

Chapter 2:

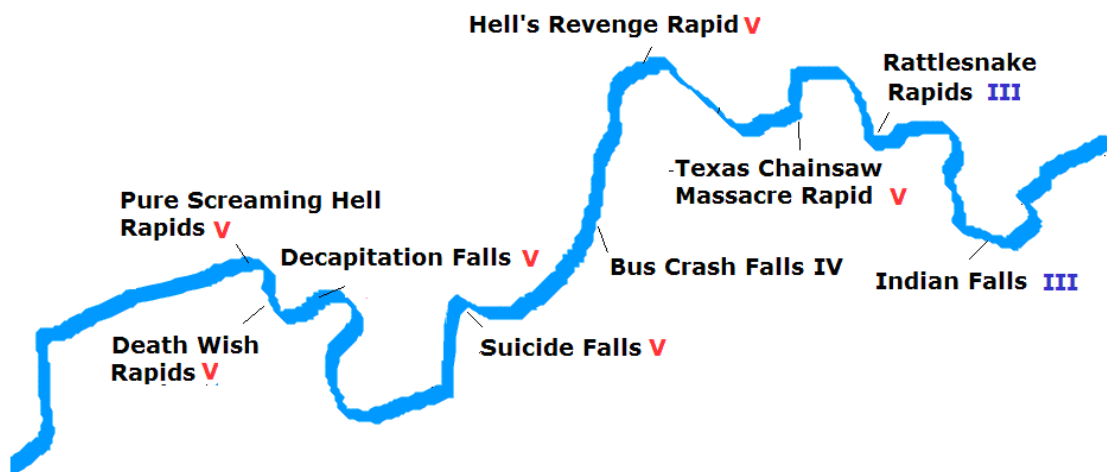
Three Strengths used by Great Negotiators

Power vs. Strength

Great negotiators enter the negotiating room with *strength* rather than with *power*. *Power* denotes an ability to control or manipulate. Power indicates a tendency to dominate the conversation, talk over the other party and interrupt at will. Great negotiators avoid power. Instead, they carry with them something much more effective. They carry strength.

In order to understand this strength, I wish to use the allegory of white water river rafting. The reason is very simple. Much of what I have ever learned about negotiating I learned while white water rafting.

Picture a ten mile stretch of river that winds through steep canyon walls. Along the river's path lie several water falls with names like Decapitation Falls, Suicide Falls and Bus Crash Falls. The names of the rapids aren't much better. In order to navigate the entire ten mile stretch, a person must also successfully negotiate several category III, IV and V rapids with names like Texas Chainsaw Massacre Rapid, Death Wish Rapids and Pure Screaming Hell Rapids.



Without seeing the river, can you image the force of the water as it surges through the canyon? There is not a man or woman alive or a group of men and women alive that could claim a superior *power* to the force of that water. It appears to have all the advantages and unless the river chooses to be merciful, men and women would not have a chance. Yet, time after time, people climb into rubber rafts and successfully negotiate both falls and rapids. They not only come out unscathed, they come out excited, wanting to run the river again!

If, in fact, the men and women's *power* pails in comparison to the rivers, what is it that they possess that gives them the advantage in the negotiations?

I believe it is found in one word. They possess *strength*. This strength is not primarily found in their forearms. If that were the case, we would once again be matching *power* against *power*. Instead, in this great negotiation setting found between two canyon walls and raging water, we find the *power* of the river matched against the *strength* of men and women. The river has the ultimate power to crush its victims. However, the men and women have the ultimate strength to overcome, negotiating every obstacle and to end the journey with a great smile on their faces.

Three Strengths used by Great White Water River Guides

1. *The strength found in beforehand preparation.* Guides know the river and what is around every bend. They know their equipment; how to read the water and recognize potential hazards. They know the weather and its affects on the river. Before ever stepping into the boat, they are prepared to keep the boat from flipping; prepared to surf holes in the river; and prepared to maneuver the craft around every obstacle.

2. *The strength found in their ability to leave room in negotiating every obstacle.*

3. *The strength found in their ability to continuously gather information.* They have mastered the art of listening to the river and are continuously looking for hidden objects found beneath the water.

In comparing the strengths used by White Water Guides to the strengths used by Great Negotiators one will find a strange similarity.

Three Strengths used by Great Negotiators

1. *The number one strength is found in the negotiator's beforehand preparation.*
2. *Secondly, great negotiators always leave room to negotiate.*
3. *Next, a great negotiator continuously gathers information. They have learned the art of asking open ended questions and the art of listening rather than speaking. They read the body language, spot hidden agendas and listen to what is and what is not being said. Great negotiators not only make assumptions but they test those assumptions.*



1. Great Negotiators have the Strength that comes from Preparation

In most areas of life, there is a direct correlation between being prepared and success. Notice that *being prepared* was also listed as one of the skills of a great negotiator. I believe that once this area is mastered, it not only becomes a skill, but becomes the number one strength of a negotiator.

