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INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATION ACADEMY

Negotiation: The Genesis of Management



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

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Running Useless Meetings!

If you are a professional chairperson (somebody paid to do it), such as a Speaker of parliament or many, all over the world, who are highly paid chairs (such as those who chair international and local sports, academic, social, environmental or professional bodies), you do not have to read what follows.

You surely know all about the topic. You have studied the laborious rules, the processes and the **art of chairmanship**. We, the members, are often awed by your finesse, your procedural knowledge, your manoeuvring skills and your amazing raw controlling abilities!

We guess you possibly became so adept by studying other top-notch chairpersons intensely. Perhaps you even went on special 'chair' courses. You could probably recite '**Robert's Rules**' on chairmanship (see: www.robertsrules.com) from the back of your head, and you carry an extended and updated copy of this 'bible' of all professional chairpersons in your briefcase.

Most of us, however, have to attend meetings at work, virtually on a daily basis, where we are less fortunate! The chairpersons of our meetings at the office, at the school, at the golf club and at church, are not so suave and impressive. In fact, they are **simply rotten**, and drive us to **alcohol and depression!** They waste **our time** (we could be playing TV-games!) and they make us **lie** (making up ridiculous excuses not to be there)! They push us to the point that we lie about death in the family, about medical ailments and about non-existent appointments with ministers of cabinets!

In fact, if you tally all those lame excuses in every square kilometre of Pretoria Central, you will need all the doctors, dentists, undertakers and finance ministers in the world to attend to them!

I suppose the terrible chairpersons have done some good in this world as well. Imagine all those who became full time artists and **quit the company** after a few doodling sessions in the 'midnight' meeting! Imagine all the creativity (oops, and spam) you stimulated, Mr 'Do-it-all-Yourself'-

chairperson; think about the tons of sleeping drugs you kept on the shelves (surely the pharmacists will hate you for that!) Ms 'No-Progress' chairperson!

How to be a really bad Chairman

Somebody once stated that you should rather not try to be a good chairperson, since there are no good ones...only shades of bad! Let us list some of the most **serious irritators**.

- **Bad chairpersons do NOT agree beforehand to the minutes, or any process and order rules** (such as time, agenda and participation rules) for your meeting.

This will result in no one being able to predict the outcome. The chances are good that the meeting will **last longer** than anyone expected. You can bet your last penny on the fact that there will be **gossip** afterwards in the coffee shop about the **chaos** at the meeting, or about the chairs' abilities/inabilities. It could even reach the ears of the CEO and open the path to promotion for someone other than the chairperson.

- **Bad chairpersons are partial to their own cause** (perhaps they would like to get the credit for the final proposal?)

Partial chairmen do not need anyone to attend their meetings. They have decided before they enter the meeting what the outcome should be! They should perhaps hope very few members turn up; or else, the minutes may end up being recited to a judge by some advocate who studied administrative law in detail!

Well, if you want to do it yourself, you can always justify your action by saying that Alexander the Great, Galileo, Vincent van Gogh and Bill Gates would never have reached

those heights if they listened to everyone's objections in their meetings!

- **Bad chairs do not keep proper minutes and do not have them approved** (and don't sign it either!).

Whether we like it or not, meetings could have **legal ramifications**, if some basic procedures are not followed. Lawyers, I'm sure, love bad chairpersons!

Bad chairpersons ignore any preparations before the meeting. They just push the throttle and hope that the plane will take off! They seldom realise that it could be to their benefit to consider, at least a **purpose**, an **agenda**, and a **timeframe** before they pull the trigger.

We have all had to endure the chairperson that follows the approach that someone labelled: the SATSNCADQ approach (speak all the time so that nobody can ask difficult questions)!

- **Bad chairpersons are vague about the purpose of the meeting!**

It is quite shocking to add up the time lost to chairpersons who were very unclear about the reason why they were there and what they were **supposed to do!**

Much time is often spent in arguments on data regarding 'topics', totally unrelated to the objectives of the meeting. The whole meeting then becomes an exercise in trying to determine what the meeting really should be about. Such meetings therefore regularly end in realisations that... " So, I believe I am correct in concluding that our next meeting should be about the marketing strategies for our new brand in Zimbabwe!"

