

The Ideal Negotiator

Sharks, Carp and Dolphins

Basically, there are three different types of negotiators, which closely parallel the three different kinds of businesspeople discussed in *The Strategy of the Dolphin* by Dudley Lynch and Paul L. Kordis. Lynch and Kordis compare the three types of businesspeople to sharks, carp and dolphins to shed light on their distinct behaviors. I think that applying the same metaphor to negotiators provides a better understanding of the three negotiating styles.

Sharks

Sharks believe in scarcity. Their perception is that in all negotiations, there must be winners and losers. To ensure that they won't be the losers, sharks "move in for the kill," striving to get as much as they can in every case, regardless of the cost.

When negotiating, the sharks' basic nature is to take over or trade off. If their efforts to win are thwarted, they will resort to a trade-off strategy. But they feel comfortable only when they are in total control, so one of their characteristics is a tendency to use crises to confuse the other party. A second characteristic of sharks is to assume that they always have the only possible solution to any negotiation. They have a desperate need to be right 100 percent of the time and will go to any extreme, including lying, to cover up their failures and shortcomings.

It is difficult to negotiate with sharks because they lack the ability to use creative strategies. They are unable to try anything different or learn from their mistakes. Their attitude of scarcity dictates their actions and reactions. If you find yourself negotiating with a shark, you need to be constantly on guard. One bad move and you will be eaten alive. If you find yourself behaving like a shark, you are encouraged to take a look at some more creative strategies.

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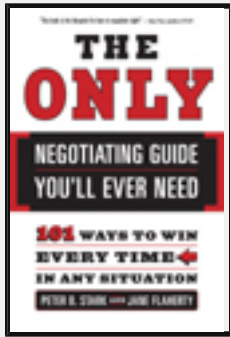
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Carp

Like sharks, carp believe in scarcity; but unlike sharks, carp believe that in a negotiation, they can never be the winners. Because of this belief, they focus their efforts on not losing what they currently have.

Carp do not like any type of confrontation, so their normal response in negotiating is to give in or get out. Neither of these responses, when used repeatedly, leads to positive outcomes. People who always “get out” and avoid negotiations become cut off and isolated. The “give in” strategy is even worse--people who constantly give in eventually have nothing left, and are eaten alive.

Seldom does one side have all the power. If you find yourself behaving like a carp in negotiation, you need to concentrate on raising your level of aspiration. Research demonstrates that your aspiration level will dictate your outcome.

Dolphins

Lynch and Kordis chose the dolphin to illustrate the ideal negotiator because of the animal’s high intelligence and ability to learn from experience. When dolphins do not get what they want, they quickly and precisely alter their behaviors in sometimes ingenious ways in pursuit of what they are after.

In negotiation, dolphins have the ability to successfully adapt to any situation they encounter. If one strategy is unsuccessful, dolphins respond with other possibilities. They learn from their mistakes and the mistakes of others.

Dolphins believe in both potential scarcity and potential abundance. Because they realize that both are possible, they learn to leverage what they have and use their resources superbly. Although dolphins know that the win/win strategy is ideal in negotiation, there are times when they will deliberately use a win/lose strategy. They will take over when:

- *Time is limited or a specific outcome is crucial.
- *The relationship with the other party is of little importance and a specific outcome is critical.
- *Appropriate retaliation is necessary.

They will trade off when:

- *Time is short.
- *The issue is trivial.
- *They care a lot about the relationship with the other party.
- *It becomes apparent that the other party will not cooperate.

They will give in when:

*The issue is trivial and the relationship is crucial.

*It is wise to "buy time."

*They discover that they are wrong.

And they will get out when:

*The outcome does not matter much.

*More pressing needs exist.

*They need time to gather more information.

*Their emotions need time to cool.

The Dolphin-Like Negotiator

In negotiation, dolphins have four key characteristics:

1. They play an infinite rather than a finite game. Dolphins realize that negotiation does not happen in a vacuum, and every action they take will have a reaction. Knowing that they may have to deal with the other party in the future, they foster cooperation and trust to enhance the relationship.

2. They avoid unnecessary conflict by cooperating as long as the other party does likewise.

3. They respond promptly to a "mean" move by retaliating properly. Dolphins recognize the importance of responding quickly and appropriately when provoked. Putting off a response sends the wrong signal, inviting more sharklike behavior from the other party.

4. While quick to retaliate, dolphins are also quick to forgive. If the other party shows any signs of cooperation, dolphins quickly switch to a more cooperative strategy.

Unlike sharks, who spend the majority of their time trying to control their counterparts and expect to conclude any negotiation with a definite winner and loser, dolphins spend the majority of their time building trust and rapport.

Knowing that negotiations are usually most successful when both parties' needs are met, they consider the other party's goals and foster an atmosphere of cooperation. And when one negotiating strategy fails, they try other strategies to enhance the possibility of achieving a win/win outcome.

Peter Barron Stark is president of Peter Barron Stark & Associates. He travels internationally training procurement specialists, sales professionals and other leaders in the art of negotiation. www.everyonenegotiates.com, (877) 727.6468

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