Being underprepared

Years ago, I decided to chaperone several high school students on a two-day canoe trip down a stretch of river in the mountains of Western Colorado. We were going it alone without the use of any guides; plus, the stretch of river chosen was unfamiliar to any of us. Because of these factors, there was inherent danger and risk involved.

Logically, there was only one thing that could help me minimize the risk. I needed to prepare myself as best I could. I needed a map of the river. I needed to speak with others that did know that stretch of river. I needed to hear from them every aspect they knew about the river. I also needed to physically scout the river before ever launching a boat. If possible, I needed to look at the rapids and the other obstacles.

The trip did not go without some trauma. There was a four to five mile stretch of river that I was not able to view beforehand and the map I had secured did not show an old abandoned bridge that

spanned the water. Those that I had spoken with failed to mention the bridge either. The map did indicate that this stretch had several sharp bends but we had no idea about the speed of the water or any water hazards. The trip had been great until we reached that section of the river. Remember, this was the only section of the river that we were completely unprepared to negotiate.

We turned the second bend. The water began to move faster and we recognized the sound of rapids ahead. Our boats were picking up speed. We turned the third bend and there looming before us was the partial remains of the bridge. Caissons (huge boxes made of concrete and reinforced steel) that once supported the bridge's towers were now sitting undetected near the water's surface. Several of the bridge's columns were still in tact with two sitting directly in our path. All of our boats either hit a caisson or a column. One canoe overturned. Another was damaged. Because we were unprepared to negotiate this one obstacle, we lost food, two tents, all of our water, two oars and one boat.

I learned a valuable lesson that day. Being over prepared is always better than being underprepared.

You make the choice

Assume you have decided to go on a white water expedition. The river is notorious for danger and excitement. Two guides stand in front of you. Both look to be in excellent physical condition. You can pick either of the two as your guide. One has been on this stretch of the river several times. His knowledge seems unlimited. He handles the equipment with precision and he mentions that, according to his research, the weather is going to be perfect. The other guide has never been on this part of the river before. You hear him ask his counterpart if he should take some kind of map so he would know where the falls are located. When he picks up the oar it appears that he doesn't even know which end is to go into the water.

Do both men have the same strength? Which of the two guides would you want to help you negotiate the river? Most of us would conclude that the second would not be the man for the job - too big a risk considering the possibility for failure.

Learning a hard lesson

Years ago, I was called into my boss's office. He simply said, "We're flying you to California. There is a lease we need and we can't get the

guy to sign it. It's a drill site; don't come home without it!" Two days later, I was on a plane to California. I was completely unprepared for the negotiation. I hadn't done any research on the land, the location or the lessor. I hadn't even read the lease I was going to ask him to sign. Imagine my dilemma when I pulled up outside his home. The lawn was overgrown, the shutters were falling off the house and all the drapes were pulled shut. When the old man answered the door, I immediately realized he did not trust anyone from the outside world. The first words out of his mouth were, "I'll let you in but I'm not signing anything unless you read me every word and explain what it means!" Sitting in his dark living room, I could barely see. At one point I ran into a word on the lease form I was unfamiliar with. I not only did not know what the word meant, I wasn't sure how to pronounce it. It came out of my mouth wrong. He knew it and I knew it. When he asked me to explain the word, I tried will all of my powers to come up with something. To no avail, I had to admit that I didn't know what the word meant. He cited again, "I told you, I'm not signing anything unless you can read me every word and tell me what it means."

If you had been my boss observing this fiasco, what would your conclusion have been? I can still recall how I felt. My strength in successfully negotiating was gone. I had showed up unprepared. Because of that, I wasn't the man for the job – too big a risk considering the possibility for failure.

Most all of us have, at one time or another entered an arena where we were either underprepared or ill-equipped. What was the result?

How often have we left a conversation only to play back the dialogue in our mind? We think, "Why did I say that? Why didn't I say this instead?" or "Next time I should say this." The problem with such dialogue is that, in most cases, there will never be a next time. The damage has already been done.

Preparation influences success

Think of the obvious outcome to any NFL playoff game if one team decided not to prepare for the contest. Think of the obvious outcome to a college final if the student decided not to prepare for the test. To "be prepared" is the motto for every Boy Scout. Preparation is a part of all life. Preparing for a negotiation is no different. Some would say that *being prepared* is the number one element of strength and the number one key to its success.

