

Reasonableness

This article is the result of some recent negotiations we have been involved in which have lead us to reflect on what are the personal attributes of a person who knows the phases of negotiation but still relatively unsuccessful at producing consistently the outcome they want.

One of the main barriers that block effectiveness, particularly in managers dealing with industrial relations negotiations is a desire to be seen to be 'reasonable'. This seems to stem from a real need to look good - to be unrattled - not to be passionate.

To meet real passion with reasonableness is a bad mismatch of styles. To try and meet the passion of a Bruce Ruxton or a Margaret Thatcher or a Joe Bjelke-Peterson with anything but a deeply felt passion of your own is almost always doomed to failure outside of a court room. This does not mean that all such negotiations have to be conducted in a climate of high drama, however experience shows that to succeed you must match then come down a bit. If the other party does not follow, match again until they do.

This 'reasonableness' also leads to managers failing to meet a list of demands (containing a fair bit of ambit) with a list of demands of their own. Managers in IR are often only reactive thinking that they have done a good job if they can concede only half of what is asked for. The unions found out a long time ago that militancy pays. Most managements seem reluctant to learn the lesson.

Of course some balance is required as the BLF found out to its cost. You don't build a better racing car by installing a bigger engine and then taking out the brakes to save weight.

One way of developing a deep passion is to do your preparation thoroughly. Work out your bottom line - be certain of what you can afford and what you can't. Look at both the long and the short term consequences of your decisions. A decision not to fight a particular issue may teach the other side a lot about your negotiation style.

Looking for the "right, bullet proof" issue on which you are finally going to take a stand is likely to lead to a lot of defeats in the meantime.

Some of the ways to make your life in the IR arena hell are:

- Be afraid to play unless you are sure you can win, as you will never be sure, you never will win!
- Be afraid to take any risks, that way you won't do anything at all!
- Always surrender before you are defeated, that way you never get beaten!
- Exaggerate your wins and minimise your losses, that way you can lie your way up the corporate ladder until you are acknowledged as an expert and therefore put into a situation where you are expected to pull rabbits out of hats!

In IR negotiations it is of critical importance to know what phase you are in. It is also crucial to know when you are negotiating and when you are not. The power plays before or during a negotiation are part of the negotiating process taken as a whole but they are not part of the phases. The power tactics in themselves will not lead to a solution of any sort. The negotiation, after the power tactics have exacted their toll, will lead to a solution, but don't confuse the two.

The object of the power plays is to create a context for the talks to occur just the same as a war creates a context for the peace talks to occur. For you to talk while they fight is as good a way to lose as any I know.

PS. We were recently asked if an organization could duplicate our newsletters for distribution to previous participants or reprint them in the company magazine. We are delighted with the interest that has been shown and are pleased to extend the permission to reprint, to all of our clients.

This newsletter has been prepared by Rose and Barton - Negotiation professionals. Rose and Barton offer negotiation representation, training and their own Total Resilience package, to help insulate your business against the pressures of modern business. Please contact us on (03)5428 3002 to discuss what we can do for you.