceed with the negotiations peacefully.”

Profile

This former police officer learned his craft in the most extreme situations, ranging from negotiating in hostage takings and suicide attempts, to operating undercover in criminal organizations. Today, the 53-year-old negotiation expert puts his skills to use assisting decision makers through their negotiations. His customers include executives and large corporations, such as Deutsche Bahn, as well as international organizations such as the United Nations. He is the founder and CEO of the Schraner Negotiation Institute, adjunct professor in a couple of universities, as well as author of several books on the subject of negotiations.

© Harvard Business Manager 2017

Alle Rechte vorbehalten

Vervielfältigung nur mit Genehmigung der manager magazin Verlagsgesellschaft mbH