Charles B. Craver, a man who has taught negotiating skills to over 85,000 attorneys, believes that the number one factor influencing the outcome of a negotiation is preparation. Through his observations, studies and research, he has concluded that "*thorough preparation*", first and foremost, enables a party to "completely understand what they have to negotiate."

Harvard Business School Professor Michael Watkins believes that great negotiators maneuver on just a handful of basic principles. In his book, *Breakthrough International Negotiations* he cites one of those principles: "Great negotiators organize to learn." He believes that success to any negotiation begins prior to any meeting. Great negotiators do their homework, *learning* about the issues, history, framework and the other parties involved.

Before any negotiation, one should gather as much crucial information as possible. This information should cover several items which might include any or all of the following:

1. Issues surrounding the negotiated item (reasons for and against)
2. Positive and negative outcomes resulting from the negotiated item
3. History surrounding the need for or desire for the negotiated item
4. The framework needed to implement the negotiated item
5. Knowledge about the other counterparts involved (their past, motives, thought processes, desires. etc.)

Scoring Carl and Bud

Remember the negotiating exercise with Carl and Bud. Assume that their initial meeting and conversation went something like this. Determine which of the two came to the negotiation prepared and which was underprepared.

As Carl drove up the road leading to Bud's Produce and Farm he failed to see any type of for sale sign showing that Bud was actually selling the farm. As he approached the farmhouse he noticed that it was in need of paint; that the barn was in need of repair and that the only truck near the house was an old 1975 Ford pickup.

Bud saw Carl's 2009 Dodge Ram pickup drive up the road. When Carl stepped out of the shiny vehicle, he noticed that Carl was nicely dressed, wearing a pressed shirt, a new pair of wrangler jeans and a pair of Tony Lama boots.

Carl: "So you're the fellow that's selling the tractor?"

Bud: "Yes. My name's Bud. I own the place."

Carl: "Glad to meet you. Just call me Carl."

Bud: "The tractor's over here. It's my pride and joy."

Carl examines the tractor

Bud: "So what do you think?"

Carl: "Yes. It's in pretty good condition."

Bud: "Well, that's kind of an understatement. You're not going to find a better used John Deere in this part of the country. It's in mint condition!"

Carl: "Well I have looked around. This is the fourth I've seen. I'd have to say this is also the best. But it's the newest and it's the highest priced."

Bud: "It's priced to sell."

Carl: "Well, I know you want \$98,000 but that's more than the Blue Book. They list this tractor at \$85,000. I would never pay more than the Blue Book. But more than that, every time I have bought something used, it's turned out to be a lemon – someone else's headache."

Bud: "Believe me. This has never been a headache. It's been the best tractor I've ever owned."

Carl: "So, why do you want to sell it? I did some research on the way out here. This farm has been in operation for years. Before my time! Didn't your dad or your granddad run the place?"

Bud: "Yes. Both of them. But like the ad says, I'm moving."

Carl: "Where you going?"

Bud: "Haven't decided yet."

Carl: "Have you already sold the farm? I didn't see any for sale signs coming up the lane."

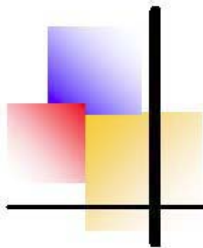
Bud: "Well, not exactly. My brother's taking over the place."

At this point in the negotiation, which of the two men came most prepared? Which appears to be underprepared?

From my vantage point, Carl gets the point on this one. He seems to have done his research. He checked the blue book, compared prices on all four tractors, gathered some information on Bud's farming operations, and is now wondering what's up with Bud? Why's he

moving? Where's he going? Why would he sell the tractor, it's the only thing of value he sees on the entire farm. At this point, the strength Carl is bringing to the negotiating table is greater than Bud's.

Score: Carl – 1, Bud – 0



2. Great Negotiators have the Strength that comes from always leaving enough room to Negotiate

Many years ago, I was white water rafting with several friends. We had three small rubber rafts. Each raft carried gear, clothes, food and four men. One evening, it had rained particularly hard all night long. The next morning, the river was running fast and high. We were going to enter the river at a bend a hundred feet upstream from a ridged boulder that stuck straight out of the water. Because of the force of the water, we knew it was going to be very difficult to push off and paddle hard enough to negotiate past the rock. To hit the rock head on would have been disastrous. The first group set out and paddled as hard as they could; however, the power of the river was too great.

I can still remember watching my friend sitting in the front part of that raft as the boat headed straight for the boulder. Crashing was inevitable and he knew it. Seconds before the raft buckled into the rock, he did a strange and idiotic thing. He jumped out of the boat and onto the boulder. He was now stranded in the middle of the river with no where to go and no boat to go on.

This story illustrates two important aspects of successful negotiations.

