

## **Connectivity in Negotiation**

We have all had the experience of feeling an instant connection or bond with someone after just a few seconds of being in her/his presence. This is referred to as connectivity. The more we feel connected to, part of, liked by or attracted to someone, the more persuasive s/he becomes. As we feel more comfortable, a natural sense of trust ensues. This ability to work well with people tops the list of common skills and habits that highly successful people possess.

People skills are crucial because they have a huge impact on our success. First impressions are made within only four minutes of an initial interaction with a stranger, so we don't have time to *not* have good people skills. One of the most important characteristics to show up front in a negotiation is goodwill. Goodwill means being caring, kind, sensitive and thoughtful. It means demonstrating genuine interest in others instead of focusing on how to get them interested in you. It also means being a good listener. This kind of compassion and empathy will win you loyalty from all those you come into contact with. Negotiation is not a war; you can connect with everyone in the negotiation process.

You can also hone your abilities to interact with others by using appropriate body language. Whether we realize it or not, we are constantly reading and being read by others. Even without the utterance of words, the language of the body speaks volumes. Always be mindful that everything about you, be it flamboyant or subtle, communicates something about you to somebody else. The words you use, your facial expressions, what you do with your hands, your tone of voice and your level of eye contact all contribute to the way people feel about you. Consequently, they also play a role in how likely they will be to accept your message.

Fortune 500 companies commonly require listening training, even though many employees think it's a waste of time. The truth is, poor listening skills account for the majority of people's negotiation problems. Good listening is not just looking at someone and nodding your head in agreement. You have to acknowledge what is being said and let

the other person know that you understand. The more you can acknowledge what is being said by others, the greater your ability to negotiate. Why? Because the person/group speaking with you will feel important and understood. Why is listening so difficult for most of us? Consider the top five challenges to effective listening during negotiations:

1. **Thinking about Our Response or Comeback.** Instead of thinking about what the other person is saying, we think about what we want to say next or where we want the negotiation to lead. Thinking about your stance on an issue or why the other side is wrong is an obstacle to effective listening.

2. **Not Concentrating.** We talk at a rate of 120 to 150 words per minute, but we can think 400 to 800 words per minute. As a result, we often act like we're listening when we're really thinking of something else. Stay focused during your negotiations.

3. **Jumping to Conclusions.** Sometimes we assume that we know exactly what the other side is going to say next. As a result, we begin forming reactions based on those assumptions. In other words, we begin putting words into our fellow negotiator's mouth.

4. **Prejudging Based on Delivery and Appearance.** We judge people by the way they look or speak instead of listening to what they say. Some people are so put off by personal appearance, regional accents, speech defects and mannerisms that they don't even try to listen to the message a person is trying to convey.

5. **Lack of Training.** Some people haven't ever had any training or guidance in how to listen effectively. As result, they don't realize the mental effort or level of involvement required to do so.

If you know how to listen, you'll always know what someone is thinking. You'll also always know what s/he wants from you. Listed below are the insider secrets for effective

listening. Follow these guidelines, and you'll always be able to delve below the surface during your negotiations:

1. **Give the other side your undivided attention.** Make them feel like they are the most important people in the world to you at that very moment in time.
2. **Look them directly in the eye while they are talking.** Lean forward to indicate interest and concern. Listen calmly.
3. **Show sincere interest in them.** There is no need to talk. Just nod your head and agree with verbal sounds like "uh huh."
4. **Keep the conversation going by asking questions.** Prompt more information from them by repeating their phrases.
5. **Use silence to encourage them to talk.** You have heard that silence is golden and that maxim certainly holds true in negotiation. Being silent encourages all parties to talk about themselves and to reveal information that will help you in the negotiation process.
6. **Pause before replying or continuing.** Wait three to five seconds and then reply thoughtfully. Don't leap in, even if you know the answer. When you pause, it shows the other person that you consider what s/he is saying is valuable.

Sometimes we enhance our listening capability by honing our *watching*. As a negotiator, it is crucial to be very attentive to the cues and signals that the other party may be sending out in addition to the words they're saying. A "powerful curiosity," as it has been called, is invaluable in detecting other important but unspoken messages. For example, when the other party nods and says "yes," is that sincere agreement or polite diplomacy? It is far too easy to get caught up in our end of the bargain and miss the valuable signals that are being sent by the other party about how they really feel.