
The Heavy Burden of Forceful Negotiating



By Horacio Falcao , INSEAD Senior Affiliate Professor of Decision Sciences

It takes several good interactions to counteract the effects of one negative one. Spare yourself the cost and approach your negotiating partners with care.

As I've written before, **bringing power** to the negotiating table has inherent risks both for the survival of the negotiation and the quality of its outcome. But many still choose power moves and aim for high expected rewards. Those who choose this approach, however, fail to anticipate the likely high amounts of pain they cause their opposite and therefore take big risks.

In contrast, win-win negotiators take a risk-aware approach. A true win-win approach will attempt to balance risks and rewards through value-oriented moves, pursuing rewards without the inherent risk of power moves.

Since most negotiators fail to distinguish between value and power moves, even when attempting to negotiate win-win, they unintentionally use power and inflict pain in the pursuit of their goals. In theory, this would not be much of a problem if the pain produced by power moves was easily cancelled out by the gains from collaborative moves. However, the science on the matter

so far indicates that the impact of painful moves far outweighs the benefits of positive ones.

On the back foot

Research shows that negative interactions have five times the effect on mood than positive interactions. In other words, it takes several “good interactions” to repair the damage done in one bad interaction. An experience [sampling study](#) directly examined the link between mood and supervisory interactions. This research revealed that employees rated 80 percent of their interactions with their supervisors as positive and only 20 percent as negative; however, the effects of negative interactions on employee mood were, in general, five times stronger than the effects of positive interactions. These findings suggest that even though most supervisory interactions are positive, the overall net effect of interactions with supervisors may be slightly negative because of the stronger effects of negative interactions on employee mood.

To shed more light on the effects of bad interactions on mood and stress levels further, another [research study](#) showed that supervisors were associated with employee emotions in three ways:

1. Employees experienced fewer positive emotions when interacting with their supervisors versus with co-workers and customers.
2. Employees experienced more positive emotions with supervisors who scored high on transformational leadership measures.
3. Employees who regulated their emotions (both hiding negative emotions and faking positive emotions) experienced decreased job satisfaction and increased stress, but those with supervisors who scored high on transformational leadership measures were less likely to experience decreased job satisfaction.

The results also suggest that the effects of emotional regulation on stress are long lasting (up to two hours) and not easily reduced by leadership behaviours.

Negative moves hurt most

The parallels with negotiation are hopefully easy to see: science suggests that negative moves hurt five times more than positive ones can amend and even more so if the interaction is based on a power difference. Even if there is a power difference, the restraint in using such power prevents the

decrease in satisfaction and increases positive emotions. Since the impact of negative or power interactions is five times stronger than positive ones, it pays off dramatically to have a very risk-averse and preventive (abstinence of power moves) approach to negotiation.

Thus, when value negotiation suggests a risk/reward approach, it is important for negotiators to calibrate their assessment of risk and attempt to eliminate the inherent and often unnecessary risk contained in power moves. Win-win choices do not mean that we do not take risks or do not seek to maximise the rewards behind our moves, but rather that we maximise rewards, while aware of and mitigating risks by best framing, timing and phrasing what we want to say or do. This way we do not slide five steps backwards for every step forward. As a certain famous brand likes to suggest: Keep moving forward!

*This article is an outgrowth of one of Horacio's recent blog posts to his **Negotiations group on Yammer**, where he follows trends in negotiations and shares his commentaries with the INSEAD student community for discussion and debate.*

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