

Once more with feeling!

By Ian Newall



What is your image of a skilled negotiator? Someone with ice in her veins? The poker player, playing his cards close to his chest and never revealing to the other side what he is feeling or thinking? Inscrutable, stony-faced?

If that's your image of a skilled negotiator you may be surprised to hear that Huthwaite research into what skilled negotiators actually do in face-to-face negotiations shows the opposite! Skilled negotiators frequently reveal their feelings to the other side. In fact, the skilled negotiators that we studied disclosed their thoughts and feelings to the other side at least 55% more than average negotiators.

But why would they be doing that? There are at least two possible explanations.

Firstly, revealing feelings says to the other side, *"Look at me, I'm human too and I have feelings just like you"*.

Think of an iceberg. All you see is the tip, sticking out of the water, while the biggest part is out of sight, below the waterline. Now think of the tip as a person's behaviour. This is all we can observe but we all know that beneath the outward expression of behaviour lie feelings, attitudes, motives and beliefs - all the things that make up the personality of the person. Revealing inner thoughts and feelings presents some of this to the other side and invites them to do the same. And the more that is revealed, the more the relationship will develop and the more likely it is that the sides will start to see common ground.

Secondly, it is an alternative to agreeing and disagreeing. Typical phrases used by skilled negotiators are:

*"I'm **concerned** that we aren't making any progress on this issue."*

*"I'm very **pleased** with your proposal."*

*"I'm a bit **apprehensive** about your proposed price."*

To put this into context, average negotiators, hearing a point from the other side that they would like to accept but about which they have some doubts, are likely to receive the point in uncomfortable silence. Skilled negotiators are more likely to comment on their own feelings, saying something like, *"I'm not sure how to react to the information you've just given. I would like to accept it, but I'm a little concerned about its accuracy. Can we just check it?"*

Of course, revealing thoughts and feelings is like comedy, timing is everything. We certainly don't recommend that negotiators 'spill their guts' by talking about all their thoughts and feelings all the time. However, talking about feelings at the appropriate times can have a powerful effect on the outcome of negotiations.