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INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATION ACADEMY

*Negotiation: The Genesis of Management*



# Negotiation Skills Training

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## “Hit me harder, please!”

What makes you weaker and what makes you stronger?

To what extent should you **protect** your loved ones or your children against the **hardships** of life, and, while we are on this topic; how safe should you make the workplace for your employees?

What about yourself? Are you perhaps getting weaker due to a lack of challenges?

You can seal off your child in an **antiseptic glass dome** and fetch your workers from home in an air-conditioned centurion tank. You could pad their desks with cotton wool and remove all sharp objects (like pens and paper clips) from the environment. You can set up a computer to handle all customers complaints and in this way shield your staff from any unpleasantness, or keep them away from unhappy co-workers or from difficult assignments.

Or, you can do **nothing**.

Which would be best for them?

## A fragile life

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Nicholas Taleb\* recently published a prophetic book called “Antifragile” that already had some effect on how some of us view negative life events (in education, business, governing, medicine, etc). He explains the huge downside of a ‘**fragile**’ world and believes that we should be conscious of the stress factors that we normally protect ourselves from, but, which, in fact, makes us stronger (antifragile).

Some life experiences empowers one and some weaken one; in the same way that some germs strengthen one and some weaken one’s body.

Biologically, a human being is **weakened** if you kept in a sterile bubble, while exposure to some germs/viruses (within limits), may strengthen his/her resistance against infections at school and at work. Making **exposure decisions** is crucial!

For example: If you **overprotect** a child you may weaken his/her resistance against the difficulties of life. By allowing the child to be exposed to some difficulties, you may enable him/her to grow and become wiser, more skilful and stronger!

If you go and see the headmaster, teacher or other parents every time your child experiences problems at school, what are you doing to your own child?

If you experience **conflicts at home and work**, do you learn from it or do you ‘never want to go through it again’?

## Winning and Losing

If you loose a match, do you quit, or learn and become better next time.

A team or individual often learns much more from losing than from winning. Winning can, in fact, be **bad for you**. By winning and performing exceptionally you might develop an attitude, assuming that you are unbeatable. You might stop practicing or stop analyzing your opponents. (you might become fragile).

Some become stronger, when they learn that losing is as much part of life that winning (they become antifragile). You cannot always win, but you can **learn from losing**.

If you have an accident, or lose a court case, have a power failure, receive a threatening letter from the government, or any of many other misfortunes, do you hide where no one can find you and live off bread and wild fruit, or do you find ways and means to be ‘**one step ahead**’ of the electrical company, the government or whatever adversity?

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at

## Fragile killers

Why do we read, ever so often, of **individuals going crazy**; shooting and killing others so as to overcome their difficulties?

Have they ever been exposed to enough conflict and **disappointments** before? Have they had opportunities to develop their ability to cope with opposing views and emotions? Have they experienced being **rejected by** the other sex and developed the realisation that there are many alternatives? Or have their parents protected them from anyone that gave them as much as an **ugly stare**?

Do you keep your kids away from the hot stove, or do you warn them and then allow them to learn a lesson that they will never forget?

So, instead of **avoiding conflict**, failure, being sworn at, etc, you could actually learn from such experiences and become.

Of course you have to protect kids and people against fire and drowning and allergies that could kill them, but where do we draw the line? Realizing that you can also be over-exposed to all sorts of germs and hardships, which, in turn could cause you to develop all sorts of medical and psychological ailments.

## Post-Traumatic Growth

Taleb (P 41) talks about 'post-traumatic growth' instead of 'post traumatic disorder'. In fact today (19 March 2013) I happened to hear a call-in program on a local radio station. People were asked to talk about **post-traumatic stress** and the problems they experienced. Lots of callers were telling terrible stories (and it made good copy), yet no one talked about post-traumatic growth!

Many people actually become stronger from bad events like bankruptcies, divorce, death in the family and other sad events!

We tend to **focus on the negative**; the 'disorder' but often, as our grandparents used to say: "It **builds character**". Taleb uses the example of a racehorse that often loses against weaker opponents but win against the stronger ones (P43). The horse became antifragile.

We constantly hear about antifragile **viruses** that develop new strains after we have succeeded in overcoming the 'old strains'.

Those of you whose kids play **video games** will surely have come across a 'boss' in the form of Hydra, who keeps on growing new heads as they shoot off the old ones. That is in essence what antifragile means.

## Fragile Predictions

Many of us fail to realise man's ability to withstand and even learn and **grow from adversity**. We can still remember how, twenty years ago, fragile intellectuals predicted that half of the population of the world will be annihilated by Aids by 2010. It is now three years past that date and the world's population have not decreased! In fact the opposite has happened.

Taleb calls this tendency (to grow stronger when mishandled by life): "antifragility". Religions are often antifragile. The more you **criticize** Christianity or Islam, the stronger it gets!

## **Fragile Governments and Big Business**

Governments and Corporations that become **too powerful** often hate criticism. They do not want to listen and then **stop growing**. They do not understand that they become weaker by making laws against the free flow of information and the ability of newspapers to criticize them and say what they want. This sensitivity could be the beginning of their **own demise!**

"Perhaps we have benefitted more from those who have tried to **harm us** than from those who tried to help us!" (P53)

## **Develop your Workers and Everybody else**

One can postulate that those employees who work with **customer complaints** and gripes learn more about the business than some managers who shut themselves in an 'ivory tower' behind a secretary and other security mechanisms.

Those who train students by simply reading from a book do not develop themselves and their students as much as those who actively **encourage criticism** and constant feedback.

Taleb is of the opinion that we harm our kids by giving them medication for the slightest mood swing or headache? By putting kids on antidepressants and other drugs for any slight uncomfortable feeling we are creating **fragile kids** who will possibly create more fragile marriages and more fragile kids in return!

There are thousands of applications of the above principles: Lets briefly list a few:

- No competition: no development of new and innovative products
- Too strong government: laws that aren't properly debated
- No independent court system: Bad judgments
- Married life: No conflict, no ability to withstand change
- Sport: No losing and strain, no improved performance
- No Exercise: Body becomes flabby
- Child rearing: Kids cannot cope by themselves
- Negotiation: No debate and degree of conflict, no good deals
- Skills: No development if no practice
- Medical: No resistance without exposure

- Love: No relationship that can withstand a problem unless they were exposed to hurdles before.

## **Conclusion**

A recent article in the local newspaper told the story about a lady who, at the age of 102 explained her recipe for old age: “Lamb chops for breakfast, for lunch and for dinner”, she said to the surprise of the reporter.

Perhaps that explains fragility and being antifragile. Her body developed an ability to digest the lamb chops and even put it to good use. It helped her to be antifragile to ‘unhealthy’ food. If some of us fragile ones would suddenly, at the age of 50, start having lamb chops three times a day, we would possibly die from a heart attack within a few months!

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### *Bibliography:*

Taleb; N, 2012; Antifragile; Allan Lane, London