



***NEGOTIATING LIFE:
STICKING WITH THE BASICS***

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NEGOTIATING LIFE: Sticking with the Basics

This month's reflection from the front lines of negotiation is about the basics. I thought about calling this piece "Back to the Basics" based on my observation that so many of us get lost in negotiations, especially important negotiations. But I thought that would be presumptuous at best and potentially a turn off at worst. So instead of assuming that many of us have forgotten about the basics of negotiation, let's just say we seem to wander away from what we know works.

This month we'll take a look at the basics. And we'll make it brief since everyone seems to have so much to do these days!

The Basics of Negotiation.

Let's start with something *very* basic: whether and when you should "negotiate."

These common questions are based on a misunderstanding of what negotiation actually is.

It's all a negotiation. This is true even when you choose not to engage with others or when you litigate and have conflict with them.

Simply put, if you want someone else to do something or refrain from doing something, you are in a negotiation. (By contrast, if you can do it yourself, it is not a negotiation.) So don't waste all that time pondering and debating whether and when to "begin" a negotiation. No, it does not indicate "weakness" to communicate with others; to the contrary, it usually shows you are confident and prepared, especially if you *are* confident and prepared! (If you or your colleagues still feel hung up on this point, start a "negotiation" by communicating what you intend to do to harm the interests of your counterparts if you are unable to come to a negotiated agreement.)

So if you're already in a "negotiation," what should you be prepared to talk about in the negotiation?

The short answer is everything! Nothing should be "on" or "off" the metaphorical table (unless it is unethical, illegal or contrary to your core principles) if you or someone else cares about the topic.

Why? Well for starters, in order to determine whether you are likely to come to agreement with others, you should look at a wide range of options based on a solid understanding of your own interests and the interests of others. This means you should be prepared to stretch yourself out of your comfort zone. You should listen carefully to what others say and observe what they do not say.

When you listen to others well, you have the best chance of building durable relationships. And from my own experience in negotiations, I have learned above all else that *relationships matter*. Do not underestimate the damage you can do to your own interests when you harm the interests of others. When you think you are on top, it can be tempting to overestimate your leverage and damage relationships with others. Don't do it. Even when things are going well for you, find ways to share your good fortune with others. If that sounds like good advice for *life*, it is. And "negotiation" is life. You cannot do it all on your own. Again, relationships matter.

The bottom line: you should care about what other people want if you want to get your own needs met.

How do you get there?

I suggest you stick with the following three-step process (yes, I confess to being a stickler for this process, but I guarantee it works):

Step One: Figure out who you are dealing with and what they want.

Step Two: Come up with options for satisfying others' needs and getting what you want.

Step Three: Understand what happens if you do not come to agreement.

Those of you who know me know I swear by those three steps (and try to live by them).

Good luck in all your “negotiations” this year, whatever they may be. Remember, it’s all a negotiation; so do it well!

As always, you can reach me at jshulman@alignor.com. I look forward to hearing from you!