

Career advancement: Negotiation vs. expectation

"In business, you don't get what you deserve, you get what you negotiate."

– Chester L. Karrass

In the last issue of *Broadcast Dialogue*, Stephanie MacKendrick made the interesting observation that people are born with negotiating skills. She went on about how children focus on their goals with dogged persistence until every avenue is exhausted before they give up. They also unfailingly and enthusiastically set new goals as circumstances change.

What erodes this innate ability? I am always puzzled by the general reluctance to negotiate a better deal, especially when it concerns a promotion, a raise or a more favourable contract. Instead, people choose to remain silent, walk away or quit a perfectly good job. Why is this?

While in a perfect world people should be rewarded for good work and receive what is their due, it is also a normal and human goal to secure the best deal at the lowest possible price. Few would point out to a store-keeper that their prices are too low or that a consultant's service fee really needs to be raised. So too in the workplace; many managers or employers, accountable to bottom line profit margins, are happy to secure input for the best price. It takes a really good supervisor to think long term and take the initiative to suggest a raise or promotion for someone just because they deserve it.

That said we, for the most part, are aware of business practice theories that remind us that workplace retention goes hand in hand with incentive and reward. Most organizations have written policies outlining succession and salary structures. These necessary operational phenomena are perhaps part of the problem. The expectation is created that individual salary and promotion issues will automatically be taken care of according to set procedure. At the same time managers are lulled into thinking that they need to

promote or raise salaries only when they have to. Added to the mix, the massive layoffs witnessed in the 90s, as well as the constant post buy-out/sell-off reorganizations that are so common in the corporate world, have created a lingering malaise. The average worker is permanently alert to the potential jeopardy of his/her position. There is perhaps a very real anxiety that asking for more or seeming entitled will result in being placed on the *expendable* list.

People are generally fearful when the outcome of an interaction is uncertain. Just as with interview situations, the possibility of rejection and perceived humiliation of a failed negotiation is daunting for most. It is easier to avoid confrontation, hoping the desired outcome will just appear. The resultant problem is that buried frustration festers and grows into deep-seated discontent that eventually flares into misdirected conflict over unrelated issues. A more common consequence would be a passive-aggressive attitude that eventually poisons the office environment.

How much better to confront career advancement issues rationally when they arise. To do this the individual employee should be prepared to negotiate in a rational manner, with a built-in preparedness for success or failure. The outcome of negotiation will then dictate a course of action based on actual, not perceived, realities.

Consider the following as a suggested awareness checklist to prepare for an effective career advancement negotiation:

- A full appreciation of current net market worth of individual experience, competencies and their application in a specific work environment.
- The financial/operational realities of the organization and industry.
- A firm, articulate objective/goal that will be the focus of negotiation.
- Existing knowledge of the negotiation playing field (who will be the negotiation opponent/party; what are the



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personality/historical factors that need to be taken into account).

- A preparedness to compromise (unwillingness to compromise changes the prospective interaction from negotiation to aggression).

Directly asking for what is deserved is not conflict. It is the inherent right of any employee to seek advancement. Assertive behavior, however, is the balancing of individual needs with those of the employer. Negotiating while in a desperate financial or emotional state drastically increases the risk of confrontation escalating into conflict.

Unfortunately our personal requirements are not always uppermost in the minds of busy managers/executives. As many assume that silence equals contentment, we would do well to remember that we are responsible for keeping our requirements on the corporate radar screen.