

Women and Negotiation: Tips from the Field

Susan W. Coleman and Dorothy E. Weaver

What does evidence — and the experience of practitioners — tell us about building women's negotiation competence? In this article, based on the substantial literature on women and negotiation in the accompanying article and our own experience as negotiation coaches, trainers, educators and researchers who have worked extensively with women, we provide practical suggestions about what we think are some of the most important things women should recognize and pay attention to regarding negotiation — whether for themselves or on behalf of others.

We offer five suggestions: Becoming proficient at “win-win” strategies, viewing “negotiation” with a wide lens, taking extra time with competitive or distributive problems, being a life-long learner of negotiation, and walking your talk.

“Win-Win” is a Breakthrough for Women: Become Proficient at This Strategy

Researchers have known for a long time that there are two main strategies in negotiation — competition

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The Literature on Women and Negotiation: A Recap

By Dorothy E. Weaver and Susan W. Coleman

Thirty years of research on gender and negotiation have yielded a complex picture. Although research has established factors and contextual situations that appear to enhance women's willingness to speak up and negotiate, most studies have been conducted in laboratory settings using cases and simulations.¹ What remains to be fully researched and understood are the factors that support women as they learn to speak up and negotiate in the "real world" of the workplace and home environment. Yet, some studies remind us that women can—and often have—learned to speak up and negotiate.² These journeys are ones that deserve close examination and discussion in our field.

From our perspective as practitioners, we have seen women have tremendous breakthroughs in their attitudes and understanding of what negotiating can be. When women experience success in negotiation, even in simulated cases during negotiation training sessions, we have witnessed life-changing moments.

At the same time, we recognize that negotiating is often seen as anathema for women. Women can have barriers in the form of mindsets or attitudes that appear to hinder, or even stop, their willingness to consider learning about negotiation. We are conscious of the risk of reinforcing stereotypes and conclude that our role is to help women move past these barriers by enhancing their understanding of their personal strengths and potential as negotiators.

Since the 1970s, a plethora of studies have been conducted about negotiation and gender. In the early years, studies examined whether men were better at negotiation than women in terms of one variable — the negotiated outcome, or who "won." The findings from these early studies were inconclusive and at times contradictory.³ In Deborah Kolb's overview of the past 25 years of research on gender and negotiation, she notes that this early research had an "essentialist" concept of gender differences, trying to identify an innate or "hard-wired" difference in how men and women negotiate.⁴ While dozens of studies have sought to answer if men and women negotiate differently, it turned out that the story was far, far more complex.

Much of today's research on gender and negotiation is shaped by the thinking of authors who believe that individuals "construct" their understanding of situations (and the behaviors required in those situations) based on the details of the particular context and their own individual backgrounds. In this social-constructivist view, gender is not a fixed notion or simple unchanging attribute like a person's eye color. The constructivists view gender "as an institutionalized system of social and cultural practices" that can change as a person moves through different communities and institutions.⁵

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and collaboration. Competition, or win-lose, is more of a power-struggle negotiation characterized by low trust, holding one's cards close to one's chest, and one-upsmanship. Collaboration, or win-win, is the opposite and is based on skills for building trust, sharing information, creating value for both sides. For both of us, being introduced to collaborative negotiation was life-changing.

We have seen a similar reaction for the thousands of women we have coached and trained over the years: relief at finding a way forward that is not about confrontation, fighting and aggression, but rather addressing both sides' needs and interests, integrating emotions, and respecting cultural differences. Learning collaborative negotiation enhances one's ability to be a good listener and helps build and improve relationships. We see that many women respond positively to this kind of negotiation; it feels safer and in keeping with their values. Armed with the collaborative negotiation skill-set, they become more willing to engage in difficult conversations and more confident in general about their ability to negotiate. They also advocate for their interests within this framework and do not simply accommodate (lose-win).

So, for these reasons we recommend that women fully incorporate win-win (integrative) negotiation into their repertoire and use it wherever appropriate.

