

NEGOTIATION: IS IT A MAN'S GAME?

In my previous two articles on negotiation, I provided some insight into the common mistakes made and gave some top tips to get the best deal every time you negotiate. I also shared my view (based on watching hundreds and hundreds of people negotiating over the last few years) that while men and women are as capable as each other when it comes to negotiating a deal, there are a number of differences that exist between the sexes.

Recent debate around Katty Kay and Claire Shipman's new book, *The Confidence Gap*, says that stereotyping, societal conditioning and expectation hold women back when it comes to asking for what they want. We need to be aware of this to ensure we aren't selling ourselves short at the negotiation table.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that all women do all of the things below, all of the time. However, if you do recognise yourself in the list below, I have provided a few tips.

WOMEN DON'T ASK (AS OFTEN):

It seems that we women are less likely than our male counterparts to take an opportunity to negotiate when we are presented with one. We are more likely to assume that the proposal being made to us is a definitive position and so we challenge less. Research carried out at the US Tennis Open Championships showed that female tennis players were more than 80% less likely than males to challenge a close line call decision made by the umpire.

What we should start doing is to make a conscious decision to challenge the facts that are being presented to us. That might be in relation to a pay rise or dealing with a supplier. Next time, try pushing back. What's the worst that can happen?

WE DON'T AIM HIGH ENOUGH:

So if we assume that we have managed to get over the first hurdle, our next problem presents itself: when we do ask, we don't aim high enough. This might explain why a recent study by the Chartered Management Institute showed that male managers would earn £141,000 more in bonuses over a lifetime than their female counterparts.

The problem is that at the end of the exercise if you bother to add up what the real cost of those freebies are to the firm's bottom line, then all of a sudden that target hourly rate isn't so lucrative after all.

WE DON'T LIKE BEING CHAMELEONS:

In my previous article I talked about the importance of being able to change your negotiation style to suit different situations. Over a number of years in this industry, I have observed that many women feel very uncomfortable at the thought of "switching personalities" in order to get a result. Women appear more concerned about being labelled "disingenuous" or "shallow" and have told me that they don't feel they would be able to pull it off successfully.

My response to this? There is nothing disingenuous about playing different roles. Over the course of a week I play the roles of mother, commercial negotiator, friend, boss, mediator, wife, all of which require different styles and responses. If we can apply this flexible mindset to executing our negotiations, then we will start to see improved results.

WE DON'T LIKE TO SAY NO:

From a young age girls are socialised to be "nicer" and more in touch with their own, and other people's feelings than boys and as a result tend to find it harder to say no to people. This reluctance appears to carry on into adulthood, with women generally being more empathetic and seeking to appear collaborative and co-operative, even when it might not be appropriate to do so.

However, there are alternative ways of disagreeing with someone or rejecting their proposals. Why not try rejecting their proposal by thanking them for their suggestion and then moving them on by suggesting an alternative proposal? The best way to reject their proposal is quite simply to deliver your own.

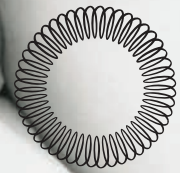
WE ARE BETTER AT NEGOTIATING FOR OTHERS:

Numerous pieces of research over the years have highlighted the fact that women tend to perform better when they are negotiating on behalf of others. This is evidenced by female politicians in the US routinely securing better financial outcomes for their constituents than their male counterparts and research from Harvard University that saw female executives securing higher bonuses for their team than their male colleagues.

The suggested reasons for this range from women feeling a greater sense of responsibility towards others, to suggesting that we feel more motivated to push hard if others are relying on us. Whatever the reason, we should surely embrace this. I often think of the words of Professor Neale of Stanford University who said "Every time I go into a negotiation now I remind myself that at home I have a husband, two sons, a mother-in-law, five dogs, three cats, four horses, two budgies and eight hens who are all relying on me to get a good outcome."

Negotiation can be uncomfortable. Negotiation can be challenging. Negotiation can be tough. If we recognise and accept these statements then we have already taken a huge step on the road to becoming better negotiators. So, before your next negotiation, borrow some advice from these articles, effectively plan your strategy and take a deep breath. Being a smart, resilient, articulate, confident negotiator takes balls.

And that's true whether you are a woman or a man.



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