First, the rock's position was anchored. It was not going anywhere. The same is true in everyday negotiations. *The party which establishes its position first is more likely to have an outcome in their favor.* The first offer sets the expectations or conditions around the

negotiation and the other parties must adjust their position accordingly. Some have referred to this as "*conditioning*." The rock set the conditions for the entire negotiation.

For instance, assume you see a boat for sale. You think, "I'll bet that boat is worth \$8,000 but I think I can get it for \$6,000". You call the number listed on the for sale sign. The person who answers the phone immediately says, "I've had other offers of \$9,000, so unless you can do better, you're wasting your time!" The \$9,000 has immediately moved your expectation. You must move off your \$6,000 mark.

Once the \$9,000 figure was spoken it sent a message that the boat was worth \$9,000. That may be true and it may not be true but the message was still sent. Over the years, a lot of research has been done on this topic. For instance, assume you were asked this question: "Do you think the population of Argentina is more than 50 million or less than 50 million?" You might respond by saying, "I don't really know." Assume a second question is asked. "If you were to guess, what is the actual population of Argentina?" You still don't know but most people would say, "Probably, somewhere around 50 million." In other words, the first question anchored the 50 million in the minds of the people. It set the standard and the expectations.

David Starr, an instructor who has taught successful negotiation to over 20,000 individuals believes "Where you begin your negotiation will have a predictable effect on the other party's expectation throughout the negotiation."

Those who lack negotiating skills or who are intimidated by negotiating often ask the other party first, "What are you selling this for?" or "What are your terms?" or "What are you thinking." They do not realize the power of setting the conditions. Generally, the first person to anchor sets the conditions and the expectations for the rest of the negotiation.

I remember a business negotiation where the spokesman for our company began by stating his position on the issue being negotiated. I cringed inside. "What was he thinking?" I thought, "They will never go for that!" I could tell by the look on the other party's faces that they were thinking the same thing. His position was completely out-of-line. Later, I realized that my business associate was doing the same thing as the rock in the river. With his position seemingly anchored, the other party had to adjust their beginning position. My friend never believed his original offer was going to be accepted. That was beside the point. His tactic was to move the other party closer to our company's desired end from the very beginning. My colleague's

statement had set a high expectation which affected the entire outcome of the negotiation.

There is some danger in doing this. The rock anchored in the river with white water crashing all around it was a foreboding sight. Many might have taken one look and said, "Impossible!" The rock's position might have caused them to simply walk away. My colleague's beginning position could have insulted the other party, frightened them off or could have made them so angry that they simply got out of their chairs and walked away. I believe that caution should be used when beginning a negotiation in this manner. One should be realistic rather than ruthless.

Secondly, my friend who jumped out of the boat and onto the rock was not the only one who had acted foolishly that day. All of us had miscalculated the position of the rock and did not leave enough room to negotiate for our desired outcome. With the rock anchored, we needed to adjust our position which we failed to do!

This is also true in negotiations. Assume you want to buy a car, sell a horse or negotiate a contract. Where you put your boat in the water should leave enough room for you to get what you want. If we had begun our negotiations farther up stream, we would have done better in the outcome. In other words, begin your negotiation from a position that will leave more room to get the desired result. Dr. Chester L. Karrass, bestselling author of *The Negotiating Game* and *Give and Take*, puts it this way, "Leave room to bargain when you open talks and give in grudgingly as you move toward the agreement". Where you put your boat in the water will affect where you end up.

Think large – get large

Research tells us that if we think "small" we will get "small". If we think "large" we will almost always get "large". Those who aim higher will do better. According to David Starr, the largest experiment ever conducted on negotiations revealed that if a person is to get what they want, they should leave more room in the negotiation than they are comfortable with.

Assume a farmer is selling beans. The going rate is \$25 a bushel. The farmer might ask \$35 hoping to settle at \$30. Assume a purchaser is buying paper. The going rate is \$4.00 a ream. The purchaser could ask \$3.00 hoping to settle at \$3.50. Assume a leasing agent is buying leases in a \$200 per acre area, the agent could offer \$125 hoping to settle at \$150.

Leaving room to negotiate seems to be a foreign concept among many who live in the western world. Fear keeps us from asking too much or stating a position that is aiming too high. Yet, travel to any other part of the world and observe the bargaining in every other culture. The process is simple. The seller begins high. The buyer begins low. The party that aims the highest will, generally, get the most!

Scoring Carl and Bud

Remember the negotiating exercise with Carl and Bud. Assume that Bud was willing to sell the tractor for \$88,000 so he could pay off his gambling debt and Carl only had \$86,000 to spend. If their conversation continued with something like this, determine who anchored first. Determine who aimed the highest or who left the most room to negotiate. How would you score Carl and Bud?

Bud: "So, my tractor was the best of the four you've looked at, huh?"

