

NEGOTIATION SKILL # 5: COMBATING AGAINST REACTIVE DEVALUATION

Adversaries naturally tend to devalue the compromises and concessions put on the table by the other side. This can make any negotiation a challenge as cries of "bad faith" and "you are not taking us seriously" are met with cries of "extortion" and "bullying".

But your settlement offers do not have to be met with cries of insult and outrage caused by the phenomenon known as "reactive devaluation."

In an interesting 1986 "sidewalk" study, random American subjects were advised about the details of a U.S.-U.S.S.R. disarmament treaty between Reagan and Gorbachev. In fact, the treaty had already been agreed upon and implemented. But surprisingly, when the (U.S.) subjects were told the proposal was generated by the U.S. State Department, 90% thought it was favorable to the U.S. or even-handed. If they were told it was the idea of a neutral third party, 80% found it acceptable. Yet when the terms were attributed to a Soviet leader, only 44% saw the very same treaty proposal as evenhanded or fair!

How do you combat against that effect in negotiation? Experts suggest that insight and awareness alone may weaken the effects of reactive devaluation. If your client reacts adversely, you can normalize it by reminding him that this is routine and expected. Also, if you can have a third party neutral "adopt" and articulate your position and communicate it as her own, you may insulate yourself from this adverse reaction to a proposal. The neutral, at least will be seen as not harboring malice or intending to insult or outrage the adversary. Finally, if you can negotiate in advance as to several possible moves, you can harness the momentum and take the sting out of that initial adverse reaction.