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BUS415(01) Business Negotiations

Dr. Viner

Thailand Negotiation

Source of Difference

From the beginning of my college career and even before, I had always intended to study abroad. People close to me knew this, especially my parents who even encouraged it. The reason I found myself in a negotiation with my parents about studying abroad was because of the location I had chosen and how I told my parents that was where I was going.

As a computer science major, I had limited options as to where I was able to study, to begin with. The four places I could have gone and actually considered were England, Ireland, Greece, and Thailand. The one location that stood out and inevitably was my choice from the very beginning was Thailand. I've always been fascinated by Asian culture because it is wildly different from what I've experienced myself. Ultimately what I wanted was a deeply cultural and eye-opening life experience from my study abroad semester; the clear choice in my mind was Thailand.

Without considering that Thailand is generally considered dangerous if you are the parent of a child who will be there for three months, I called my dad a couple days after deciding and told him the news. He was surprised and said that I had some research to do before leaving. I

then called my mom and she had the same reaction but also immediately brought up health and safety concerns. After both of them were made aware that I fully intended on committing to Thailand, I got a call from my dad a couple days later. He began by saying he thought about Thailand and insisted that I look elsewhere such as a country in the EU. I was immediately flustered and erratically replied asking why. He mentioned how he talked to my mom about the trip and that they had a few concerns that would be dwarfed if I studied elsewhere.

My parents' interests included safety, health, distance, money, and general discomfort with the country. Their interests varied greatly from mine which was, a life-changing cultural experience, immense curiosity, an alternative to big study abroad party locations, and exploring a place entirely foreign for a long period of time.

Initiation of Negotiation

Background Information

It is important to know that my parents have never traveled out of the U.S. and also don't have passports. Meanwhile, I've lived on my own for the past few summers on Nantucket Island and have been all over the country and to different countries over the past few years.

Additionally, I've always wanted to travel and love being on the move experiencing new things daily.

My mom's concerns include the fact that I have a few allergies and also a blood disorder that increases iron intake which will effect me later in life but doesn't at the moment. With all of that being said, my mom is very thoughtful and more often than not correct about my own health and

safety. Instead of being smart and breaking the news to her about me wanting to go to Thailand after doing research, I simply called and dropped the news very deliberately which wasn't a good idea at all. I think this is the reason my parents began asking so many questions and eventually wanted to negotiate for a different location. As Lyle Sussman mentions in his Harvard Business Review article about framing messages, “A frame orients a reader or listener to examine a message with certain disposition or inclination” (Sussman, 1999). If I had framed my message better to make both my mom and my dad feel more at ease about the situation, to begin with, I would have been much better off. Instead of stating that I was going to Thailand I should have explained my reasoning as to why I wanted to study there specifically and what it meant to me. If I had told my mom I did some research on some safe places to study abroad and had talked to students who had already been there and back she would have been likely to be much more receptive to the idea. Sussman describes this well-known negotiation principle when he says, “A frame is to a persuasive argument as the picture of a completed puzzle is to the jumbled pieces of the puzzle”(Sussman, 1999).

Initiation

The negotiation that I didn't know I was getting into began with a surprise phone call around 10 a.m. in The Callahan from my dad. He opened by saying both himself and my mom weren't comfortable with Thailand and that I had to choose somewhere else. Immediately flustered again, I shot back with a response full of emotion and said Thailand was the only place I wanted to go to and I wouldn't be traveling abroad at all unless that was the location. As is

mentioned in *Getting to Yes and Negotiating with Emotion* by Kilianna Pillemer, it is essential to separate the people from the problem and to leave all emotions at the door in negotiation (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991). I wasn't negotiating in a room face to face with my parents it is still best to leave emotions behind during the phone call as well. Although the call was a surprise, I should have remained calm and questioned the claim rather than refute it ignorantly. Likewise, I should have separated myself and my dad from the problem. This is someone who I have known and grown up with my entire life. Reacting emotionally and naturally is how I have always acted with my parents which are why it was easy to get carried away. Being void of emotions like a poker player can definitely help in negotiation, however, I forgot to exercise this skill in initial talks (Pillemer & Wheeler, 2013).

Positions

The first stated position of my parents was that they simply had a lot of questions and uncertainty about what a trip to Thailand alone as a 20-year-old student would be like. As I mentioned, neither of them have ever been out of the country and therefore don't have a clear picture of life in other countries, let alone Asia. They wanted me to have the opportunity to study abroad but were hesitant about such an exotic location. The source of difference stemmed from their genuine concern for me and my safety. If I had recognized this from the beginning I would have talked with less emotion and would have planned differently.

