

Thought for the day – 30

‘Think before you speak’

There is no doubt that words are the tools that we use to build the right emotive tone for a negotiation. Words can inspire confidence, invoke a spirit of working together, emphasise benefits and develop rapport. Alternatively, words can chastise, needle, alienate and introduce personal animosity.

It is not the meaning of the word that is important, it is the impression it creates. Imagine a situation where a salesman is trying to sell oil to a motorist. He dips the tank. Then he has a choice, he can say the tank is half-full, or he can say the tank is half-empty. Which is most likely to sell oil?

I remember asking a strict Jesuit priest while on a religious retreat as a boy if it was OK to smoke while I prayed. The answer I got was very short and very sharp. A friend of mine at a later stage in the day asked the priest if it was OK to pray while he smoked. The different answer he got convinced me of the power of words.

Words can have a very positive and powerful effect. They can also have a very negative effect. Most of us will not need to be told that it is counter-productive to insult the other party as part of a negotiation. Although we do not insult the other party, we will quite often create offence by using a group of words which are known as irritators. These words are not intended to insult, but they do. They include:

- Poor and inappropriate humour, often attacking minority groups in society.
- Expressions and phrases which are not well received, however well-intentioned they are meant, eg, phrases such as ‘dear’ or ‘love’ used to address women or other phrases which may be received as patronizing.
- Gratuitously favourable comments about us, our position, our intentions, such as ‘I am making you a *very generous* offer’ or ‘I am trying to be reasonable’ (and the implication is that the other party is not).
- Slang or swear words.

Although you cannot script a negotiation, you should carefully think through the impact of what you are about to say, and think about the best way of putting your point of view across.

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This thought has been taken from Eric’s book ‘Mastering Negotiations’. A master negotiator himself, he is our expert trainer on the subject – click [here](#) for details of one of his most popular courses.

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