

Everyday Negotiations: Navigating the Hidden Agenda in Bargaining

Authors:
Deborah M. Kolb
Judith Williams

There are many books that are recommended to every management student, there are some that should be read, and then there are those that are an absolute 'must read'! Everyday Negotiations is one such book.

One of the first things that would strike you about Everyday Negotiations, is how it begins on a realistic note. The very first chapter brings in the premise of negotiations and how they exist in our life at each and every moment. The deep rooted existence of negotiation in our life is explained with simple examples, like when your alarm goes off at six in morning, and you get into an argument with your spouse about who is going to take care of the current house-related chores/crisis. Whether you win or lose that argument is also a negotiation!

In the same chapter, the authors also introduce the concept of 'Shadow Negotiation'. As interesting as the name, the concept itself turned out to be an eye opener for me. How many times do we realize, that while we are talking about some negotiation that is to happen at a later date, even as we are deciding on how it will happen, there is another negotiation that happens in parallel, where, things like Whose time is more important?, Who is in a dominant position

in the negotiation?, etc. are being decided. So the takeaway is, that taken for granted that people bargain over issues, they however also negotiate over how they are going to proceed with their negotiation. This is the essence of this particular chapter. The authors say that you can either manoeuvre to put yourself in a good position, or you can let others create the position for you; the call is yours. It's no hidden fact that slight changes in positioning can cause major shift in the dynamics within shadow negotiation. The authors splendidly set the tone for the rest of the book and advance seamlessly into the opening chapter called 'Staying out of Your Own Way'.

One of the best things about this book is that it uses interesting titles and anecdotes that intrigue you; so much so, that you would want to read what's inside immediately. As you'll read through this chapter you will realize exactly how well the authors make their point; and they reason with you so well, that any questions that may arise in your head are answered in the very next line. For instance, they start by quoting an example of a reporter who asks the legendary baseball player Yogi Berra what advice he would give to the aspiring baseball players. After a minute of puzzlement the baseball player replies, "Ya gotta dress for every game". Before you question the example, you are enlightened with the cause in the very next line. The authors explain here, with "Ya gotta dress", Yogi Berra is not referring to wearing the sports gears and glove, instead, he means you need confidence and the tools of effective advocacy to toss out any game in your favour or, for that matter, any negotiation in your favour. The authors

stress on the importance of being ready for negotiation and having the confidence to go to it. If you're already going to go with a jaundiced eye, then why go at all? This will actually make sense, and you will connect with each and every word that make up those lines. I am sure there have been such incidences in each of our lives, where we went to a meeting with a prejudice, with a negative attitude, and the results turned out exactly the way we feared they would. It's the logic of the examples and the thoughts of the authors that will make you want to go into depth with the rest of the book.

Just when you think confidence is the beginning and end of it all in any negotiation, the authors break your stream of thought and introduce you to the concept of 'Feeling Overconfident', and how even that can ruin a negotiation for you. While good temperament and certain level of confidence is important for any negotiation, an excess of it can be lethal. Authors Deborah and Judith explain this with a simple hypothetical example of two tech founders who lose a deal with a newspaper because of their overconfidence, which only exposed their inexperience in front of the other party. I could not help but think of all those times when I may have lost a client, and where I may have come off too strong. You may not even realize that you are doing it, but you could be actively expressing arrogance, which is just enough to toss any negotiation out of the window.

This book seamlessly takes you through various chapters like 'Making Strategic Moves', 'Resisting Challenges', 'Laying the Groundwork', 'Engaging your Counterpart', 'Getting Collaboration to work', 'Crafting Agreements', and

'Negotiating Change'. It's surprising how a book of decent volume, with 341 pages, makes up such an interesting story. The concepts of negotiation are weaved with such finesse that you might even forget that this is a subject in management!

Just in case you're one of those anxious readers who would rather just leaf through the book, and in order to grasp it all, skip the chapters, I would strongly suggest that you not do that with this one. There isn't a single chapter that is boring or that does not make sense, but still, if you can't help but leaf through, make sure you do not skip the last chapter – Negotiating Change.

This last chapter culminates the whole essence of the book and brings you to the end, where every concept you've read in the book is shown while applied to an example. The chapter revolves around a union hotel and its manager Shannon, who has worked at the hotel for 20 years and has donned various hats during this period. How she gradually works her way up the ladder, and from being the new bee, becomes a woman in the top management, is the central theme for the chapter. Her journey is an eye-opener for anyone, but especially so for women who aspire to be at the top of their game in their respective careers. The threads of examples woven with the concepts, subtly transform the whole book into one gospel of negotiation.

For those who like to win and do not like to compromise, negotiation is an important aspect; and for anyone who wants to master that, this book is a must read!



Review By:
Ms. Isha Gupta
PGDM 2014-16
SDMIMD, Mysuru