Planning for a negotiation is the most important part or you can lose before you even walk through the door. Pillemer's article about negotiating with emotion makes a strong point

about this as well. “Granted, rigorous preparation is crucial. The bigger the transaction, the more important it is to identify core interests, weigh walkaway options, and assess how other parties see their choices. Running the numbers and scouting the marketplace are essential before heading to the bargaining table” (Pillemer & Wheeler, 2013). Without proper planning, you might misunderstand the other side's position or might not even fully understand the premise of the negotiation. If I wanted to avoid a negotiation from the beginning all I would have had to of done was plan out my actions and words with my parents. Ideally, I would have put myself in their shoes as Pillemer and the authors of Getting to Yes suggests.

The bigger the transaction the more planning you need to do. I’m my parents’ youngest son going abroad alone to a country most people don’t know much about and my siblings never even considered traveling abroad. My general assumption of Thailand being a normal place to travel to with relative ease and safety did not resonate with my parents at all and was a much bigger deal than I made it out to be.

The Bottom Line

My bottom line wasn't going to Thailand or nothing, however, I became so emotionally invested in wanting to travel to this place that I became irrational during negotiation which was very problematic. My parents’ bottom line was that they wanted me to choose a country where I would be safe. This didn't mean that I couldn’t go to Thailand but that was how I initially interpreted it. If I had done some research and supplied them with enough information about the country and showed maturity in my interest in traveling there, I don't think a negotiation would have taken place at all. Also, if I listened to Roger Fisher’s advice about going to the balcony to

take a quick break and look at the situation instead of overreacting on the phone call with my dad I would have put myself in a much better position (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991).

Alternatives

The alternatives involved in this negotiation were the same for both sides. I could choose another country to apply to that was more conducive to my parent's concerns or stay at Endicott for the semester. For the sake of easing my parents' stress, I began generating other options of other countries I could travel to. This did help and for each country, I tried to explain how it was similar to Thailand and the life I would be living there. Generating realistic options that both parties can see eye to eye on is the key to a successful negotiation (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991). Getting to Yes calls this, inventing options for mutual gain. The book goes on to explain how the negotiation between Egypt and Israel for the territory of the Sinai Peninsula required creative options to minimize concessions from both sides. The negotiation required both sides to focus on interests rather than positions. This can be a difficult task to complete when in a serious or heating negotiation.

BATNA's

The only difference between my alternatives and my parents' alternatives was our respective BATNA's. Ultimately my BATNA was traveling to any of the other countries available to me. My parents' BATNA for the negotiation was me staying at Endicott for the semester since I outwardly said that if I wasn't going to go to Thailand I didn't want to go. This was another

miscommunication on my part that added needless complexity to the negotiation. I believe I did this subconsciously because it ended up putting more value on Thailand and my parents' desire for me to travel. The clear alternatives were England, Ireland, Greece, and Australia and that was how the formal negotiation began.

Obstacles to Agreement

As mentioned, I added obstacles to an agreement that stemmed from poor planning and communication by me. There was also the obstacles that came from my parents' true interests. These included safety, health, distance, money, and general discomfort with me alone in the country. After realizing the mistakes I made by not putting myself in their shoes when I called them for the first time, and also overreacting emotionally to the responses that developed because of my own poor planning; I had to come up with a plan to overcome those obstacles. Eventually, I became aware that I had to start over and explain my own interests without emotion and also present some information to them that refuted or eased their concerns. I generated a logical explanation of my own experiences and own preparedness for the trip. All in all, I thought Thailand would be the most beneficial option for my happiness and growth as a person, and more importantly their son.

I didn't have to worry about lying or making the other side play fair in this negotiation since only family was involved. This added an interesting dynamic to the negotiation. It enabled both sides to be as open as possible and therefore allowed us to not have to worry about checking facts. This made for a quick negotiation process. As Zakary Tormala said in How Uncertainty

Transforms Persuasion, “In short, certainty is the catalyst that turns attitudes into action, bringing beliefs to life and imbuing them with meaning and consequence.” (Tormala & Rucker, 2015).