View "Negotiation" with a Wide Lens

To be most skillful in negotiations, women need to think long-term and relationally, understand the range of negotiation tactics and strategies to use where each is warranted, and to always pay attention to their BATNA. (Note here BATNA is a term frequently used in negotiation for "Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement").

Most negotiations don't happen in a vacuum; they happen in the context of a relationship. Whether we are talking about an employment situation, a marriage, an

interaction in the community, or just a first-time salary negotiation, the parties have been and will continue to interact. In our experience, solid negotiation outcomes often build from an acknowledgement of the importance of maintaining the relationship. This should come as a relief to anyone who takes a more relational approach to life, including many men and women.

Pablo Restrepo, a seasoned negotiation consultant from

Colombia, encourages his students and clients to consider the "negotiation architecture." As he once explained in a conversation with one of the authors, "negotiation must be looked at beyond the traditional tactical view because negotiation begins long before we sit at the table, and requires much more than an effective interaction." It involves, for instance, developing the value and influence you bring to the table. And, he would add, negotiation is worthless without effective implementation which may involve many other smaller negotiations, as well as renegotiations over time. Thus, negotiations are made up of multiple impressions and interactions over time with periodic heightened focus on exchanges, or the resolution of specific conflicts as they arise. Consequently, if the relationship is being attended to regularly, and a problematic situation arises, it will be far more likely to be handled with ease.

Let's take, for example, the simple interactions and transactions that are necessary to get regular maintenance on one's vehicle. Assuming one employs the same service provider over the lifetime of the vehicle, there will inevitably be "stuff" that happens — conflicts that occur between the service provider and the owner of the vehicle. If one takes the time to create respectful and relational interactions with the people running the garage and a conflict breaks out, chances are that conflict is going to be handled in a less adversarial, more problem-solving way.

Women should always pay attention to strengthening their alternatives in any given negotiation. It is fundamental.



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A narrower, more tactical view of negotiation is still prevalent in the minds of so many, including researchers. While relationally-oriented accommodations might seem like a mistake to some, for certain situations, they are precisely the right choice. We would like to see research that not only measures economic outcomes, but other criteria and longer-term considerations of the parties as well, such as solidifying trust, building respect and good will, and creating value that will be reciprocated over time.

Women should also become proficient with the complete range of negotiation skills — competitive to collaborative — and to apply the right tool for the right situation. Win-win is a great strategy and not used nearly enough. Nonetheless, if one's counterpart in a distributive negotiation is a bully (using tactics of fear and intimidation), the win-win skill of listening for needs and reflecting them back will probably not work nearly as well as setting clear limits of engagement and implementing the best distributive tools. Knowing the spectrum of techniques to both create and claim value, therefore, and being strategic about when to apply them is key for success in negotiation.

Finally, regardless of the specific negotiation, women should always be clear about their BATNA. There are two things that give you power to influence a negotiation — your ability to meet or thwart the needs of the other side and the quality of your alternatives should the negotiation not work out (i.e. your BATNA.) Women should always pay attention to strengthening their alternatives in any given negotiation. It is fundamental. We must also remain mindful of the societal backdrop, which can strengthen or weaken our BATNA in specific negotiations. For example, in applying for a job, it may be easier for white, well-educated people to find other work if they are unable to negotiate their preferred terms in an employment negotiation. Worldwide, evidence of the backdrop of gender imbalance is hard to ignore — from the trafficking of women, to barriers to income and education, to being silenced entirely. In the United States, we still have not passed an Equal Rights Amendment, women still do not get paid the same as men for equal work, and women are still doing two-thirds of the housework, even in dual-earning households. These realities more often than not affect the walk away alternatives with which women enter negotiation and must be countered with wise strategic preparation.