Carl: "Yea, but it's the newest."

Bud: "Did the others have the *Deluxe Comfort Package*, auto quad transmission, the deluxe cab and *cold weather package*?"

Carl: "No. I can't say they did."

Bud: "Well, that's one reason why I've listed it at \$98. I don't know what the Blue Book says, but this tractor has it all!"

Carl: "It's still used."

Bud: "That doesn't change the price. How much do you have to offer?"

Carl: "Well, I was looking at a 2008 (in good condition). It was selling for \$75,000."

Bud: "Yea, but that tractor is older, has more miles and doesn't have any of the upgrades. How much for mine?"

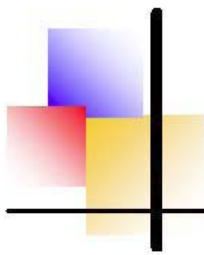
Carl: *hesitates, furls his eyebrows and ponders the question.* "Being used and all – given the Blue Book - I wouldn't pay more than \$83,000."

Bud: *flinches, jerks his head back.* "Wow. We're pretty far apart. There were two guys here last week - looking the place over. I have to say, they seemed pretty serious. Carl, I like you and I'd like to do business with you but \$83's not going to get that tractor sold."

From my vantage point, Bud gets the point on this one. He anchored first at \$98,000 and hasn't moved off that mark. He is willing to settle for \$88,000 and has left \$10,000 in negotiating room. Carl jumped in

with a bid of \$83,000 hoping that he could get the tractor for \$86,000. He only left \$3,000 in negotiating room.

Score: Carl – 1, Bud – 1



3. Great Negotiators have the Strength that comes from continuously gathering information

Continuously gathering information even after the negotiation has begun is particularly important to its outcome. This concept is true in all types of negotiations – personal, business or negotiating a river full of rapids.

Many years ago, several of my friends and I set out on a five day white water river trip down a beautiful but dangerous river in western Colorado and Eastern Utah. The spring rains that year had been unusually heavy. Coupled with the snow melt, the river was running very fast and high.

Because of difficulty in negotiating the rapids up stream, there was one fall down stream that gave us some concern. Its name was *Hell's Half Furry*. Rock slides on both sides of the river had narrowed the canyon wall just above the falls. A large boulder the size of a house sat at the base of the falls and, under normal circumstances, the only proper way to safely maneuver over the ten foot cascading water was to stay far right keeping your boat in a straight on position. To misjudge the water that day could have been disastrous.

Given the full-fury of the river, we felt our best choice was to pull ashore directly above the falls. A larger pontoon boat carrying eight to ten men had been following us and we wanted to see how they would approach the waterfall. Our boats were much smaller and given the danger, we needed to gather more information before our approach.

As we watched from the rocks overlooking the falls, we were amazed at how much water was flowing that day. *Hell's Half Fury* seemed to be *Hell's Whole fury*. As the larger pontoon approached the falls, we observed the craft angling slightly to the left. The approach looked dangerous and as the raft shot over the waterfall one of the worst possible scenarios began to happen.

Often an eddy is created at the base of a waterfall or when fast flowing water moves past an obstacle in the water. An eddy is a reverse in the current. Once over the falls, the river can actually push a boat back into the base of the waterfall. Trying to paddle free can often seem impossible. This is exactly what happened to the pontoon. As the boat hit the base of the falls, it began to turn sideways. The undercurrent of the river propelled the boat into the eddy and pushed the helpless men toward the falls. Their boat, in danger of flipping, began taking on water. We watched, helpless as the men struggled to free themselves from their position. Luckily, all of those men safely negotiated free from this near tragedy.

I often have thought that the luckiest of all were those of us who decided to pull ashore and gather vital life saving information prior to our attempt at negotiating Hells Half Fury. Given the fact that our boats were much smaller, if any of us had made our approach the same way as the larger craft, we would have capsized. We would have lost gear, a boat or worse.

Gathering Information

Information is critical. Some would even say that information is power. In our case, gathering information was perhaps life saving. Gathering information prior to a negotiation, being as prepared as one can be, is indeed a key element for success. However, as much information as can be gathered prior to entering a negotiating room, will never include all of the information one may need. Gathering information must also take place during the negotiation. At times, like in the previous story, one must simply pull ashore and observe. Gathering information will come in three main areas.

1. Reading Body Language

A study at UCLA concluded that nearly 93% of all effective communication is determined by nonverbal actions. Another study indicated that an event will impact observers in three ways. Seven percent of the impact will come from the words spoken. Thirty-eight percent of the impact will come from the voice quality and fifty-five percent of the impact will come from nonverbal communication.

