

The manager as negotiator

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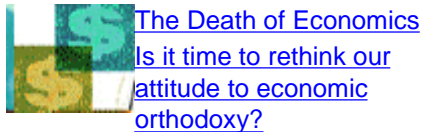
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The manager as negotiator

21 Nov 2012 | Simon Horton



**What did you do today? The chances are you were involved in a negotiation. Did you meet any clients? Talk to your boss about getting more budget next year? Recruit anyone? Source those widgets your department is so short of? Sort out that argument between two of your team members? Talk to the head of I.T. about upgrading the system? Ask your colleague if you can borrow one of their team for a short project?**

Guess what? It's all negotiation. And possibly the no.1 primary skill-set necessary to be a successful manager is negotiation.

And yet, my guess is you've never been on a negotiation course. At most a day, but tell me, what can you learn in a day? Would you want to be treated by a doctor who had studied medicine for a day? Or live in a house built by someone who had studied architecture for a day? Complex skills, and negotiation is a complex skill, take time to learn well.

The good news, however, is that a little can go a long way. It may not be obvious but all of the above situations have exactly the same structure and so the same methods will get you your best results in each. So let's have a quick look at what that method actually is.

The first point to make is that, even for selfish reasons, win-win is best. Any energy spent fighting your colleague is energy wasted; squeezing your supplier is a great way to get a poor service; squeezing your customer is a great way to lose your customer.

Ok, easily said, but how do you get win-win? Well, there's a clue in the words: what is your win and what is their win? It's actually not that complicated.

A successful negotiator will know what they want to get from the deal and they will be ambitious and optimistic and they will be informed. They will know the detail but they will also know the bigger picture and realise that this is the most important. It's not about winning the battle, it's about winning the war.

But a successful negotiator will also take the time to think about the other party's win and will be ambitious and optimistic for them too.

Stop and read that sentence again. It's possibly the critical difference between a good negotiator and a bad

one. Old school negotiators think of their counterparty as an adversary and try to get one over them, whilst 21st century negotiators help their counterparty get their best win possible, perhaps even better than they had originally thought themselves. Think about that – how well would your supplier work for you if you gave them more than they expected?

Now, I'm not saying be a pushover, I'm not saying give away anything at your expense, not at all. I'm saying be quite selfish, if getting your outcome is selfish. But you are most likely to get your outcome if you also help the other party get theirs too.

Okay, I know a lot of you are thinking, what if your outcomes are mutually exclusive? My view? I think they very rarely are, especially if you really are working at the level of the bigger picture.

Let's take an example. A star employee is insisting on a promotion because you promised them one a while back and they have met all the objectives agreed. You would like to help them but you can't. You remember a discussion but you don't recall exactly promising and, anyway, your hands are tied: there is a head-count freeze and no new promotions are possible. The employee insists and says they will leave if they don't get one.

Stand-off. What to do?

Well, you continue to explore different possibilities. You express the fact that you want to keep them and you want them highly motivated too. You simply can't change their job title. Who cares about the job title, replies the employee, what they are after is the more senior responsibilities and the pay-rise that would go with them. Great, you can give them that.

What initially seemed mutually exclusive becomes solvable when working together for win-win.

Every negotiation has a set number of parameters: you have your agenda, they have theirs; you have your resources, they have theirs; you have your constraints, they have theirs. The successful negotiator then looks at this as a problem to be solved, given these parameters, working collaboratively with their counterparty. It is a highly creative process.

And it is a skill. And the great thing about skills is that they can be learnt. And the better you become at it, the better results you get. And since negotiation permeates every aspect of your job, you'll notice the difference in many, many ways.

So if you want to become a better manager, become a better negotiator.

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About the author



Simon Horton is the author of



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