DIPLOMA IN NEGOTIATION SKILLS

COURSE DATES FOR 2007:

10-12 SEPTEMBER (MIDRAND)
5- 7 NOVEMBER (MIDRAND)

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- **Bad chairpersons do not introduce guest speakers properly.**

As if it is not tough enough for the poor speaker to establish some form of **credibility** (especially if they are unknown), it provides further confusion for those in the meeting as to why they had to listen to this person (which makes you wonder what motive the chairperson had in inviting this 'guest' to begin with).

- **Bad Chairpersons do not start the meeting at the scheduled time!**

Chairpersons seem to think, at times, that their time is more valuable than that of the members. Perhaps they try to create the impression that they are busier than anybody else.

Possibly 80% of irritators in meetings are related to **time factors**. From meetings that do not start on the scheduled time to those that do not end on promised times; and the unnecessary time spent on unnecessary topics! (Or too little on important ones!).

A Guide for most Meetings

1. Frame the Objectives!

Good chairpersons **explain the objectives** of meetings, the constraints regarding time available and the consequences of not reaching a conclusion.

They get the members to **agree on the process**, the time, the agenda, the priorities, and the manner of decision-making (consensus, voting, as well as the procedures that will be followed during the meeting). At the

start, the chairperson's aim will also be to set a favourable climate (nobody says there cannot be any humour or fun involved in all of this!).

2. Question and Summarise!

A capable chairperson can explore whether members agree to the mission of the company, the objectives of the meeting, the benefits in the long run, and general motivation and support for their role in all of this.

In this phase, his/her primary role will be to ask lots of **questions and test understanding** by comparing the interests and needs of the different parties and then by summarising frequently.

An important responsibility of the chairperson is to

make sure that there are no misunderstandings or misconceptions in this initial stage.

3. Proposals and Agreement

During the next phase, better than average chairs will move members towards a conclusion (at least for this meeting). It is the role of the chairperson to ensure that **proposals** are being listened to and **expanded** upon. Chairpersons can make proposals regarding the process and the procedures, and summarisation of these proposals. In some extreme cases (if no proposal is forthcoming), it could be feasible for the chairperson to ask some questions such as...."Have you considered the option of...?"

4. Now the boring but important part!

After agreement or compromise has been reached, it is the chairperson's responsibility to ensure that a proper **action plan** (what, who, when, where, etc) is being drawn up by the parties to implement the proposals or agreement(s). If the implementation issues are not nailed down, an aggrieved party may give rise to the ignoring of critical deadlines which he/she perceived as being "forced to accept without consent" during the meeting.

5. Closing (until next time)!

The last phase of the meeting, the closure, is as important as all the other phases. The chairperson can play a very important role here by making sure that all the parties feel that they have something to take back to their relevant divisions etc., for what is called the internal selling.

Facilitating a proper closure also sets the scene for a next meeting or negotiation.

Therefore, in summary, a chairperson has a highly responsible and sometimes extremely difficult role, especially when there is a big **difference** or contrast in the **interests** and needs of the parties involved. A main aim for a chairperson is to facilitate the process so that the parties reach a compromise or agreement in such a way that the **relationships** are still in tact after the meeting.

6. Final Thoughts

It is the chairperson's responsibility to make sure that a proper **agenda** is being drawn up and distributed, together with the minutes of the previous meeting (if any), to all concerned parties, well in advance.

It is also his/her responsibility to ensure that the **minutes** of the present meeting are drawn up, checked (by him/her) and distributed within the period as agreed upon in the meeting.

Other responsibilities are:

- To ensure that the meeting is being conducted in a **structured** manner.
- To ensure that a balance is maintained, ensuring one party does not **dominate** another.
- To ensure that the parties stay **focused** on the objectives by means of frequent summaries.
- To ensure that **personal attacks** are immediately dealt with, by separating the people from the issues.
- To ensure **progress** and movement by not allowing long debates or irrelevant "war stories". Movement can also be stimulated by asking for new proposals, or by expanding proposals already on the table
- To ensure that misunderstandings are being kept to the minimum, by the frequent **testing of others understanding** and **summarising**.

"Meetings are a **huge investment** of time, the number-one unnecessary expense that most companies have is wasted time. Unsuccessful meetings can be a disaster – they are unpleasant to attend, they are ineffective, they waste valuable time and they create a major **gap in productivity**. You only need look around the room, whilst attending most corporate meetings, to see how money is being burned by the minute."

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