Experts believe that nonverbal language sends out powerful messages and often communicates more than many of us would ever verbally speak. For this reason, a company will often send a team of three people into a negotiation. One of those is simply designated as the observer. Their task is to gather vital information through the body language of the other parties. They will be looking for language tone, gestures, the way a person is sitting, how fast they talk, facial expressions, body movement, posture and eye contact. Through the other party's nonverbal communication, the observer will attempt to evaluate their motivation, honesty or dishonesty, interest or disinterest, understanding or confusion of the other party.

Vanessa Glass, in her article, *How to Become a Great Negotiator* writes, "It is a lot easier to negotiate when you are aware of what the other person is saying. If you listen carefully, you can pick up a lot more from the tone of voice," or from "nonverbal actions. Certain things (sweating, fidgeting, shifty eyes, clenched jaw, etc.) can give away a person's nervousness or anger, and you can use that to your advantage."

Hints to understanding body language

- A. Looking away – this may indicate that the other party does not believe what is being said.

- B. Scratching an ear or head – this may indicate that the other party has lost interest in what is being said or that the other party is nervous about something.
- C. A sharply tilted head – this may indicate that the other party is bored with what is being said.
- D. A slight tilted head – this may indicate that the other party is indeed interested.
- E. Folded or closed arms – this may indicate that the other party has become defensive or closed off.
- F. A blank expression – this may indicate that the other party is no longer listening rather trying to form his or her response or it may indicate anger.
- G. A smile - this may indicate a friendly nature of the person.
- H. A continuous smile – this may indicate that the person is hiding something.
- I. Appropriate smiling – this may indicate that the person is truthful and engaged.
- J. A continuous giggle or laugh when things are said – this may indicate insecurity on the part of the other person.
- K. Poor eye contact – this may indicate that the person is hiding something or not being truthful.
- L. Good eye contact – this may indicate that the person is engaged in what is being said.
- M. Steady eye contact – this may indicate that the person does not trust what is being said.

2. Asking open-ended questions

Everyone has a story. When going into a negotiation, this one fact must not be lost. Think about it. Wasn't it your story that brought you to the negotiating table in the first place? The motor in your car froze and you needed a new car by next week. Your company wanted to drill an oil well in a competitive area and you needed leases in place that would give you the advantage. You have taxes due by the 15th and the only way to get enough money is to sell your antique walnut dresser. If your story brought you to the negotiating table, don't you suppose the other party also has a story that brought them to the same place? Finding out their story can be significant!

The problem is great negotiators don't reveal *their* story. Dr. Chester L. Karrass, an expert in the field, gives this advice "Shut up. Don't talk so much. Anything you say may be held against you."

I knew of an attorney that would tell every client, prior to their taking the stand, "Know this, every time you open your mouth, money will drop out!"

In other words, if you need a new washing machine by tomorrow, never walk into the appliance store and tell the salesperson, "Our washing machine just died! We need to buy today and I don't really care what it costs." Revealing your story will shift the advantage.

As true as that is, it is equally true that great negotiators have the ability to draw out the other party. One effective way to do this is by asking "open-ended questions" and then waiting for the answer.

A few years ago, my daughter and son-in-law asked me to look at a condo they were considering buying. We met the realtor at the property and she showed us around. Of course, according to the realtor there were no issues with the property. I asked her about a couple of potential problems I had spotted regarding water damage in the bathroom and outside the house. She dismissed my questions with a simple "That's not a problem!" answer.

While we were there, the owner came home with her young eight-year-old son. All of us stood in the living room finishing our conversation. I could tell that my daughter was very excited about buying the place. I still had some reservations and I did not think the realtor was being straight with us. Just as we were leaving, I asked the eight-year-old, "Hey, I noticed the faucet outside. What can you tell me about that faucet?"

He immediately began telling us about the issues they had had with water leaks outside the house and inside the house. "Sometimes, we can't get the water to shut off. It's flooded the bathroom a lot! It runs down the walls and you can't stop it," he said, "That's why we want to move."

The mother was trying to shut him up. The realtor got so angry she stomped out of the house. Needless to say, gathering that one piece of information through one simple question saved my daughter and son-in-law from making a terrible mistake.

Three rules when asking open-ended questions:

1. First, be patient while you wait for the answer. Often a person will ask a great question. While the other party is thinking of an appropriate answer, the silence becomes deafening. Fear opens the mouth of the party who asked the question and they begin filling in the blanks, attempting to lead the other party or prompt them in their answer. Learn to ask and then keep your mouth shut until there is an answer.
2. Secondly, open-ended questions will only be of value if the person asking the question is a *good listener*. One must be able to ask the question and then digest what is being said.
3. Third, questions should never be used to paint a person in a corner. Rather, their purpose is to allow the other party the freedom to talk about their opinions and/or beliefs. Appropriate questions are safe questions.

