

THE WOMANLY ART OF NEGOTIATING

By

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Relaxing into the workday, I'm sipping tea from a mug emblazoned: Let Me DROP EVERYTHING and work on YOUR PROJECT. The tea soothes my throat and voice for today's meetings and caffeinates my body rhythms.

But it is the inspiring mug slogan that gives me a mental boost and a memorable reminder toward getting my way in today's negotiations. It does provide a tinge of cynicism. I suspect not everyone I deal with is sincere, truthful and seeking win-win results as much as I strive to be and do.

Cynicism, I tell myself, is not sinful. It's a proper balance, albeit often underutilized, for the sugar, spice and everything nice description of what little girls are made of. I'm firmly convinced from talking with women of various ages and experiences that this 19th century nursery rhyme theme is still part of female upbringing.

Change of Mindsets

We women don't give ourselves sufficient credit for the skills and experience, talents and intuition that bring us personal and professional success in negotiations. Women wonder why. I suspect men wonder too.

In business, especially in negotiating, it's time to let go of those nursery rhyme and fairy tale messages. Let us replace being women in distress to being women in charge. Keep in mind that the basic tenets of win-win negotiations do not differ between the sexes. It's our womanly mindsets of wanting to please, feeling less than confident, and communicating without strength that require improvement. We can persuasively and permanently change how we think, speak and act in negotiating situations.

Role Models

Which women come to mind when you think about successful negotiators? Do you think of their physical appearance first, or admire their negotiating abilities as savvy, intelligent leaders? Visualize Cleopatra, Queen of the Nile and US Secretary of State

Hillary Clinton. Each, in her own way and in her own time, negotiates effectively, garners respect, and changes her world.

Develop your style and maintain your image with class, grace and consistency. Picture yourself as a powerful negotiator at a meeting on your schedule. You are maintaining a confident attitude because you've done all the research, and rehearsed and roleplayed your messages.

You are taking action on specific steps to accomplish your goals. Your words are precise and get directly to your point. Your declarative sentences never end with a nervous, up-pitched question mark. You don't add 'perhaps, maybe, or I wonder if' thus lessening your responsibility.

Reinvent yourself with a deep level of security. Be the woman who asks for what you want and wants what you ask for. Don't allow that doubting little girl voice in your head to distract you. Don't allow your negotiating opponents to tempt you to drift off topic with words that insincerely flatter or evoke fear.

Mind Your Business: Business Your Mind

Pay attention to your woman's intuition. Don't sabotage yourself in negotiations by disregarding these basics:

1. Say less. Mean more. Don't volunteer information.
2. Maintain eye contact. Smile like Mona Lisa. Make them wait for your response.
3. Don't fuss, fiddle or check your makeup.
4. Remember you can't read your opponents' minds and they can't read your mind.
5. Invest in e-vices to enhance your effectiveness.

Two Women: Two Negotiating Styles

Learning by watching and listening to other women negotiate is empowering.

Angela's attitude is pure self-confidence. She never doubts that her way is the right way. Her communication style is brief, focused and specific. Her negotiating opponents immediately know her goal. She works the room, is the center of attention, and doesn't apologize for thinking others must prioritize her plan and goals.

Martha's eyes pierce right through you. She is worldly-wise, intelligent and experienced. Her descriptions of previous negotiations are filled with facts, balanced with charming anecdotes that take her opponents' focus off their own plans. She doesn't know if she would take no for an answer because she's never had to do so.

The womanly art of negotiating means adopting the best of style and substance of other female negotiators. Keep an open mind. Realize you can learn from women who differ from you in history, lifestyle and experience. I take the wisdom of Angela (age two) and Martha (age 92) into heart, mind and conference rooms.

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