Take Extra Time with Competitive or Distributive Problems

As stated above, negotiation is a skill-set that incorporates a wide range of “hard” (distributive, positional, quantitative, competitive) to “soft” (integrative, win-win, relational, collaborative) skills. It is our belief, after years of experience with many different kinds of people, that the soft skills are truly the hard skills because they are

generally more difficult for people to master. Nonetheless, for women who are less comfortable applying distributive skills, and because of their own and other's stereotypes, we advise extra attention when facing a highly competitive negotiation problem. We often see gendered preferences when it comes to negotiation. Many male law students will perk up and say things like “I'm glad we are getting to the real stuff” when we introduce a competitive case that requires crunching lots of numbers and the application of concepts such as BATNA, reservation price, and aspiration. The research comparing men and women in negotiation suggests that men and women can negotiate equally, but both genders will often assume that the men will do better than women at the more quantitative and distributive cases. But these stereotypes, both about negotiation and about gender, are fluid and can be manipulated.¹ As we work with women from all walks of life, we need to remind them that all women can learn to negotiate, and it is urgent that they do so before a life-changing negotiation presents itself, such as a divorce or entrenched problem with their boss.

Especially when faced with high conflict situations in which claiming value will be key, we believe that women must dive into their preparation. Let's say business partners, a man and a woman, are breaking up the partnership, are now alienated from one another and are on the brink of litigation. The climate has gotten very hostile and the male partner is a “scrappy” fighter who uses name-calling, gender-based slurs and hard bargaining. The issues they are fighting about are primarily financial, and the female partner knows that she can fall into stereotypical patterns when it comes to numbers. In such a case, she needs to take heed and put in extra care and attention. This involves thorough preparation — analyzing for both sides — position, interest, BATNA, worldview, reservation price, aspiration, and offers and counteroffers. Her BATNA may include her prospects in litigation; she may need to get solid input from a good lawyer. She can get advice, but she should control the negotiation whether she is using a lawyer or not. She should understand the concepts and be bold about using them.

Commit to Being a Life-Long Learner of Negotiation

Many people still think of negotiation as an art, not a science. But years of negotiation research, and our years of training, have shown this not to be true. You can learn good negotiation techniques either through reading, the support of a negotiation coach, or training. To a great extent, negotiation skills are simple and common sense; it's the complexity of our humanity that make them difficult. Mastery takes a life-long commitment to challenge one's skills and build awareness. Given the inequities women face—for example the relative poverty of older women who are single, widowed or divorced,

learning negotiation must be a priority for women. When women increase their negotiation skills, they can improve relationships, gain greater control over the treatment they receive in the workplace, and secure more financial independence as well as real dollars to invest in their priorities and preferences.

Weaver conducted a study of how women learned to negotiate during their careers. She asked her study participants what factors helped or hindered their ability to speak up on their own behalf in the workplace. The women identified: learning from one's mistakes, getting training or support from others, and seeing one's worldview or cultural lens clearly.²

Learn from Your Mistakes; There is No Failure — Just Feedback

In the aforementioned research, a substantial number of women cited a choice that went wrong as a major factor that altered their thinking about how to handle negotiation and conflict. Each of these women recounted an incident early in her career that she handled either with silence or other “gender-conforming” behaviors. Each recounted how this choice resulted in a bigger problem rather than a solution. Women who did not want to live through such

a negative experience a second time often made pledges or promises to themselves to handle a situation differently if the need arose. For example, a businesswoman recounted staying silent in her early career in the face of sexual harassment from her boss. She grew up

in the South and was taught that women were to keep quiet. She did not want to make trouble and felt afraid of “rocking the boat” by complaining to Human Resources. Her friends encouraged her to just deal with it. However, the situation turned worse. When she refused to keep dating the boss, he fired her, and at that point she realized she had lost her opportunity to complain and possibly keep her job. She was young and did not have the resources to hire a lawyer. She was humiliated and out of a job. As the years passed, she was increasingly angry at herself for not speaking up to file a formal complaint. Several decades later in her career, when she faced a hostile and harassing boss, she did speak up for herself. With the appropriate guidance from the Human Resources department, she negotiated a resolution in a face-to-face discussion with her boss. Commenting on why she “had to” speak up, she said, “I wasn’t the only one, and I couldn’t just let this keep happening.”³

Trained negotiators avoid escalating or accommodating unnecessarily; they stay focused and constructive even if they are dealing with an adversarial negotiator or bully.