Who hasn't been with some salesperson that immediately began asking questions? I personally hate those times. I'm turned me off in a heart beat and want to walk away. The reason is simple. The salesperson is trying to qualify me or disqualify me. The questions don't feel safe. The questions are designed to put me at a disadvantage. They are simply and totally designed to get the sale.

On the other hand, when a person genuinely asks me questions about who I am or what I believe, my reaction and response is immediate. I am drawn in. I open up. I reveal my own story.

Twenty Great Open-ended questions

1. What brought you here?
2. Tell me, why is your company considering this?
3. What are you expecting to gain from this?
4. What are your demands or requirements?
5. If we do this deal, what are your needs?
6. If we do this deal, what would you like to see accomplished?
7. If we do this deal, what is the most important priority to you?
8. Have you done something like this in the past and if so, what was your motivating factor?
9. If you have done something like this in the past, what obstacles did you face?
10. Help me understand what you mean when you say _____.
11. I think I understand. Is there more to it than that?
12. What else is going on?
13. What other issues are important to you?
14. What's the most important aspect of this deal to you?
15. What does that mean?
16. I really want to understand better. Tell me more.
17. What is your timeline for getting this done?
18. What else should I know to take back to my company so we can get this deal done?
19. On a scale of 1-10, how big of an issue is the money aspect of this to you and why?
20. What else is involved that we should discuss?

Open-ended questions can shift the advantage

Several years ago, a colleague of mine had a job selling new and used heavy road equipment. For all practical purposes she knew nothing about the machinery or their use. One of her first clients was a man who had lived his whole life around such equipment. He lived and

breathed every aspect of what they could or couldn't do. Feeling completely inadequate to successfully negotiate any fair deal, she had to hide her inexperience and lack of knowledge from him for fear he would have taken advantage of her.

Quickly, she developed a plan and began asking him open-ended questions similar to the ones listed above.

- If you are interested in any of our equipment, what is the most important priority to you?
- When you have bought equipment like this before, what issues did you face?
- What else is involved that we should discuss?

He was a man that liked to talk, so, she quietly listened and he began to reveal *his* story.

Tires seemed to be his number one issue. It wasn't the price tag on the equipment or that some machines were used and others new. It was tires.

As he spoke, she learned more about tires than she ever dreamed. They are very expensive. He had had problems with inferior tires in the past and having a tire fail while on the job shuts everything down! Down time will cost a company thousands of dollars. Wages still must be paid. The project loses valuable time and for this man, "time was money and tires equated to time." With this knowledge, the advantage had changed. Her new goal was to simply satisfy his concern over tires!

3. Effective listening

A third way to continuously gather information is through effective listening. This tool is perhaps the most important technique of the three. Listening is one of the skills needed to be a great negotiator. Effective listening becomes so important that some believe a person should listen 80% of the time and only speak 20% of the time.

Failing to listen can cost you

A few years ago, I learned this important lesson while on a white water river trip with my wife, children and ageing parents. We had rented a large rubber raft and began a two-day white water river trip down a fairly calm section of the Colorado River. At the end of the first day, as we approached our camp site, it began to rain. The down pour lasted thirty minutes and then moved farther into the mountains. The clouds dissipated above us and the evening sky came into view. We sat around the campfire telling stories and commenting on that day's adventure. In the distance we could still hear the rumble of thunder but we paid no attention. Instead, we directed our full attention to one story after the other.

I suppose, if any of us had been a Native American Indian scout we would have heard what the world was telling us. But we failed to listen and that failure almost cost us our lives. We paid no attention to

the sounds in the distance and we paid little attention to what seemed like the faint sound of an 18-wheeler coming down a road. The problem was that an 18-wheeler had never been in this part of the country. The sound got stronger but we continued to talk. Finally, someone asked, "Is that an airplane?"

Before an answer could be offered, a wall of water six feet high came rushing down the ravine just feet from our campsite. The water looked like concrete. It was full of branches and trees and came with such force no object or person would have been safe in its path. If that wall of water had been six inches higher it would have flowed out of the ravine and carried my entire family into the river.

I learned a valuable lesson about listening that day. I should have listened to the thunder in the distance and digested what it meant. I should have listened to the faint rumble of what sounded like an 18-wheeler and then connected the dots. Listening can become tricky. Effective listening is intentional and takes practice.

You will never learn anything when your mouth is open

I remember Helen Ann, a fifteen year old junior high girl who had been abandoned by her mother and younger sister. Helen Ann had come home from school one day. The apartment she had been living in was bare. Everything and everyone was gone. The poor girl had no place to go so she called us and asked if she could live with us until things were sorted out.

