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06 AUG 2019

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 Negotiation, Negotiation Mastery

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Extensive preparation is essential to any negotiation. But beyond an agile strategy and keen understanding of [deal-making tactics](#), success at the bargaining table requires having the right mindset and a high degree of [emotional intelligence](#).

In a recent lecture [streamed via Facebook Live](#), Harvard Business School Online [Negotiation Mastery](#) Professor Mike Wheeler explored the role of emotions in dispute resolution, and the ways those feelings can be channeled to [create value](#) and close deals.

In his talk, Wheeler shares key findings from his research at HBS, insights from seasoned negotiators, and practical tips you can use to emotionally prepare for your next bargaining session.

Check out a full recording of Wheeler's discussion below:



HOW DO EMOTIONS AFFECT NEGOTIATIONS?

The emotions you feel when entering a negotiation can have a profound impact on the outcomes you achieve.

To explore this relationship, Wheeler conducted a study with colleagues, which involved in-depth interviews with experienced negotiators regarding their thoughts and feelings about the bargaining process. Participants were asked to assemble collages of images they associated with negotiation.

The study revealed that even experienced professionals have mixed and conflicted feelings about negotiation, including anxiety over unknowns and self-doubt about performance. They also described a feeling of pessimism

regarding the other party's trustworthiness and self-doubt about their own ability to perform.

These findings have been tied to research by HBS Professor Alison Wood Brooks, who found that anxious negotiators tend to make more modest first offers, have lower expectations in deal-making discussions, and exit situations early, among other pitfalls.

While strong negative emotions can come with high costs at the bargaining table, not all emotions are detrimental to negotiation. Positive emotions can actually help facilitate a more favorable outcome, and feelings like anxiety or nervousness can be channeled to achieve success. Brooks's work shows that when people tell themselves they're excited, rather than anxious, before important tasks, they're more engaged and perform better.

Whether you're a practiced negotiator or someone who typically shies away from the bargaining table, this insight is important to keep in mind.

"There's a way you can take that adrenaline raised by stress and anxiety, and instead of working hard to push it down, you can use it as excitement and engagement," Wheeler says. "When you feel the little upwelling of anxiety, name it—even though you know it's a gambit. 'I am excited.' It will help inoculate you against the problem."

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN NEGOTIATION

In addition to understanding how your own emotions affect negotiation, it's important to read the emotions of the other parties involved. Having a strong sense of emotional intelligence is critical to successfully doing business.

Chris Voss, a former FBI hostage negotiator who's featured in Negotiation Mastery, needed this skill in his career. His time working for a suicide hotline taught him to "listen between the lines" and pick up on what callers

were implying, rather than explicitly stating, with their words. This enabled him to more quickly guide people through their decision-making processes and navigate their emotions.

Exercising emotional intelligence has also played an important role in the career of Erin Egan, who currently works at Amazon. In her previous role with Airbus, Egan learned a lot about negotiation dynamics by observing how people behaved during meetings.

“What’s interesting is what’s not said, and body language,” Egan says. “You can learn a lot when someone says something and watching how other people on their own team respond. That’s extremely telling. You can understand if everybody is aligned.”

These examples demonstrate how critical emotional intelligence is to negotiation. In order to be successful, you need to not only identify the emotions that you and others are experiencing, but effectively understand, use, and manage them.



HOW TO EMOTIONALLY PREPARE FOR NEGOTIATION

To help you put emotional intelligence into practice, here are six questions you should ask yourself before engaging in your next negotiation:

1. What do you want to feel going into the negotiation?

2. Why do you want to feel that?
3. What's the best thing you can do beforehand to feel that way?
4. What could throw you off balance in the midst of negotiation?
5. What can you do to recover your poise?
6. What do you want to feel when you're done?

Even if you're short on time, running through these questions can help you calibrate your mindset and improve your likelihood of success.

"You always want to be well prepared at the bargaining table," Wheeler says. "That means running the numbers. It means getting a sense of whom it is you're going to be negotiating with. Reading the contract language; the proposals back and forth with great care. But you also need to be in the right frame of mind."

USING EMOTIONS TO YOUR ADVANTAGE IN NEGOTIATION

Although emotions have the potential to get the better of you during negotiations, having a clear understanding of how emotions impact the situation can give you an advantage. As Wheeler and Brooks's research suggests, channeling feelings of stress or anxiety into excitement can increase the likelihood of a favorable outcome, and having [strong emotional intelligence skills](#) can help you understand how the people you're negotiating with are feeling.

Do you want to hone your negotiation skills? Explore our eight-week online course [Negotiation Mastery](#), and learn how you can develop strategies and techniques to achieve success at the bargaining table.

This post was updated on March 17, 2020. It was originally published on August 6, 2019.



About the Author

Matt Gavin is a member of the marketing team at Harvard Business School Online. Prior to returning to his home state of Massachusetts and joining HBS Online, he lived in North Carolina, where he held roles in news and content marketing. He has a background in video production and previously worked on several documentary films for Boston's PBS station, WGBH. In his spare time, he enjoys running, exploring New England, and spending time with his family.

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