Get Support from Training Programs and Knowledgeable Others

We know from the literature that programs and people can support women as they learn to negotiate. A “goal setting” protocol can help women anticipate obstacles and make plans to overcome them during negotiations.⁴ Training programs such as ours, see cglobal.com, can guide participants to make changes to longstanding interpersonal habits.

An educator in Weaver’s study described being scared to defend herself in her early career as she thought it would be out-of-line to talk back to the person she worked under as a student-teacher. She was raised to be “a good girl” and to respect authority. Decades later, as an assistant principal working with students, parents, faculty and other staff members, as well as a highly opinionated principal, she realized that she would need to negotiate regularly. She studied books on the topic and found a mentor with whom she could discuss upcoming negotiations. She realized there is a system — a map — to help her, and she uses it in conjunction with planning and role-playing to get comfortable with how she might react to various scenarios. While she still isn’t comfortable negotiating, she “does it anyway.”⁵

If you are the type of woman who would just as soon not engage in difficult negotiations, training can help. In our experience, it’s the “untrained” in the field of negotiation who are often the most adversarial — perhaps out of fear, lack of sophistication, or simply inexperience. One of the signature models

of our training programs identifies five communication behaviors used in negotiation — *Attack, Evade, Inform, Open* and *Unite*.⁶ *Attack, Evade, Inform* are more typically concentrated in a competitive negotiation (essentially fight/flight characteristic of our “old” reptilian brain) and *Inform, Open* and *Unite* more so when one uses a collaborative strategy (the “new” brain or cerebral cortex of logic and reason). It’s easy to observe that the untrained, both male and female, typically use more “attack” behaviors and are often unduly competitive when the situation does not warrant it. For instance, a female NASA engineer working on a joint space project with the Russian space agency and well-trained in negotiation recounted to Coleman how she received initial correspondence from the Russian team addressed as follows: “Dear, Jim, Sam, Tom, Larry and Mrs. Thompson.” She assumed it was going to be difficult for her to work as a woman on this team. Nonetheless, as the negotiations progressed, the men on her team (who had not received the training she

had) constantly used “attack” behavior and, in the end, she became the preferred representative of the American team.

Trained negotiators avoid escalating or accommodating unnecessarily; they stay focused and constructive even if they are dealing with an adversarial negotiator or bully. They know how to look for the integrative potential and stay calm when dealing with the inevitable tension created by zero-sum problems. They will share most information except for BATNA and urgency, they will work to understand the perspective of the other side, and they will not close too early — all skills which will keep one “in the driver’s seat” to reach one’s goals. Of course, when a woman is a trained negotiator and is assertive, she may still be called names. But her training will help her stay above the fray, not react in kind, and keep her focused on a successful outcome.

Build Awareness of One’s Own Cultural and Gender “Lens”

Women who have reflected on what norms they grew up with, and who have perspective and awareness of their gender “lens,” are better positioned to negotiate from a position of strength rather than falling into stereotypical behaviors. Kolb reminds us that when gender is seen as “constructed” within each of us as “an institutionalized system of social and cultural practices,” there is no absolute meaning to the concept of “gender-appropriate” behavior.⁷ In the socio-cultural view, learning must always be considered in and around context. Reflection is the key to such learning: “through reflection on how different contexts influence our experiential learning, we may make sense of our actions.”⁸ For some women, this reflection brings self-awareness about the need to speak up on their own behalf. For other women — often those who were raised to be highly assertive — reflection yields the recognition that they need to be more nuanced and strategic in their negotiation tactics, saving their well-honed competitive techniques for when they are required.

