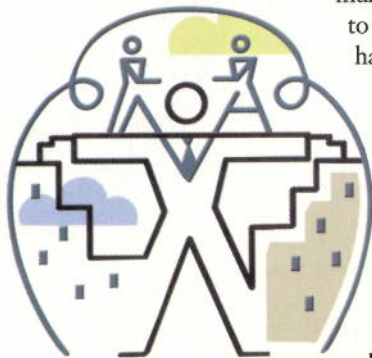


Women as Natural Negotiators

In this first in a new series of columns on successful negotiating, we explore why the important 'softer side' of negotiating might give women an advantage in this area of meeting management

SPEAKING IN BROAD GENERALITIES, WOMEN TEND TO BE perceptive and empathetic because we were traditionally brought up to talk about our feelings as well as listen to others. Men, on the other hand, have more likely been taught to “suck it up and deal.”

In meeting planning, negotiation is the process by which two parties reach an agreement of various points of interest to each after a period of discussion. Moreover, it is about two people communicating their perceptions and emotions, listening to each other, and building a successful relationship that will endure the planning and execution phases. Therefore, the important “softer side” of negotiation involves perceptions, emotions, communication, and enrolling the other side to find solutions — and women may have a natural advantage here.



About the Problem

There are three parts to perceptions: perception about the problem, about the “other side,” and about ourselves. Before you can start negotiating, you need to find a common definition of the problem. How do you know what to negotiate if you are on different pages? Once you agree on the issue, you can examine it from all sides. If you communicate the problem from the other person’s perspective and integrate that understanding with your view, doors will open. By understanding the other person’s concerns, you will be seen not so much as the “other side,” but as a partner in solving the issue. The more you become partners, the easier it is to help each other find solutions and reach goals.

About the “Other Side”

How do you perceive the other negotiator? Is the “other side” tougher, have a higher professional status? Do you have preconceived stereotypes of people with a different race/religion/class/gender that you might not even be aware of? How you look at the other person will have a great impact on the way you negotiate. Your comfort level with

the person on the other side of the table could color the tone of the negotiation. If the other negotiator is a male and has a higher professional status, you may feel intimidated and give in more or you could be tougher in order to overcompensate.

About Yourself

How do you perceive yourself? If you are not confident in your ability because of low self-esteem or inexperience, you are creating an unequal footing in the dynamics of the negotiation and putting yourself at a disadvantage. You may worry about the way you are perceived and focus on establishing yourself rather than on the issues at hand. Men may have an advantage here as they tend to care less about what people think of them.

The only way to overcome this is to remember that the negotiation is not about you and is not a reflection of who you are as a person. It is about getting what is best for the meeting.

The best way to get perceptions out in the open is to communicate. Women tend to ask a lot of questions: It is in asking the questions and listening to the answers that perceptions become known. Also, women share more stories. If you feel it is safe to share your history with the other person as it pertains to the issues you are negotiating, the “other side” can better understand why you are doing something. Lastly, women are usually less direct, which helps in saving face and allowing the “other side” to walk away not feeling battered.

Negotiations are not one-time deals. Not only will you be working with this person until the meeting is over, but your reputation as a negotiator will follow you. This is a small industry and the better you relate to people, the more successful you will be. ■

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