



Instill a climate of trust in negotiation situations

The challenge

We often imagine the good negotiator as a strong-willed individual who sets ambitious goals and knows how to present his or her case to better emerge victorious from a confrontation. In reality, however, negotiations that turn into battles are generally less productive, as they leave little room for compromise espousing the interests of both parties. Without denying the fact that power struggles exist, it is a good idea to create a relationship which encourages people to share information and jointly explore options. This is the best way to identify solutions likely to satisfy both parties. Yet, this is no easy task, because the parties are tempted to dissimulate their real interests and leeway in order to maximize their respective benefits. How can you create a climate of trust and collaboration?

Pay attention to three points to position yourself as a trusted partner

1

Establish and defend your credibility

Above all, your counterparts must want to **commit to having a real discussion with you**. It's up to you to ensure you are recognized as a counterpart who deserves an attentive ear.

- **Establish your legitimacy** as a negotiation partner, by ensuring that those on the other side of the table clearly perceive that you are in a position to make credible commitments on the various aspects of the negotiation. E.g.: If you speak in the name of a group, show that you have the required authority to commit the group you represent (official letter of accreditation, references, etc.); concerning technical points that you don't completely master, call on an expert who recognizes your authority in the negotiation.
- If your counterparts refuse to listen to you, **call on allies**. To do this, identify who may have an interest in the successful conclusion of your negotiation.
- Also defend your credibility by **rejecting personal attacks and countering erroneous perceptions**. E.g.: Faced with an inappropriate remark, adopt a scandalized or sarcastic tone, or clarify the lines which must not be crossed.

2

Show your willingness to collaborate

Reassuring your counterparts by giving **proof** of your goodwill makes it possible to establish a collaborative relationship aimed at finding a win-win solution.

- **Show** your counterparts that **you understand their objectives** and are taking their concerns into account. E.g.: Recognize their constraints and the difficulty of the situation they must manage.
- **Show recognition for the value of their ideas**, by asserting their relevance, and clarifying or expanding upon them.
- **Share information** available to you which could be useful to your counterparts, to show your good will and trigger a reflex of reciprocity. Nonetheless, you aren't obliged to show all your cards at once!
- **Involve your counterparts in solving your problems**, going as far as asking them for help! This requires that you establish your credibility beforehand, to ensure that this is not perceived as an admission of weakness.

3

Create interpersonal bonds

Establishing **close bonds** and adopting an **empathetic attitude** during discussions help to defuse certain reflexes of mistrust or suspicion.

- **Encourage informal contacts** among the parties: the climate will be influenced positively by meetings away from the negotiating table. E.g.: Share a meal to get to know one another better.
- **Show interest in people, beyond the interests they represent**, to make the negotiation more open and relaxed. E.g.: Take time for small talk at the beginning of discussion, by encouraging your counterparts to speak about themselves. Use humor to relax the atmosphere.
- **Point out similarities** and shared interests, being careful to employ **positive words** and **inclusive pronouns**. E.g.: Underline the advantages of solutions under consideration; use "we" or "us". Your nonverbal communication must be consistent with this language. E.g.: Nods of the head, smiles, etc.
- **Show empathy**: Be attentive to the emotions of your counterparts, and show that you take them into account with tact and sensitivity. E.g.: Give them an honorable way out if they are stuck.