

NEGOTIATION—THE KEY TO ENDING THE BATTLE OF THE SEXES

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The battle of the sexes has been brought to the workplace especially in the legal profession! It manifests itself in “turf wars. Women who feel discriminated against because of gender may have challenges with management partners. This creates poor morale, unnecessary resignations, wrongful termination suits, sex discrimination accusations, cries of sexual harassment, age discrimination and workers compensation complaints. With greater numbers of women in leadership positions, they are still attempting to break through the “glass ceiling.” These changes cause tension for both men and women. Astute business leaders understand the key to ending the wars and tension between the sexes is effective negotiation.

No one would consider negotiating with a representative of another country without first understanding the social differences to insure clear communication. Cultural “faux pas” can destroy international deal making. Given the disparity in thinking between the genders in our own country, why shouldn’t we prepare to negotiate with the opposite sex with equal precaution?

We must acknowledge that men and women think, perceive, communicate and negotiate differently. The dissimilarities are caused by distinct biological brain functions, social mores and cultural history. Although men and women are not equal, they are equally advantaged-as well as disadvantaged-in the bargaining process, due to their varying perceptions. The diversity in gender negotiating styles, when recognized and used imaginatively, greatly enhances “total quality management” and business productivity.

The following traits are common to each gender, but do not account for individual differences. This general overview provides insight to deal with the opposite sex.

The feminine approach to negotiations

Since the dawn of time, women have valued relationships in joint problem-solving. Their ethics focus on encompassing and empathizing. Women are traditionally therefore more likely to avoid conflict, be open, revealing and more accommodating and conciliatory than their male counterparts. That is not the case when women are pressured to be more adversarial in high conflict situations.

The feminine approach emphasizes interconnection building. Therefore, on first blush feminine language may appear passive and deferential. Their strategy focuses on fairness, collaboration, mutual support, listening for cues and the importance of the process. Women often think through an issue aloud and interject the emotional issues to affect the outcome. They emphasize detailed, tactical thinking and tend to facilitate, cooperate, and foster “connection” in a negotiation.

Many females in negotiation use their intuition as a power advantage, recognizing feelings and transforming hostility to incorporate problem solving. Long-term business relationships may be successfully maintained with this approach to negotiations. The challenge for women is to keep emotions in check when faced with hostile intimidating situations.

The masculine approach to negotiation

Men have an individualistic, self-reliant, distancing, ethical standard in negotiations. They communicate to report and convey solutions. Most males think through an issue before they speak. This causes women to question men's motives. Male concerns in negotiation focus on logic, objective standards and adhering to "rules of the game."

The competitive masculine nature has a high regard for individual performance and freedom, causing them to strive for power through assertive language. Men may conceal the underlying needs and interests due to their need for privacy, their discomfort and communicating emotions or as a strategy to focus used to gain an advantage or leverage.

The male negotiator often formal, aggressive and perceived as an antagonistic by women. When then negotiate with each other, however, they understand the ground rules of competition so they may view this technique as engaging and challenging. Men are more comfortable in conflict situations and therefore appear more confident in confrontational circumstances.

Men develop team spirit and relationships with other men through humor, sports, and effective joint results, rather than through emotional communication. Males excel in overall strategic thinking. Their power advantage is natural competitiveness and their ability to see logical circumstances in the emotionally charged situations. The masculine challenge is to reach on census through the open exchange of interests and values. This more "feminine" approach (interest-based bargaining) is utilized by Japanese culture very successfully.

Blending of styles = solutions

When men and women understand and accept each others' negotiation characteristics they can realize their own strengths and weaknesses. Both males and females are thus empowered to jointly develop imaginative solutions to business and social concerns in the workplace. When the masculine logical, bottom-line approach is coupled with the feminine, intuitive, cooperative methodology, enduring powerful agreements are created.