One of the main things I remember about Helen Ann was her love of talking. She could carry on a two-person conversation with herself for hours. She never seemed to weary. At times it was exhausting for everyone but Helen Ann. One day at the dinner table, she looked at me and simply asked, "Why don't you ever talk." I didn't have the heart to tell her that is was because I couldn't get a word in edgewise. Instead I said, "Well, Helen Ann, I've never learned anything when my mouth was open."

A great negotiator understands the reality of that statement and a great negotiator understands the advantage that effective listening gives to a person.

Most people would agree that listening skills are a key to achieving great success in relationships and also in business ventures. As *listeners*, most people think they would rate in the "good" to "great" category. However, perception and reality sometimes are not the same and studies have found that most people do not have "good" to "great" listening skills. Most people are "poor" listeners at best,

possess few good listening qualities and spend most of their time wanting to talk about themselves.

During several conversations, I have asked the other party to repeat back to me what they thought they heard me say. In almost every case, the other party could not repeat back what I had said. They, like most, were not listening. Instead, they were, in their minds, talking over the conversation, mentally verbalizing what they intended to say.

During negotiations, good and patient listening skills can help solve many problems that might have otherwise appeared impossible to solve. The reason is simple - listening allows a person the ability to view the world through the eyes of the other party.

Vanessa Glass, in her article, *How to Become a Great Negotiator* believes in the value of great listening skills. She writes, "Try to see what the other person is seeing. If you can see the other person's perspective, you will have a better chance of negotiating the terms so that you are both satisfied."

Scoring Carl and Bud

Remember the negotiating exercise with Carl and Bud. Bud was asking \$98,000 for the tractor but was willing to sell if for \$88,000 so he could pay off the gambling debt. Carl started his bidding at \$83,000 knowing that he only had \$86,000 to spend. Assume that their conversation continued. Determine which of the two possessed better skills in reading body language, which asked better open-ended questions and which possess the better listening skills.

Bud: *flinches, jerks his head back.* "Wow. We're pretty far apart. There were two guys here last week - looking the place over. I have to say, they seemed pretty serious. Carl, I like you and I'd like to do business with you but \$83,000 is not going to get that tractor sold. Honestly, you're going to have to do better than that!"

Carl: *noticed Bud's flinching and thought,* "My \$83,000 won't cut it. I've got to do better than that but I only have \$3,000 more to negotiate." Carl asks, "What's the lowest you can go?"

Bud: *looks away as he ponders the question.* "I don't want to go below \$95,000."

Carl: *noticed Bud had lost eye contact when he said \$95,000. He didn't believe Bud was telling him the whole truth.* "\$95, huh. If that's the lowest, I still have the 2008 as an option. I may just end up with that."

Bud: "I thought you hated buying used? It seems like that is a huge issue for you so why buy the 2008 over the 2009?"

Carl: "Well, money is an issue."

Bud: "On a scale of 1-10, what does that look like to you?"

Carl: *As Bud asked the question, Carl broke eye contact which did not go unnoticed by Bud.* "Well, I don't want to pay for something used and bring home a lemon. I want to get the most bang out of my buck."

Bud: *thinking there was more to what Carl was saying.* "That makes sense. Is there more to it than that?"

Carl: "Well, I have to get my corn planted."

Bud: "What's your timeline for getting that done?"

Carl: "Within the next week. If we can't agree on a price for your tractor, I'm going to have to settle for one of the older ones."

Bud: "Look, I know if we make a deal you'll love this John Deere. It's the best in the county. What's the most you're willing to pay?"

Carl: *ponders the question and lowers his head. He then looks straight into Bud's eyes.* "The most I can pay is \$86,000."

Bud: "We're still \$9,000 apart. Will you split the difference?"

Carl: "I can't do that. Tell you what. I've got \$46,000 cash in my pocket. Let me try out the tractor for the next week and the \$46,000 is yours today. If the tractor doesn't give me any problems, I'll give you another \$40,000 by the end of the week. And I'll sign a promissory note for another \$2,500 to be paid in cash in ten days."

Bud: "That's not a bad deal but I can't wait a week. If I sell the tractor today, I need the money today. I'd really like to make a deal with you but you're going to have to help me out too."

Carl: "Okay. Let me call my bank and see if they will advance me the \$42,500 and I'll pay them back in ten days. I think we can use the John Deere as collateral."

From my vantage point, both Carl and Bud were able to discern and read body language equally. However, Bud gets the point on this one because he clearly asked the best open-ended questions and was able to discern Carl's immediate need for a tractor. Overall, Bud wanted \$98,000 and settled for \$88,500. He was able to pay off the gambling debt and walk away with \$500. Carl originally offered \$83,000 but ended up paying \$2,500 over what he wanted to pay.

Score: Carl – 2, Bud – 1