

Demolishing the urban legends of negotiation

By Ian Newall



Urban legend 4:

“Create a good climate by agreeing the minor issues first”

Most of us want to keep conflict to a minimum and would like negotiations to start well, remain pleasant and conclude positively. Skilled negotiators take this into account by planning around issues of common ground. These can be used to set the stage for a positive climate at the start and can be referred to periodically during the negotiation if the atmosphere should become tense.

With this in mind it may be tempting to settle some of the minor, or easy, issues first. There are two potential problems with doing this.

Firstly, settling minor issues early on may leave you with no room to manoeuvre or nothing to bargain with later in the negotiation. This, in turn, could eat into your margins.

Secondly, what you identify as a minor issue may be a major issue for the other side. Take a look at this diagram.

If an issue is of low importance to both sides it can be considered an Enabler. Occasionally an Enabler may be used to lubricate a relationship. A negotiator may concede an issue for the benefit of the relationship – but only if it is of negligible cost.

But there is a trap for the unwary. An issue may be of low importance and low cost for you but what if it is highly valued by the other side? It is then one of your Levers and can be used to trade for something else. Failure to see this will mean that you will incorrectly identify the issue as an Enabler and throw away the chance to get something in return. Perhaps something that is of low importance to them but highly valued by you.

This is the essence of win-win negotiating.

To find out more about Huthwaite Negotiation Skills training solutions, visit www.huthwaite.co.uk.

