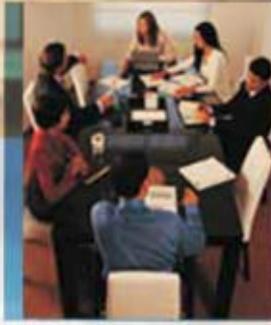


Course Director:
Prof Manie Spoelstra



Negotiation Skills Training

- Managers at senior, middle and junior levels
- Labour Union Negotiators
- Conflict dispute resolution mediators
- Sales Negotiators
- Buyers
- Hostage & Crowd Control Negotiators
- Facilitators

INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATION ACADEMY

Negotiation: The Genesis of Management

Newsletter March 2007
Issue 34

YOU DON'T LISTEN AND NOBODY LISTENS TO YOU!

“There is only one option left and that is to **fire** the whole workforce. After ten days of negotiating they still **don't understand!**”

Without boring you with trying to summarise the millions of pages written on communication, the simple conclusion seems to be: A **shocking** number of us do not communicate at all!

We do **not even understand** each other; although **both** of us **use the same language!**

The English of your wife could, at times, just as well be **Latin** to you; The French of the Labour Union Leader could just as well be American English to you, their French boss! The Zulu of your thirteen year old son could just as well have been **Chinese** to you!

This causes you to draw the wrong conclusions and to make the **wrong judgements**. This makes you sign the **wrong contract**. It makes the mediator only hears what he/she have decided before getting on the flight to factions at war.

It can cause you to marry someone although you both wanted to run away. Even to **consider suicide**, not realising that you have a great future at work, and it could make you send your kid to boarding school because you **never understood** that she was screaming for you to hug her!

Why don't we listen?

DIPLOMA IN NEGOTIATION SKILLS

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 **The information is in Conflict with our own beliefs!**

The statement, “they only heard what they wanted to hear” is often used by negotiating teams after a deadlock or failed attempt to make a deal.

Many academics have studied the **selectivity** of the perceptive (see, hear, taste, touch, smell) process for some time. This happens when someone **blocks out and filters communication** that is in **conflict** with her/his existing information or **beliefs**.

E.g. when a mediator in a divorce case hears the husband says to his wife: “**You are too fat**. You have to loose weight”, the mediator can be quite sure that the wife will **react** with.....”then why did you cheat on me with fat Sandy, hey?”

No communication takes place. The information is not absorbed and objectively evaluated; only **discarded** and seen as an attack with another motive.

Another common example is when a notice is sent by management that costs must be reduced if the organization is to earn a profit. The communication may not achieve its desired effect because workers view it in **conflict with the large salaries**, travel allowances, and expense accounts of some executives.

✍ **The information is in conflict with our Values**

The financial manager of a private hospital may give little attention to an email from a nurse who is “always putting too much emphasis on patient comfort”.

A white farmer, perceiving the SA Government as not being concerned enough about white farmers, may consider **emigration** or another career instead of **negotiating** with the Department of agriculture.

✍ **The Speaker has no Credibility**

Credibility of the speaker directly affects how the receiver views and reacts to her/his words, ideas, and actions.

A person, who views the minister of justice as **having no insight** in the rule of law, may sneer at his/her reported plans to change the judicial system of the country.

Union leaders who view management as **exploiters** and managers who view union leaders as political, **power seeking** animals are likely to engage in little real negotiation.

✍ **The Words are Greek!**

If an auditor talks to the union leader, “cost-benefit analysis, ROI, PPIX, CPIX, tax leverage, etc’, could have **little meaning** to the union leader, while “our comrades’ demands, the people’s charter, the struggle, etc. could have as little real meaning to the auditor of the company.

✍ **Window Dressing**

Speakers often **manipulate their words** and phrases to get the other party to perceive the information as positive. This is especially true in **presentations** where, for example three software companies are bidding for a huge contract at a bank. The bank may end up using the worst supplier due to being **‘fogged’ by the presentation**.

Workers often “**cover up**” unfavourable information when they talk to their bosses. Bosses make merit evaluations, grants salary increases, and promotes individuals based on what it receives by way of the positive and negative communication upward channel.

✍ **“In-Group” Language**

School kids, student groups, worker groups, professional, sport and social groups often develop words or phrase that have meaning only to members. Such special language₂

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can serve many useful purposes. It can provide members with feelings of belongingness, cohesiveness, and (in many cases) self-esteem; it can also facilitate effective communication within the group. The use of in-group language can, however, result in **severe communication breakdowns** when **outsiders** or other groups are involved.

