

Chapel Words (April 24, 2010)

“Negotiation vs. Manipulation” — Jim Holland

My younger son, Theo, is a very good negotiator. His older brother often operated under the banner "It is better to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission." But Theo likes trying to get us to agree to his plans, he likes the fight, he loves to negotiate.

Now don't take this the wrong way, but being at Shawnigan, I often feel as though I am living with 450 Theo's. I am amazed at the amount of negotiation that goes on here on a daily basis, can I have another day for this assignment, can I miss class, can I come late for class, can I go home this weekend, can I have unsupervised prep, can I have extra supervision? And on it goes. And I must say that I have seen some very high level of negotiation skills. You are really good at it, and that's a good thing. One of the things you should learn at Shawnigan, because of the kind of school we are, is to negotiate for your needs and wants.

I have not been impressed, however, when I have seen on occasion negotiation deteriorate into manipulation. And there is plenty of that too. Am I right? Let me say what I believe is the difference between negotiation and manipulation, and ask you to think about it.

A good negotiator does not lie. He or she can't afford to lie, and they know it ultimately backfires. Lies in negotiations almost always get exposed, and when they do they ruin the reputation of the negotiator and they often ruin the possibility for further agreements. Manipulators lie all the time. It is their primary tool. It becomes habitual and it ultimately makes the manipulator weak and ineffective. Besides that it's wrong.

Good negotiators take into consideration the needs and desires of the person with whom they are negotiating. The best negotiators start with the other person's needs. "I know that it is important that I am in class, I know that if I am not there I will miss important information." They move to their own needs and desires. The manipulator isn't the least bit interested in anyone else's needs. They simply want what they want.

Good negotiations result in win-win solutions. Today in the professional world of negotiations virtually everyone from labour negotiators to peace negotiators to business negotiators, use win-win approaches. "Let's come up with a solution that works for everyone." This has become the industry standard because it has proven itself to work. The old style of get what you want by crushing your opponent, or fooling your opponent or manipulating your opponent is considered totally backward and out of date.

A good negotiator sometimes accepts compromise. They sometimes give up a small thing to win the bigger; they will sacrifice in the short run to win in the long run. A manipulator first decides what they want and then they use any means necessary to get it, without consideration for what damage their tactics might cause to themselves and to others.

According to the Harvard negotiation project good negotiation revolves around four principles:

1. Separate the people from the problem
2. Focus on interests, not positions
3. Invent options for mutual gain and benefit
4. Insist on using objective criteria

In other words, good negotiators seek solutions without threatening, lying, attacking the other person or basing their appeal on emotion. “Puuuleeeeeeease!” may work in the short term, but it isn't the best way to conduct a serious negotiation.

So keep negotiating for your needs and wants. Because in the end negotiation is not just about getting something specific, it is about life, it is about relationships, it is about growing up and getting wiser. So negotiate as much as you can, but do it with integrity, honesty and dignity. Not only will you feel better, you will increase your real success rate.