Walk Your Talk

While gender equity may not yet be ours to claim, we can have a huge impact in our own immediate circle of influence. We can each do our best to create fair and respectful workplaces and homes, supporting other woman along the way, and doing the inner work required to believe at the deepest level that we are truly worthy of equality.

Create Fair and Respectful Homes

In longer negotiation skills programs we have conducted, where people have time to “warm-up” to each other and talk about what is most important to them, the women participants typically begin to share their frustrations with negotiations at home. More often than not the issues are about sharing household work.

As consultants of almost 25 years to organizations of all types, the authors know only too well the parallels between organizations and families. Even though the language used may be different, many of the same patterns and power struggles play out in organizations that play out at home. In fact, people bring much of what they learned in their original system — their family — and play it out in the workplace depending on their level of awareness. For men and women who are interested in creating more gender equity and partnership in the 21st century, it makes sense to create homes where partnership, respect and equal (age-appropriate) contributions are the norm.

As Terry Real, a highly celebrated couples therapist, puts it, “children learn what they live.” We see too many well-educated mothers still waiting on their sons and allowing them to be disrespectful to women. We also are aware of how many women still live in a culture of violence in their own homes, subjects of verbal or physical abuse. While not specifically negotiation, these bullying and submission communication patterns can set a destructive backdrop for how a woman ultimately negotiates or claims value for herself. Indeed, we would like to see more research done on the parallels between work and home in how women negotiate.

Support Other Women in Their Development

Ideally, all of us can contribute to mentoring younger women to make the workplace as fair and equitable for them as possible. As Leslie Bennetts points out in her engaging book, “The Feminine Mistake,” many women who leave the workforce to “be with their families” in fact were pushed out by a work environment that didn’t support them in any number of ways.⁹ Unfortunately, too many women report having difficult experiences with female bosses. Working together to create good work environments for women is something we all can, and must attend to.

Believe You Are Worthy

As we know, in negotiation there is creating the pie and then figuring out how to divide it up. With respect to the latter, women must believe they are worthy to claim value on their own behalf. On this front, women must grapple with all the ways that culture has taught them to not do this. We must examine internalized messages such as “negotiation is unladylike,” “it is selfish to put oneself first,” “good women do this,” “it’s not nice to challenge,” and “I don’t want to be seen as aggressive.” In the beautiful civil war novel “March” by Geraldine Brooks, a young boy, just freed from slavery, is wounded in a battle and encouraged by a white minister to get up on a mule and allow himself to be carried. The boy can’t do it. For all of his life until that moment, riding a mule would invoke a whipping. Within the

context of the American experience, we recognize that no group's oppression is equatable to that of enslaved African-Americans. Nonetheless, all human beings who have been acculturated to societal norms that do not respect them as equals need to examine the ways they have internalized them. As women, if we believe we are unworthy, then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, both in terms of what we expect for ourselves and what others expect for us. Internalized oppression is probably the largest challenge for all for all of us, as negotiators and simply as human beings.

Recent research on women and negotiation has shed light on the "double-binds" women feel when they want to speak up and negotiate but are constrained by gender norms.¹⁰ Claiming value for oneself seems more a male prerogative and a bit unladylike. Our recommendation to women is to let these constraints go and, within the bounds of best negotiation practice, forge ahead. Life is complex: people are complex. Projection is a fact of human life and, no matter what we do or where we go, others will be projecting on us either in positive or negative ways about our physical appearance, height, class, gender and education.