Power Vs. Reason

Each side had equal power in this negotiation, therefore, any results would be derived from reason. My dad pays for someone of my school each year while I work during the year and mostly during the summer to pay the rest. My parents and I have mutual respect for each other which helped all options seem realistic throughout the process. The rationale used by each side clearly expressed the deep interests behind all the words. Since my parents are divorced and I was at school a couple hours away, I had to negotiate with each of them over separate phone calls. With that being said, the rationale I used with my mom was different from the rationale I used with my dad. This is something I think most kids do with their parents, but also, negotiating can change when you know the sex of the person you are talking to.

Females in negotiation, especially when it's your mother, can at times change the approach you should take going in. Linda Babcock's article on women in negotiations, Nice Girls Don't Ask, highlights a number of the causes and differences of men and women's actions in negotiation (Babcock, Laschever, Gelfand, & Small, 2003). Babcock conducted three different studies that all had the same result, “men are more likely than women to negotiate for what they want.” This was definitely the case in the negotiation I was in. My mom seemed to be looking at the situation entirely differently than my dad. My dad was more forceful in the way he said I needed to pick another location to study abroad at. As for my mom, she was asking questions

such as, “Why Thailand?” or “Do you know anything about the healthcare in Bangkok?” Rather than asking me to study elsewhere, she seemed to want clarity more than anything else about why Thailand was my country of choice (Babcock, Laschever, Gelfand, & Small, 2003).

This could also go beyond gender roles in negotiation and back to framing a message. Instead of trying to trigger me right away by saying that I couldn’t go it seemed as if she wanted to peacefully talk about how much I knew and why it was the right choice for me. Ultimately, the message from my mom may have seem framed but it could have purely been a more feminine response to the situation that I was in.

My Rationale

For me, I wanted my study abroad experience to be exceptionally cultured and adventurous. Since I’ve never been able to go on trips anything like a semester abroad before, I was eager to finally have the opportunity. Traveling to another country for a decent amount of time and seeing how other cultures live was something I had always wanted to do despite not having the money to do so. “Years of research has provided compelling evidence that time pressure seriously impairs decision making by increasing psychological arousal, which decreases the ability to find and apply relevant information and leads to an over-reliance on simple decision heuristics” (Malhotra, Ku, & Murnighan, 2008). During this entire negotiation, I was under time pressures because of application deadlines and other trivial matters. As Malhotra mentions in the above quote, humans aren't good at making clear well thought out decisions when they have deadlines. I would attribute my failure to plan before I talked to my parents about Thailand to this principle. Once I was made of this my rationale had changed. I realized that this kind of

decision affects much more than just myself. Three months of new experiences and fun could just as easily be three months of worry for someone else. This was the case in my situation and it became clear that what I needed to do was ease all the concerns my parents had so everyone would be at least content during my time away.

My Parents' Rationale

At the lowest level, all my parents wanted was a safe and eye opening experience for me while studying in another country. While they might have imagined my destination of choice to be somewhere in the EU, I decided on Thailand which demanded a further look at the rationality of the upcoming experience. Since I do have allergies and a minor blood disorder, they tend to be more cautious with me when it comes to big trips such as study abroad. Their assumption was that in case anything went wrong, Thailand wouldn't have the means to take care of me. Due to this, they needed much more details and confirmation that Thailand was actually a safe place to travel to.

The Process

Upon realizing what my rationale should have been from the beginning, determining my key negotiating points and repossess was fairly straightforward. I needed to point out specific situations where I was responsible while away from my parents. More than anything, my parents needed some reassurance that I would be making all the right choices on the other side of the earth. I also needed to do some birds-eye-view research on all things Thailand and email links

and articles to both of my parents. This would relieve some of their stress about any of the misconceptions someone might have about Thailand. Lastly, I needed to develop a list of the places I could be going and a plan for how they could regularly contact me.

Step 1

As the second round of phone calls began, this time I opened the discussion. As mentioned in Dr. Aron Viner's powerpoint presentations, deciding whether or not you open the discussion or your opponent does can be extremely important. While there isn't any clear-cut answer to this, I believe that by me opening the discussion in this situation demonstrated that I was taking the initiative and that demonstrated responsibility (BUS415, Endicott College, Dr. Viner). Also, this time the call wasn't to each of my parents separately it was a conference call. I began by apologizing for making such an important decision so quickly and without any immediate details. They both acknowledged this and also threw in some classic parenting words such as me thinking I'm an old wise man who has everything figured out.