✍ Imagery

When an individual plans to negotiate with his boss or a mediator plans to mediate between conflicting parties they most often form an **'image'** of what will happen. If the reality does not fit that particular **'image'** they either **reject** it or try to move the others towards that particular preconceived **'solution'** or **'image'**.

✍ Power Differences

Organizations often indicate status differences quite visible through **office size** and lay-out, motor cars for executives, named parking spaces, **titles** (professor, general, CEO, president, doctor, sir, your honour, etc).

Whether these rank differences are real or perceived, they still cause communication to be strained and **listening to be impaired**. Both 'senior' and 'junior' have preconceived ideas about the other that cause them to filter any discussion significantly.

✍ Personality

The personality of some individuals discourages honest feedback. A perceived trait of total confidence and command doesn't easily **invite criticism** from others. An **abrasive style** from a boss towards his subordinates has the same effect.

Some companies, in an attempt to overcome these barriers to communication, **eradicate visible differences** in status. They often share the same washroom as the workers, they have no special parking spaces, and they work in open offices with no frills. This sometimes

reduces misunderstanding and **facilitates the flow of information**.

✍ Body Language

Conflicting non-verbal communication can also affect each individual's perceptions of the other: You may view the South American as **pushy and aggressive**; he may see you as **cold and impolite**. A co-student may seem uninterested in dating you (so you never ask her/him out), yet may feel the opposite.

✍ Time and Timing

The pressure of time presents an important barrier to communication. An obvious problem is that managers **do not have the time** to communicate. For example, suppose a budget of the Department of Civil Aviation must be spent before a certain date (with the danger of losing the allocation, or be criticised). This could cause the department to get into **rushed tendering and contractual procedures**, causing them not to listen and communicate properly with potential contractors and, as a result, **endanger air safety** in the process.

In some cases, a **proposal** at a meeting could be rejected due to poor timing. The meeting could perhaps not be 'ripe' to accept the idea or the idea could be inappropriate **at the time**. A good proposal may get rejected due to bad timing. Perhaps it was suggested at a time when everyone **would only listen to words that would indicate the end of the meeting**. Perhaps members were tired or perhaps the proposal was in conflict with the member's feelings at that particular point of time.

✍ Communication Overload

One vital task performed by a manager is decision making. One of the necessary factors in effective decisions is information. 3

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Because of the advances in communication technology, the difficulty does not lie in generating information. In fact, the last decade has often been described as the "Information Era". Managers often feel **buried by the deluge** of information and data to which they are exposed. As a result, people **cannot absorb** or adequately respond to all of the messages directed to them. They "**screen out**" the majority of messages directed to them.

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

There are many techniques whereby communication, listening and understanding could be **drastically improved** and many conflicts and differences resolved.

Typical actions by negotiators, mediators, facilitators and simply individuals who are discussing things could include some of the following:

✍ Reflecting or Summarising

By summarising or reflecting what a speaker has said, the speaker can at least ensure that **mutual understanding** exists before the discussion continues.

For example: "So what you are saying is that....", or: "Can I summarise what I have heard and you can tell me if it is correct or not".

✍ Simplifying Language

The speaker should make an attempt to use words that will communicate the **meaning** to the audience instead of using word to **impress** the audience, yet achieving no understanding. Someone said to a senior engineer: "See if your **grade seven kid understands** it. If he/she does, you will get through to your co-workers."

✍ Effective Listening Skills

People often do not listen because they are waiting for a chance to speak themselves. A good practice could be to **make a note** of what you want to say (so as not to forget it); then continue listening and when the time is 'ripe', communicate your views to the audience.

✍ Empathy

By putting yourself 'in the **shoes of the other party**', or to get groups to role play a '**role reversal**' act, you can often facilitate significant understanding. For example: Ask management to play the role of the union and the union to be management. It is often surprising how different they respond, once proper understanding of the other's position is gained.

✍ Feedback and Repetition

This refers to the action of checking later and to repeat if necessary. **Follow up actions** could ensure that communication was understood and executed.

Although there are many other ways and means of ensuring proper communication such as regular meetings, the building of **mutual trust, brainstorming differences** and **common ground**, these pointers above could help to improve some problems in communication, while it could improve listening and understanding.

Manie Spoelstra

Bibliography: Gibson, JL, Ivancevich, JM, Donnelly, JH, J Konopaske; 2004; Organizations: Behavior, Structure, Processes; Irwin; NY

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