While there are many, both men and women, who would like to keep women in their traditional roles, there are also many who do not. There are many men in positions of power that believe firmly in creating a climate of fairness and respect between the genders. About a decade ago, Coleman was asked to do a training/mediation program for representatives of Iraqi Kurdistan. When she looked over the participant list, she noticed there were no women representatives and mentioned as much to the Kurdish contacts in Washington. Soon, a woman was added to the list. Later, when talking to that woman, (who was a wonderful asset to the program) she told Coleman that her mother and grandmother were totally opposed to her traveling to the United States and it was only because of the support of her father that she was allowed to come. In another assignment teaching intercultural negotiations to a European pharmaceutical company, our instructor team was five women. Murmurs of, "hmm, five ladies" could be heard from the mostly male audience. Nonetheless, these apparent concerns were dispelled when we went on to run a highly successful program. Those who are familiar with the literature around women and leadership know that, in 2003, it was a male minister of business, Ansgar Gabrielsen, who insisted that women should hold 50 percent of the board seats on publicly listed companies in Norway. Nicholas Kristof has made it his journalistic mission to build global awareness about the human trafficking of women. And Jimmy Carter has gone on the record as saying that the situation of women is the single greatest human rights issue of the 21st century.¹¹

In coaching our clients, one of the most difficult things for them to hear — especially in conflict situations in which there is a strong desire to blame the other — is that the only person you can really change is yourself. Our thought for women here is the same — pay attention to your own internalized oppression and change it. We are certain that truly believing you are worthy will translate into better negotiation outcomes.

Negotiation skills are critical to moving the meter on key variables of gender equity such as voice, economic well-being, and self-determination. Our hope for our readers is that they will be emboldened to speak up for themselves, to support others who should do so, and to continue to improve — and excel at negotiation. ♦

Endnotes

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2 Dorothy E. Weaver, *How Professional Women Learn to Speak up and Negotiate for Themselves in the Workplace*, Teachers College, Columbia University Dissertation (May 2011), ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, <http://gradworks.umi.com/34/84/3484283.html>.

3 *Id.*

4 Cynthia Stevens, Anna Bavetta, & Marilyn Gist, *Gender Differences in the Acquisition of Salary Negotiation Skills: The Role of Goals, Self-Efficacy, and Perceived Control*, 78 J. APPLIED PSYCH. 723 (1993).

5 Weaver, *supra* note 2.

6 See <http://cglobal.com/products/aeiou> for the on-line assessment.

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9 Leslie Bennets, *THE FEMININE MISTAKE: ARE WE GIVING UP TOO MUCH?* (2007).

10 See Kolb, *supra* note 7 at 7.

11 See The Carter Center, *Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter Urges Promotion of Women's Rights by Religious Communities*, The Carter Center Blog (Apr. 6, 2011, 12:43 PM), <http://blog.cartercenter.org/?s=Urges+Promotion+of+Women%E2%80%99s+Rights+by+Religious+Communities%2C>; Nicholas D. Kristof, *What About American Girls Sold on the Streets?*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 23, 2011), http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/24/opinion/24kristof.html?_r=1; Nicola Clark, *Getting Women Into Boardrooms, by Law*, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 27, 2010), <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/28/world/europe/28iht-quota.html?pagewanted=all>.

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Research Showing Small Differences in How Genders Negotiate

During most of the 1970s and early 1980s, research on gender and negotiation was directed at discovering if the two genders had different, and perhaps innate, abilities or approaches to negotiation, typically measured by the size of the final negotiated agreement and the conflict resolution style used. One extensive literature review found a “marginal and inconsistent relationship between gender and negotiation outcomes.”⁶

In the late 1980s and 1990s, a majority of research on gender and negotiation focused on identifying individual differences. Walters, Stuhlmacher, and Meyer (1998) conducted a meta-analysis of 62 studies on gender and “bargaining competitiveness.” Their conclusion was that women do appear to behave more cooperatively in negotiations than men. However, when the studies were aggregated, the difference was slight—less than 1 percent of the variance was accounted for by negotiator competitiveness.⁷ They commented that specific constraints on negotiators such as restrictions on communication between the individuals lessen gender differences. In the studies that allowed more communication, and particularly face-to-face communication, the gender differences were larger, and women behaved far more cooperatively than the men. The authors speculate that the setting activated women’s gender stereotypes, or *gender schemas*, eliciting cooperative behaviors. It appears that men and women were interpreting contextual signals differently. The authors note that “even small variations in experimental conditions can eliminate the [gender] differences entirely, or more surprisingly, cause them to change direction.”⁸ This important point deserved further study, which it received in the field.

