

# HOW I LEARNED TO LOVE CONFLICT



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**Learning means developing, transforming, and sometimes even renewing oneself through newly acquired knowledge. Anyone who makes use of psychology and good conversational tactics can surprise themselves - and will find that their weaknesses in negotiations can be changed.**

"Many people resist criticism, yet do not do the same for praises," says Prof. Reinhard Haller in his training on how to deal with fear-inducing negotiation partners. The psychiatrist and neurologist, known for his extensive experience in criminal investigations, speaks calmly about what would make many difficult negotiations much easier: to simply say something nice to the other person. In learning theory, recognition and appreciation are valued as the best facilitators, yet very few people make use of this knowledge.

On the upper floor of the Park Hyatt Hotel in the center of Vienna, 20 women sit in a wood-paneled seminar room. They all want to learn how to be better negotiators. Most of the participants eagerly write about what Professor Haller and the other speakers present on this October day. "Do not forget to praise!", He reminds the audience.

Will the participants remember what they have learned next time they sit opposite to someone who seek their benefit only? Someone who manages to make them forget about this concept in a few sentences? Someone who smiles when they lose the thread? In other words, is everyone who does not come equipped with negotiation skills lost? "No," says Matthias Schraner. Good negotiations are, above all, about strategies - and you could learn them.

The career of the leader of this negotiation training is the best proof of this: Matthias Schraner, a former police officer and constitutional lawyer, is now a world-renowned negotiating trainer. He is one of the few in his industry trained for extreme situations. He had to learn how to distinguish tactics and strategies, and how to keep a clear head when lives are at stake. After his formative years as a drug investigator and hostage negotiator, Schraner moved to the business world. "I learned everything I could on the street," he says in retrospect.

Twelve years ago, he founded the Schraner Negotiation Institute in Zurich. His clients are mostly top politicians and CEOs, from over a dozen countries. Almost every week, Schraner's opinions on Trump and Merkel are published in the press. For some time now, his Institute has been offering a specialized workshops "I do it my way" - for women only. "Learn to love the conflict," is the motto of the event. The goal is to show participants that they should shed the fear of confrontation. They are taught to do so by learning in detail how to prepare for an unpleasant conversation, and how to stick to their demands. The core of this seminar is, above all, one thing: courage.



**The prelude is designed by Schraner,** personally. For nearly two hours he talks about conversational techniques, tactics, and dominance. "I want you to feel like solving a conflict," he calls enthusiastically into the room. The participants look at him skeptically: they are all well-educated, active in mid- to high management, all are exceptionally polite and elegant.

After a few introductory words, Schraner asks the participants to prepare for a role-play. "Imagine you are negotiating the Paris Climate Agreement with Donald Trump. How do you get in?" Silence. None of those present want to negotiate with Trump. "I have trouble with his person," one explains. The US President is unsympathetic and treats women as lesser to men. How should you negotiate with someone like him? "Sympathy is not a factor," counters Schraner dryly. "Just think of a hostage-taking."

Lesson number one: you cannot choose the person with whom you are negotiating. It is irrelevant who sits in front of you - the procedure always remains the same. At this point, he draws the flip-chart towards himself, and writes down what controls both sex offenders and conversational blockers alike: justification. "It gets really difficult when someone thinks they are right." As an example, he mentions a typical relationship dispute. "You all know that feeling when your partner is not going to give up their point of view, don't you?" A sympathetic nod from the auditorium. "Do you sometimes believe that you are right and that others do not understand you?" Asks Schraner. Many laugh and come to a realization: we are often the ones who stand in the way of a solution.

Lesson number two: justifications are a sure indication of the failure of a negotiation. Even negotiation partners should not be pressured to explain themselves. "But" is therefore an absolutely taboo word in negotiations. "You can not convince people; let go of always trying to be right", summarizes Schraner. Anyone in an emotional situation - and this is always the case in a negotiation - must resist the urge to contradict their negotiation partner. Schraner is convinced that this mindfulness can be learned. "Anyone can learn to negotiate effectively, up to a certain level." This rings true in high school, for example, where these talents are a prerequisite to success. "To be really great, you need empathy and a lot of sense." He himself would sometimes act against his own advice, when the situation demanded it. In the end, it is the intuition that maneuvers him through difficult conversations.

A few years ago, top executives would have been ridiculed for attributing decisions to their "gut feeling". Nowadays, intuition is gradually recognized as a creative decision-making process rather than as an esoteric gift. Psychologists now see intuition as the interaction of the ability to instinctively grasp the development of a situation, and the ability to respond to this analysis based on knowledge and experience. The learning process at the Schraner Negotiation Institute builds on this principle: those who have experienced the methodology develop competence and self-confidence in negotiations. Over time, this stimulates the courage needed to face a conflict that one's former self would have shied away from.



Lesson number three: "We do not argue, we demand." Schraner explains to the participants what they can do better. "Do not talk for long. You do not need to give elaborate reasons." Two women also address the crowd on this day. The actress Annett Fleischer, and Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner, who was the first mountaineer to reach all eight-thousand peaks without additional oxygen. She explains to the participants the vision that they must always have in mind. She had made seven attempts to climb the second highest mountain in the world, the K2. "I am improved by my setbacks, not my victories," says Kaltenbrunner.

According to Schraner, there is little difference between genders as to who can negotiate better. Women are not more emotional than men, and men are not tougher than women. He does, however, divide people into two types of negotiators. First, the causal rationals, who think they can convince through argumentation. Second, the players who enjoy debating and who only get aggravated towards the end. The first category of negotiators walk into a negotiation with a more difficult hand, and most people belong to this category.

Indeed - most participants can not imagine going to a trial without justification. "What if someone is inappropriate?", one wants to know. Again Schraner smiles. "What is your opponent's purpose with this statement?", "to unsettle me," she replies now with a smile. "Correct! You alone decide who can offend you," he concludes. "Fight to the end! People want opponents, not victims. "

Insults often cause negotiations to fail, explains Prof. Haller. "But in every insult is a core of truth. I have to be aware of my weaknesses, so that I can protect myself from insults." That's how he talks about dealing with narcissistic personalities. "A trifle irritates the narcissist at most, which distinguishes him from the charismatic," the psychiatrist explains. It was difficult to escape the maelstrom of admiration and guilt that a narcissistic person exercises. For this type of negotiation partner, the aforementioned praises are particularly effective: "Admiration is his drug - but it must come from the heart."

To lull one's counterpart with false compliments is not sustainable tactics, warns Schraner. He himself does not think much of negotiations in NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming), a communication technique with where people are influenced by specific words. "This is totally overrated, I care about clarity."

But how does a layman manage to achieve this clarity? Schraner explains it again on the flipchart. This time with the model of how the police act during a bank robbery. He draws a rectangle as a building and a grid for the streets. "The first thing they do is cut off the robber's escape routes." He draws a red circle around the rectangle. Applied to a negotiation, this means to be the first to specify the topics. "You tell them when to meet, how long to negotiate, and what is being negotiated. Do it in three clear points." Schraner calls this "setting the agenda". Those who define these three points automatically take control of a negotiation. Very important: do not let your negotiation partner distract you from the agenda. For example, your boss could offer you a promotion during a salary negotiation. "Do not let yourself be distracted from your agenda, but stay friendly and charming," he advises. "Also, keep summarizing what has been discussed and where the conversation will go."

He recommends to the participants to implement his strategies in their everyday lives as soon as they walk out. He finishes by telling the audience to not be afraid of being aggressive: "Strip yourselves of your need to be liked. The goal must be that when you enter the negotiation room, everyone thinks, 'Not this again!' "

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