



International Negotiations

If you are managing assignees in the world's more volatile locations, or visiting such places yourself, you may be interested in TV Journalist Rosie Garthwaite's new book. *How to Avoid Being Killed in a War Zone* is aimed at anyone wanting to know how to get out of difficult situations at home or abroad. It's a survival manual combining practical tips on how to survive in war zones and other trouble-spots with contributions from more than 30 journalists and commentators, including John Simpson, Terry Waite, Jon Snow and Rageh Omar.

Many negotiations that fail are blamed on practical issues – *they didn't like our product, or they couldn't afford our prices* – when in reality the failure is because the client wasn't managed in the right way. So, when preparing for an international negotiation, there are several areas that you need to take particular care of.

The Team

Some cultures are individualistic – these include the USA, most Northern European countries and Australia, where individuals set their own goals, take individual responsibility for their successes and failures and are comfortable doing business with anyone of any age as long as they have the skills and authority to seal the deal. Other cultures, however, are more group based – Latin Cultures in Southern Europe and Latin America, Asia and Africa – where your technical competence and your job are not the only factors that are taken into account when doing business. Age, seniority, position are also important. Your position within an accepted hierarchy is also important in the decision making process.

So, when you are deciding who to negotiate with your international partners, if you come from an individualistic culture and are negotiating with a group based culture, be aware that maybe you should send a team of people, including someone senior, rather than a single negotiator; read business cards carefully, and receive and give them with ceremony; make sure you are speaking to the right people – sometimes the most senior person present will not be taking the final decision, but will be there to lend authority and seriousness to the proceedings; build relations with your partners and be prepared for ceremonial openings, offers of hospitality, and long presentations about their company.

If, on the other hand, you come from a group oriented culture with a given status and are negotiating with individualistic cultures, don't be offended if your partner appears younger or more junior, and alone. Find out if this person is able to take decisions and has the authority to negotiate. On both sides, try and read the signals the other is giving. If they are ready and able to negotiate, there is no reason why it should not be successful, in spite of the difference in styles.

The Pace

North Americans and north-western Europeans are mono-chronic. In their cultures, people are judged by how well they can control their time and people who can't do so are not to be trusted. Latin people, Asians and Africans, on the other hand, are highly poly-chronic. To them, how you nurture relationships is more important than how you manage your time. In a negotiation, poly-chronic people are likely to want to discuss proposals in a leisurely manner, even more so as they are group oriented, so need to consult widely to gain consensus. The mono-chronic person, on the other hand, can't understand why it is taking his partners so long to reach a decision, and begins to suspect them of stalling tactics to put him under pressure to agree.

Some cultures are future oriented – the Americans are the prime example, while for others, respect for tradition and the past is extremely important – as in Western Europe and Latin America.

The Place

Where do the real negotiations take place? Again, it depends on your culture. If you come from highly functional cultures, like North America or Germany, you are more likely to negotiate in a company setting. However, if you come from personal cultures, like Asia, the Middle East or Latin America, more informal, personal settings can prove more successful locations.

Playing the game to win

Both sides want to win in the negotiation and, as long as there is the commitment, trust, relative strength, and ability to negotiate, there is no reason why it should not be successful. When negotiating with another culture, you need to trust each other and be able to interpret accurately the signals your partner is sending. If you want to play the game to win, you need to make a conscious effort to understand what lies behind their behaviour and think very carefully about your own, and the way you express yourself.

Understanding their beliefs

What your partners believe will have an impact on how they behave and on how they interpret your behaviour.

If you come from a written culture and are negotiating with a spoken culture, remember that your partner will probably take what you say more seriously than what you write. Consider carefully how you will communicate with them. Face to face contact, or if this is impossible, the telephone will probably get you better results than e-mail, even if you feel more comfortable with this medium. Keep the contract out of sight, and only involve the lawyers at the end of the process. Beware of taking too many notes in front of them. Look at your partners, listen carefully to what they say, and summarise frequently with your partner, then write it down.

Use the right language

Some cultures, like the Americans, Dutch, Scandinavians and Germans use a frank, explicit and direct style of communication. Other cultures, like the Japanese, British, Arabs and Italians are indirect, diplomatic and implicit. This difference in communication style causes major misunderstandings and suspicion.

So, if you are from a direct culture communicating with an indirect negotiating partner, remember to soften your style of language. The key is to use SOPHOP (Soft On People, Hard On Points). Nurture the relationship, keep your language friendly, and put all your toughness into fighting over the points under discussion, while avoiding making it personal.

If you are from an implicit culture, don't assume the person from the explicit culture is ignorant or badly educated because they want to go through the issue step by step, even if to you it seems a waste of time, or they want a clear agenda for the session with frequent summaries. Use these to your advantage.

Whatever culture you come from, remember the key language skills in negotiation. Keep things conditional for as long as possible, by using: *If...then*. By doing this you will link the issues and avoid giving away a concession for nothing. Explore possible options rather than just rejecting new ideas. Be positive, and remember to put as much effort into building the relationship as in the issues themselves.