

Expectation in Negotiation

The fact that people's expectations influence reality can help dramatically in the negotiation process. Individuals tend to make decisions based on how others expect them to perform. When we know someone expects something from us, we try to satisfy her/him in order to gain respect and likeability. You have probably heard the saying "What gets measured, gets done." The same is true for expectations: That which is expected is what usually happens. People rise to meet your expectations of them, thereby turning your expectations into reality. Ever notice how people who think they're going to be fired suddenly experience a drop in the quality and enthusiasm for their work? Then what happens? You guessed it; they get fired. Their belief in their impending termination causes them to act a certain way, and those expectations then work to bring about the very thing that at first was only a figment of their imagination.

Numerous studies have shown how expectation dramatically influences people's performance. For example, in one study, girls who were told they would perform poorly on a math test received poor grades. In another, assembly line workers who were told that their job was complex performed less efficiently at the same task than those who were told that their job was simple. Another case study demonstrated that adults who were given complex mazes solved them faster when told that the mazes were based on a grade-school level of difficulty. Based on these examples, it is clear to see that if you add the use of expectation to your negotiation repertoire, you have one more tool through which you can influence the other party.

When using expectation in negotiation, there are two key ways in which the technique can be most easily and effectively used: time expectations and reputation expectations. Below we will examine each these expectation types in depth.

Time Expectations

In our modern world, we are bound by time. This being the case, we have certain expectations about how long it will take us to accomplish our various tasks. Time often becomes distorted through our perceptions and expectations. Why do some afternoons

speed by faster than others? Why do we finish projects just one minute before the deadline?

Parkinson's Law states that work expands to fill the time available. So, if a project is given a three-month deadline, it will take the full three months to complete. If that very same project is given a six-month timeframe, it will still take the full six months to complete, even though it could easily be completed in three. It may sound strange, but this law holds weight because the time allotted for completion of a project sets our expectations. It is actually our expectations that influence how we will work on a project and, therefore, when it will be completed. Your time expectations going into a negotiation will determine how you negotiate. A word of advice: Don't show your cards. Never let the other party know how fast you need to seal the deal.

Reputation Expectations

The most effective psychological tool for getting someone to follow through on a promise is to let her/him know that you believe s/he is the type of person who will follow through. Using phrases such as "You're the kind of person who..." or "You've always impressed me with your ability to ..." or "I've always liked the fact that you..." invoke the powerful psychological law of internal consistency. Winston Churchill, one of the greatest masters in dealing with people, said, "I have found that the best way to get another to acquire a virtue is to impute it to him."

When people are aware of the good opinions others have about them, they want to live up to those opinions. This tendency is why we act out the roles that are assigned to us. If we receive praise, we want to be worthy of that praise. There was a police officer who always seemed to be able to get even the toughest criminals to open up to him and tell him everything. His technique was to tell the criminal, "I know you have a reputation for being the tough guy who's been in a lot of trouble, but everyone tells me the one thing that stands out about you is that you never lie. They tell me that whatever you say, it's always the truth, no matter what."

Honestly assess how you think you make others feel when they're around you. Do you make them feel small and unimportant, or do you inspire them to achieve more? Your actions towards others will tell them how you feel or think about them. The German writer and poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe once stated, "Treat a man as he appears to be and you make him worse. But treat a man as if he already were what he potentially could be, and you make him what he should be." Reputation is everything in negotiation.

Have you ever noticed how the people you assume are going to be tough turn out to be just that? And if there is someone you're especially excited to meet, then when you do meet her she seems great? Often our assumptions and expectations about someone we're about to meet for the first time play out exactly as we've already mentally conceived that they would. When first meeting someone, you will send subconscious messages about how s/he is to respond and behave.

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