

THE LAW OF SATISFACTION

Two different clients recently said something to make my head spin. These were experienced professionals and negotiators. Both just finished big negotiations where the other side leveled a unilateral demand and clearly had a “playbook.” The other side’s objective were clear – extract unilateral value. After talking about the final result, I asked if they thought the other side left “Satisfied.”

Both clients stated variations of “no...we upset them. They are not happy.” So, I ask the infamous unlock question - “why?” Both came back with roughly the same answer. “They said we were difficult to deal with, we didn’t give them what they wanted. They said we are not partners, etc. That’s bad!” Let’s explore the law of satisfaction first. Then let’s see if this is as “bad” as they say.

THE LAW OF SATISFACTION

We strive for the other party to leave a negotiation satisfied, irrespective of the deal result. Simple enough, or is it? This concept is built on the principle whereby people value things which are hard to obtain. If we give value away easily, they will keep coming back for more.

Let’s face it, the commercial world is a greedy one. We want the other side to think they got a great deal (or the best possible deal) out of you – it was all you could do/give. Let’s also understand this is equally applicable in both collaborative and competitive negotiations.

The legal definition of satisfaction is “paying what is due.” In negotiation, this is usually based on perception, in other words, it’s subjective. In this case, the perception of value is created and managed by the negotiator, both the value given and received.

WHAT DOES BEHAVIORAL SATISFACTION LOOK LIKE IN THE OTHER SIDE?

There are many different displayed satisfaction behaviors – frustration, reluctance, hesitancy, disappointment, unhappiness, anger, etc. Skilled negotiators must be diligent in managing the other party’s emotions. When we see some of the stronger emotions expressed, we need to ask “why?” Did we tick them off, or were their expectations not met? Expectations based on what – their perception, or reality of the value available? A critical difference. We also need to be cognizant if they are truly not satisfied. How do we manage this today, especially if there is a tomorrow with them?

BACK TO THE STORY - THE “WHY?”

Both clients were faced with a unilateral demand – “give me value, and we will give you nothing in return.” A simple competitive negotiation. Both clients tried to move the negotiation more collaborative but were unsuccessful. There are techniques to use, which they tried, but didn’t work as the other side didn’t want to collaborate. Unfortunate, but a commercial reality.

THE OTHER SIDE SAID...

"We didn't give them what they wanted."

Great. You better have a darn good reason to give away value for nothing in return. Leaving this aside, did they really expect to get what they wanted – spoiled child? Did they set an expectation you would give away value for nothing in return? Oops. Were they remunerated around extracting cash, or receive a black mark if they don't? You might need to remind them to set realistic expectations in the future.

"We were difficult to deal with."

Great! Because you didn't adhere to their "playbook" - their expectations you would pay up? This was a competitive negotiation. Your job is not to do what the other side wants, but what is in your best interests. Will they be less likely to dial you up for similar demands? Probably. Will they be more inclined to call those who give easily? Yes. How is this a bad thing?

"We are not partners."

Didn't sound like they viewed you as partners to begin with. Otherwise, why take a competitive approach. What's the concern? At least you know where you stand. Maybe develop a strategy to change this moving forward.

"We ticked them off."

Why? You didn't give them what they wanted? You didn't meet their expectation you would cave and write a blank check? Good. You have successfully changed their view of you. It will most likely be easier to drive a collaborative negotiation next time.

"Your competitors are in a better place."

Is it because your competitors paid up? Wish your competitor luck the next time they come calling. I guess you could pay more, and then it's a race to the bottom where everyone loses.

DON'T LET THEM INSIDE YOUR HEAD

Many salespeople don't want to upset the other side. We've all been there. As we look for the other party to leave a deal satisfied, their own expectations are critical to understand. Remember what "Satisfied Behaviors" look like – many times not pleasant. Is it the spoiled child, incorrect expectations or their attempt to influence your future negotiations. Or, possibly, all three?