



Course Director:
Prof Manie Spoelstra



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Negotiation: The Genesis of Management



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Negotiation with the Government (even if you work for them)

Background: Governments and Power

How do I negotiate with (or inside) any governmental department, local government, hospital, income tax office or any other government-sponsored powerhouse? How do I get them to deliver the stuff that they are supposed to do? (I pay taxes to them and I assist them all the time!)

To understand this question, it is important to understand **why some government officials work** for the government and what it means to be 'the government'.

Many individuals who work for government do it for one of four reasons, namely: For the **power** it gives them over others (and the financial benefit of that), to make a contribution to society (**ethical reasons**), because they could not find jobs in the **private sector** and/or to further some sort of '**ideology**'. Of course there are many of us who accept

government jobs for other reasons too (e.g. for the joy of teaching, helping others or making it a career choice).

Governments are there because everyone believes that **we cannot do without them**. Ironically, in many countries governments are changing so fast that no one knows that there is actually still a government. Can you call the government of Colombia, Somalia, Sudan, Venezuela and France a 'government? Let's accept, for argument sake) that these places do have governments and that the people there still believe they can make a difference if they go out and vote for whoever.

In theory a democratic government exists because the people '**ceded their own power over crucial services to the government** (expecting the government to do it better than themselves) Sometimes you only realise later that governments seldom give that power back to

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the people willingly (unless they go bankrupt like Russia, yet even then the Russians only gave their power to a new and perhaps more corrupt government).

Some of us seem to think that governments can do a better job of teaching our kids than ourselves, can look after your health better than privately paid organisations and even believe that governments are better in running electricity production, train and aero-plane commuting and even mines! Only to realise later that **governments, once they control these services, do not easily relent their power.** If, for example, you have power over someone else's destiny (their tenders, their ID books, their health, their income tax clearance certificates, the building of their schools and stadiums, it gives some people tremendous potential to misuse this power in many ways.

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• **Step One: Identify your 'opponent'!**

So, the first question is, which type of official are you dealing with. Ask yourself why is this official working for the government. They are actually quite easy to spot if you concentrate on the tips below. As indicated above, he/she can fall into one of four categories (unless he/she is there for the 'good' reasons' cited above):

1. The Power Hungry Official:

This is possibly the easiest type to spot. **Watch his/her dress, layout of office** and how he/she sits relative to you (possibly directly opposite to you) Concentrate on the first greeting! Listen carefully to his/her first sentence. A typical one is: "Good day, how can I help you" (with a low pitch) or, "Sorry I have only ten minutes as I am on my way to a meeting with the minister", They prefer to sit in a power position, will dress better than all around him, will wear a dark tie or dress. They will **interrupt the conversation if their cell phone (which will be at least a Blackberry) rings without apologizing.** There could be framed pictures of achievements on the wall and 'impressive' books on the coffee table (e.g. 'Seven habits of successful people'). Don't expect coffee. Call him/her, 'Sir, Ma'm or Doctor, if he/she does

not object to the title you are correct, yet if he/she says, "Call me Mary" or "John" you may be dealing with one of the other types. Watch the continuous **glance at the watch** or the cell phone! That is a sure sign!

2. The Ethical Official:

This individual will insist that your forms and application must be done perfectly right, no deviations allowed. Please do no hint about favors or influence. Not even a free pen! These individuals dress office-like and will possibly be **punctual in meeting with you.** You will not have to wait! Perhaps timid in expression but exact in detail.

First sentences could be; " I am sorry", followed by; " I have a meeting with the local teachers of the school soon and cannot give you too much of my time", you will not be offered coffee. There will

be no separate coffee table, but many governmental yellowish/brown files lying in a heap on the desk. One of the files will be open while he/she speaks to you. He/she could offer you **a brochure on their activities**, or some will be openly displayed. A picture of his/her family could also decorate the desk. If the cell phone is **not a Blackberry** or if he/she makes an excuse for having an expensive Blackberry, you are spot on!

3. The 'hate-to-be-working-here' official:

He/she will be dressed in a 'different' way or his/her uniform will look tattered, his/her hair will also be noticeably **different** than the others in the office and he/she will possibly be late for the appointment. This official will be sitting slightly on his/her back, maybe some half-eaten sandwich and dirty coffee mug sitting on the corner of the desk. The rest of the desk will be cluttered with files; amongst them a booklet of the Labour Union and a grievance form. He/she will not ask your name and will possibly try to defer the responsibility to someone else. His/her first sentence could possibly be; "I wonder if you are at the right office I think you should go to the second floor for this". **He/she will glance at your expensive wristwatch**

and shoes. Lookout for the glance! It's a sure sign!

4. The Ideologist:

The ideologist is easy to spot. They will possibly be impatient with you (if you obviously have a different ideology). This official will surely have at least a **picture, taped to the wall of Che Guevara, Abraham Lincoln** or such. Will have one or both of the following books openly displayed: 'The Red Book of Mao Tse Tung', 'The Wealth of Nations' or another book on ideology. His/her dress will also signify his/her ideology e.g. the T-shirt itself or ribbon or token on the T-shirt. He/she will look a little bit **irritated at you and your presence.**

His/her first sentence will be something like; "I'm not sure you are in the right department, could you please give me your full name or where do you come from. Were you born in this country, oh, you are from British decent, that is a funny name". After that the **glance will move to one of the books**, Watch out for the glance!

- **Step Two: What do I say to them?**

1. The Power Hungry Official

This person needs power and strive for it, so, give it to him/her! Do not argue or differ (it enrages and frustrate their need for power). They **need compliments, contacts, favours, keys towards influence** and money (but, be careful. Do not make any direct offers. Only vaguely suggest that you would 'like to involve him/her in a major project due to his/her obvious expertise in paperwork and political decision-making!

2. The Ethical Official

Compliment him/her on the way he/she executes this **major service to society**. Express a wish that there could be more such. Tell her/him that you will write a letter of support to the minister and the newspaper. Go on to ask the minister and DG's email address.

3. The Official who dislikes the job

Tell him/her that **you wish you had people like her/him at your own company** and promise to send him/her copies of the next jobs available. Tell him/her that you can have influence over the employee motorcar scheme and have helped a few to get a company BMW as part of the job.

4. The Ideologist

Tell him/her that you believe that the government should also run the mines and the banks and the farms (unless the books indicate that all should be privatised) and that you think he/she must **put his/her sentiments on paper** so that you can publish it through your contacts (you'll send a copy to the United Nations!)

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- **Conclusion**

By being sensitive to people's needs for working for any organization, you can often get to the core of those elements that motivate them to take action. The action then furthers their personal missions and interests, while you also get the service you deserve. Remember: **'You do not get what you deserve, you get what you negotiate!'**

Manie Spoelstra

Note: The above essay is my opinion only and does not reflect any research or real situation at present. In the 'Background' paragraphs I borrowed a few ideas from the recent book of P J o' Rourke: 'Don't Vote', Brilliant Books Audio, 2010