Research Showing the Impact of Context and Situations

Many studies in the 1990s focused on how specific situations elicited or did not elicit gender differences. Most of these studies used salary and compensation cases as their means to explore this issue. A 1999 literature review of these studies by Stuhlmacher and Walters found that women generally have lower negotiated compensation outcomes but that situational details were key. For example, in some of the studies, the difference

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in power of the two parties affected the individuals’ negotiating behaviors.⁹ Women given the role of the boss negotiated better outcomes compared to when they were given the role of employee. Other studies indicated that when cases present the potential for collaborative (or win-win) outcomes, women negotiate better than the men.¹⁰ In short, after another decade of research studies on gender and negotiation, the findings suggested that there are situations where women’s negotiating does not match that of men, *and* there are situations where women’s behavior does match, and sometimes exceeds, that of men.

The idea that women might be responding with gendered behavior under particular conditions became a new focus of research. The field of gender and negotiation started to explore in detail how the context of a particular negotiation might impact a women’s behavior, for example, when a woman reacts to clues in the situation about what is “expected” for women and then fulfills those expectations.

Research on Factors Relevant to Why and How Women Negotiate

Research in the last decade has shown the diversity—and strength—of contextual factors in terms of how and why individuals negotiate. By changing the context, setting, and details of a case study so that women are negotiating on behalf of another (a client or a child) rather than themselves, women improve their negotiated outcomes.¹¹ Women given higher levels of relative power in a case do as well as men.¹² Interviews with women show the impact of many women’s “concern about the relationship” and lack of interest in “winning.”¹³

Factors of Self-Efficacy, Attitudes to Handling Conflict, and Empathy

Research has also shown the negative impact of women’s lack of self-efficacy about their bargaining abilities. In one study, women who did not expect to do well at negotiating made less effort, tending to give in and settle for what was offered quickly rather than bargain.¹⁴ Attitudes to handling conflict and improving over time are also relevant; some individuals believe that they are “bad” at handling conflict and cannot change.¹⁵ These women are unlikely to seek out information about how to learn to negotiate.

Women’s generally higher levels of empathy and skill at reading facial signals may give them a possible

advantage in some negotiations but put them at risk of lower outcomes in other negotiations.¹⁶ For example, when women place a higher importance on the relationship than on winning, they can be reluctant to speak up. It seems that some women seek to be liked and do not want to appear demanding, greedy, or argumentative. This desire to put-the-relationship-first sometimes results in an overly accommodating style, which is often detrimental to their interests.¹⁷

Factor of Explicit Contextual Variables

Individuals are most successful when they make careful decisions about the negotiating styles to use and when they select appropriate tactics based on the specific contextual variables. Edmondson and Smith conducted a study showing how individuals do not always act rationally by presenting the appropriate style. When upset by “hot topics,” many individuals who have been educated about negotiation styles still revert to old negotiation behavior patterns and are unable to negotiate to their full potential.¹⁸ Research by Callanan and Perri shows how individuals of *both* genders are highly attuned to the many contextual variables within negotiations—the question is how they interpret and act on those variables.¹⁹

Factor of Gender Stereotypes

Some gender and negotiation research examines contextual situations and relevant factors supporting women in their negotiations and their learning about how to negotiate. In a series of studies on stereotypes, Kray, Thompson, and Galinsky activated the gender stereotypes by telling male and female MBA students that individuals who are “rational and assertive” rather than “passive or overly accommodating” will do well negotiating a specific case. In this first condition, the males negotiated higher outcomes than the females. In the second condition, the researchers made the statement above and added the following phrase: “Because these personality characteristics tend to vary across gender, male and female students have been shown to differ in their performance of this task.”²⁰ Under this condition, the female MBA students exhibited *stereotype reactance* and rejected the stereotyped behavior; they negotiated higher outcomes than the male MBA students. In a follow up study, the same authors explored what happens when participants are told that “people skills” are key to a negotiation (something that many in our culture believe women are better at than men). In this manipulation, the female students once again outperformed the men.²¹