Step 2

Following this, I decided to respond with the bulk of my new rationale as outlined in the beginning of this section. Since I had carefully planned the phone call, I sent the emails out with all of the details I found right before I called. This allowed me to talk about how responsible I have been in the past such as my summers alone in Nantucket and the various soccer trips I've gone on to different places. I did this as an attempt to overload them with all of this information all at once to make it clear that I had done my homework on what I was getting myself into and I

could answer any of their questions on it. While they opened up the emails to check out some of the details I was able to repeatedly talk about why I thought I was responsible enough for this trip. Their response to this was welcoming and they seemed to be comforted by it.

Step 3

I decided to push on with my strategy since it had been working. Next, I told them to look at the last attachment and link in the email. The last attachment was a list of contact names, numbers, and emails and the last link was to a Google docs page that had copies of my passport and all other official documents in the event that I lost them they could at least have a copy. This last step in my plan was to further prove that I was prepared for the journey ahead and had even taken extra precautions going into it.

This was the end of the material that I had planned to explain to my parents and I didn't know whether or not it was enough to persuade them. My dad's voice emerge after some dead time. To my pleasant surprise, he said, "This is exactly what we needed to hear from you and I'm glad you figured it out. Congratulations you're going to Thailand." This statement utterly shocked me but was the best news I've ever received. My dad went on to explain that I have to take some time with decisions with this and need to keep everyone involved up to date on all details. I'm not sure whether or not this was my parents' plan from the start, but it was definitely an experience I learned from and it definitely humbled me.

The negotiation process with both of my parents followed the outline I developed and explained above to hopefully ease any concerns they had with me going. During this whole process, I realized how deeply I wanted to go to Thailand compared to all the other options and

how much it actually meant to me. Winning this negotiation became more important to me than anything else going on in my life.

Body Language Barrier

During both negotiations, I had to attempt to understand exactly how my parents were reacting since I couldn't actually see them. "We communicate far more information to other people than is conveyed by our words alone" (Wheeler, 2009). If I was able to physically see my parents when I broke the news to them that I wanted to go to Thailand, I likely would have been able to see that their body language didn't reflect the words they said. "Our nonverbal signals sometimes contradict the words we use and subvert our objectives." (Wheeler, 2009)

If this negotiation happened in person I would have changed the way I delivered the information after realizing how uncomfortable my parents were with it. As I mentioned my parents are unbelievably supportive of me, and it has always been a great thing. This time, however, I was fooled by verbal communication where my parents sounded excited for me but actually had a number of concerns. This was something I couldn't hear over the phone so I thought nothing of it. Additionally, I've lived with my parents and have been subconsciously and consciously recognizing their body language. As their son, I'm certain that plenty of my normal facial expressions and body language are imitations of what I learned from them. With that being said it is likely that I would have been able to read exactly what they really felt about the message that I delivered to them. "We read posture as a sign of person's confidence and ease, and how they relate to others" (Wheeler, 2009). This quote applies well to something I've always noticed about my dad for example. Whenever he feels uncomfortable with something he

straightens up and has good posture. It is likely that I would have been able to see that when I delivered the news to him and could then ease the situation to make him feel more comfortable.

Distributive/Integrative Elements

Since this was a negotiation solely among myself and my parents all solutions were integrative. In the end, everyone shared the outcome of the negotiation. There weren't any individual elements that were distributed to me or my parents. Since the only element to negotiate was a location that each individual was comfortable with, the end result was an integrative solution that everyone was satisfied with.

Outcome

The outcome of this negotiation was an agreement about myself being allowed to study abroad in Thailand with the full support of my parents. By not planning the way I shared the news with my parents, I found myself in a tougher situation than I ever would have been If I did plan. Ultimately, I fixed my mistake and smoothed out all of my parents' concerns. By taking advantage of planning after making my first mistake, I was able to clearly explain the benefits of studying in Thailand and why it would be a safe and healthy experience.

Evaluation

If I had to go back and do the negotiation differently, I would change how I delivered the news to my parents from the beginning. I should have been more tactful with opening remarks instead of saying, “I decided to go to Bangkok for study abroad”. I also failed to put myself in my parents’ shoes instead of assuming they would be okay with my decision. I should have presented them with the information earlier than I did. At a lower level, though, It seemed as if my parents had more of a concern with me educating myself on what is necessary when making these type of life decisions and how to prepare for them. This was the key detail that I failed to recognize initially but eventually came to me when my parents put some doubt in my head about their acceptance of my travel to this country.

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