

Workshop “Building Better Relationships & Negotiation Skills!”



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Shell



Introduction

Women often feel uneasy during negotiations. They typically are concerned that asking what they want will damage the relationship with the other party. Negotiation is, however, a crucial part of career development, and does not need to impose a negative influence on relationships at all. In fact, good relationships are an essential part of productive negotiations! The GAIA Ambassadors Network (GAN) therefore organised the workshop “Building Better Relationships & Negotiation Skills”, attended by 45 women working in technical disciplines at the GAN (and related) organisations. The workshop was led by Margreet Rodenburg, Sacha Dekker and Graham Wood of Shell's Commercial Academy, and was hosted by Shell in Rijswijk.

Building Negotiation Skills

The first part of the workshop dealt with building negotiation skills. We all negotiate every single day: At work (with customers, colleagues, boss), at home (with spouse, kids) – any place – we negotiate far more than we usually are aware of. “Building Better Negotiation Skills” let participants experience their own negotiation skills and behaviour during an exercise, and introduced them to some important basic elements of negotiation: Think about “position” versus “interest”, the “zone of possible agreement” – and before entering a negotiation, have you ever considered your alternative?

To fully experience all aspects of negotiation ourselves, we started with an apparently relatively simple game: Over 10 rounds, teams of 5-6 women could vote for “red” or “blue” and

win (or loose!) points depending on what the other teams in their “universe” had voted. Only twice was a team representative allowed to discuss with other team representatives. Individual teams could gain some points if they could let another team loose. It being a true negotiation game, however, the universe as a whole would get most points if all teams would be happy to divide the points, but this required a substantial level of trust. Negotiation proved to be necessary both within and between the teams. The importance of relationships, and the building or losing of trust, during negotiation became crystal clear.

Key Take Aways Negotiation Skills

1. Know what you want *and* what the other party (or “counterpart”) wants to be able to use win-win approach
2. Separate the people from the problem: realise that your counterpart can help solve the problem
3. Determine which alternative you and the other have (BATNA = Best Alternative To Negotiated Agreement). There is not just one option. Identify shared interest. Seek new options.
4. Use active listening skills as 70% of the time you will be listening
5. In negotiation: test your assumptions. Trust is critical for long-term relationship, once broken it is difficult to regain. Break rules of conventional thinking
6. Test your counterpart: can the person make the deal him/herself, or does he/she represent a group instead?

Building Business Relationships

The second part of the workshop was devoted to building (business) relationships. We build relationships every day as well: When we submit a project plan, when we interact with colleagues, when we join a meeting and even when we buy lunch. With some people we have “one-off” relationships, but with others we need to foster the relationship e.g. in order to get approval or to influence them. “Building Better Business Relationships” looks at the way we interact with each other professionally, and how we can use those relationships to achieve a goal. By asking the right questions and by being aware of role models we use, we gain a better understanding of our own role and how we can use it to leverage influence.

While working on the relationships we looked firstly at the ever-changing “business” vs. “social” focus of people. This focus is partly dependent on character (e.g. shy vs. open) but also depends on the moment (e.g. just before a deadline vs. at a party). Depending on your counterpart’s focus at the time you can adapt how you approach that person to achieve the most productive interaction (e.g. brief/formal vs. relaxed/informal).

Another aspect that was discussed was that of different “role models”. These role models represent basic behaviour you can (try to) assume when working with others. Typical bad role models are those of “lecturing professor”, “threatening policeman” and “critical parent”. More positive & productive roles are those of “compassionate doctor” (competent, inspires trust in experience), “best friend” (mutual trust, respect and understanding), and “curious detective” (doesn’t pretend to have all the answers, curious, asks questions and listens). In an exercise, two contrasting roles were assumed while negotiating the same topic twice, serving as a test and for evaluation.

Key Take Aways Business Relationships

1. Consider where in the relationship matrix (with axes for high vs. low business focus and for high vs. low social focus) your

counterpart operates and how you should approach this person

2. When under stress, people often defer to their default behaviour - be aware of yours
3. The role we choose affects the role our counterpart will access
4. Choose the role that fits the situation best;
i) compassionate doctor, ii) best friend, or
iii) curious detective.

More information

The programme was full of information, exercises, tips and tricks. After the workshop it quickly became clear that many participants wished they had heard more about various topics. On negotiation skills there are of course many books available; consider “Women don’t ask” (<http://www.womendontask.com/>) or, in Dutch only, “Strategisch onderhandelen voor vrouwen” (<http://www.intouchwrm.nl/>). To learn more about relationships, go to the author of the material discussed in this workshop: <http://www.primeresource.com/>.

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GAIA & GAIA’s Ambassadors Network

GAIA is the Dutch network for female geoscientists. GAIA’s Ambassadors Network (GAN) is comprised of the directors of 10 organisations employing female geoscientists: KNMI, TNO, Deltares, Shell, VU, UU, TUDelft, Fugro, Grontmij, and RWS-Waterdienst. The objective of GAN is to improve the career development of women working in technical disciplines within these organisations. All GAN activities are organised by volunteers from GAIA: Ellen Brinksma, Fraukje Brouwer, Marjolijn Haasnoot, Edith Hafkenscheid, and Mirjam van Kan. For more information see: <http://www.vrouwen.net/gaia/> and <https://public.deltares.nl/display/GAIA/>.