Factor of Supporting Programs to Guide Planning

In another relevant study, participants were educated on two forms of goals orientation. When men and women received only “goal setting training,” both

genders improved, but the gender difference in negotiated outcomes remained. For the second group, the researchers also used a protocol called *self-management* to support and scaffold the women as they prepared to negotiate. The *self-management training* included short lectures and then class discussions using examples (such as a weight-loss plan) based on these five steps: (1) identifying obstacles; (2) planning to overcome obstacles; (3) setting goals regarding obstacles; (4) picking ways to self-monitor progress; and (5) picking ways to self-reward achievement, and then a written class exercise to develop a plan to follow during salary negotiations. This protocol equalized the negotiating outcomes between the male and female participants.²²

Patton discussed the “Interpersonal Skills for Negotiation and for Life” class that was developed at Harvard. This approach to negotiation training emphasizes individualized work in an “intensive, safe, and interactive environment” so that students can try roles “that they would ordinarily not permit themselves [due to] social or family conditioning.” This course has distinctive features, including regular input and guidance for students from a professional who has advanced training in psychology and family dynamics. The faculty and students report genuine improvement in participants’ interpersonal skills, with many students experiencing an “epiphany” about handling difficult interpersonal situations.²³

Context is Key

From our overview of research relating to women and negotiation, several conclusions are clear. The first, shared by many researchers, is: *for both women and men, context is key*. Who are the participants in the negotiation? What is the environment in which they are negotiating? What is their formal relationship and how well do they know each other? What has already happened that may affect the negotiation? Are the key elements on the table of equal interest to both parties? Are any key elements of more concern to one gender than another? How likely are they to have a long-term relationship? And, of course, how does the backdrop of historical gender relations inform the context? Participants should think through these as well as other elements of the context before they plan a negotiation, and while we know this as ADR practitioners, we should also focus on helping our clients understand that approaching conflict systematically in this way is something they can learn and incorporate into their daily lives.

Another conclusion is: *the style of negotiating must be suited to the context*. Because studies show that some women avoid negotiating in realms considered masculine such as compensation,²⁴ women should bring a consciousness of what may be gender-conforming behavior, and make the effort not to fall into gender-stereotypical behavior. Another potential gender “trap” is conceding

too much too quickly, especially if a woman is in a self-advocacy situation. Women can learn to reflect and consider what approach to take to specific negotiations, including deciding what style of negotiating is likely to be most effective.²⁵ As addressed elsewhere in this issue, choosing a negotiation style is not a simple dichotomy of a competitive (male) approach versus an accommodative (female) one. Without a consideration of the whole context, any negotiator will find it difficult to select the right style or tactics. Only with a careful review of the relevant elements of the context and an awareness of the potential gender issues involved can a negotiator—particularly a woman—be positioned to make a reasoned, justifiable, and conscious choice about what negotiating style to use.

Our review of recent studies also reminds us that we must continue to emphasize that *any individual can learn to negotiate*. Learning to negotiate certainly takes effort and time; for some individuals, learning to negotiate may require much more time than for others. Learning to negotiate is rarely a quick fix because longstanding habits and attitudes must be examined and changed. Just as learning to drive involves more than taking a single afternoon behind the wheel, learning to negotiate is a process—one that takes practice on stormy as well as sunny days, on highways as well as back roads. To gain a familiarity and comfort using different tactics that are fully suited to the situation and paying attention to creating the best conditions for positive negotiation outcomes takes time, reflection on what works and doesn't work, and increasing self-awareness. As negotiation trainers and coaches, we can remind students and clients of this fact and shape their learning experiences to support the process. ◆

Endnotes

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