



Meeting Report: Negotiation Skills for Women in Science
January 31 – February 1, 2005

Women don't ask. That's the title of a recent book on negotiation and the gender divide (Babcock and Laschever, 2003), as well as the theme of a recent workshop sponsored by the Earth Institute ADVANCE Program at Columbia University. Funded by the National Science Foundation, the ADVANCE Program seeks to transform the way in which women scientists and engineers are recruited, retained, and promoted in academic institutions. By focusing on the institution rather than individual, ADVANCE works to identify systemic barriers that inhibit the advancement of women. A critical objective of the ADVANCE Program at the Earth Institute is to provide women with the tools they need to overcome institutional barriers. An ability to negotiate is just one of these tools, but it can have a profound impact on a woman's career trajectory. Salary differences between men and women persist, in part, because women simply don't negotiate.

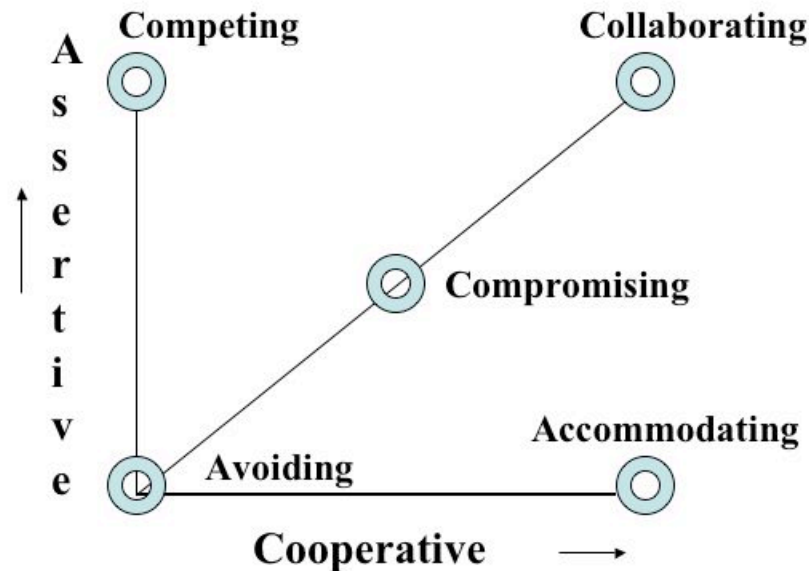
Women Don't Ask explains the motivation for the workshop. Economist Linda Babcock performed a comprehensive study of the starting salaries of students graduating from Carnegie Mellon University with master's degrees (2003). She found that students who had negotiated (most of them men) were able to increase their starting salaries by an average of 7.4% or \$4,053 - almost the exact difference she found between men's and women's average starting pay. Through a series of similar experiments, Babcock found that in general, women tend to be less likely to initiate negotiations, more apprehensive about negotiating, and more pessimistic about their own worth.

In an effort to counteract the manifestation of these trends at Columbia, the Earth Institute ADVANCE Program invited negotiation experts Barbara Butterfield and Jane Tucker to lead a workshop for women scientists and engineers. Butterfield, formerly the Chief Human Resources Officer for the University of Michigan, and Tucker, an instructor on negotiations at Duke's School of Business, addressed such challenges as negotiating salaries and start-up packages, securing access to research resources, and managing anxiety in stressful conversations. The speakers recommended four basic strategies for effective negotiation: 1) identify your own negotiating style, 2) secure supporting and relevant data, 3) identify a "best alternative to a negotiated agreement" (BATNA) beforehand, and 4) recognize positive and negative tactics.

Using the Thomas-Kilmann instrument for conflict resolution¹, Butterfield and Tucker identified four different negotiating styles: *Power*, *Compromising*, *Accommodating*, and *Avoiding*.

¹ Developed by organizational behavior experts Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann, this survey is often used by HR and organizational development professionals to identify opportunities for constructive outcomes in conflict situations.

Thomas Kilmann Conflict-Handling Modes



While most people have a predisposition for a particular style, all of the styles have advantages and disadvantages. A *Power* approach seeks the optimum outcome, but it can be used in either a competing or collaborating manner. *Compromising* seeks a sub-optimal agreement through concessions, yet it can bring about mutually beneficial outcomes. *Accommodating* implies suppression of interests, and in most professional situations, it results in a sub-optimal outcome. *Avoiding* is a refusal to confront by disavowing the conflict. This strategy that can useful for trivial issues, but it often exacerbates significant conflicts of interest. The Thomas-Kilmann model is most effective when it is used to identify behavioral patterns and tendencies that can be consciously mitigated in conflict situations.

The second strategy for effective negotiation is to provide supporting and relevant data for your case. In the ADVANCE workshop, Butterfield and Tucker emphasized the importance of being the first to define the parameters in a salary discussion by providing a salary range or a “zone of possible agreement” (ZOPA). Thw range should be based on what is typical for the field or the institution. Sometimes data can be collected through published reports, but in most cases, the best data comes from personal conversations with colleagues and advisors.

Before entering any negotiation, Butterfield and Tucker recommend that the negotiator identify a “best alternative to the negotiated agreement” (BATNA). The phrase was originally coined by Roger Fisher and William Ury in *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Without Giving In* (1981). A BATNA is a point of relativity or a starting point. Essentially, it is the result you would reach without negotiating at all. While you

might not want to disclose your BATNA, it can be a source of power for you in the negotiation.

Power struggles are a natural part of any negotiation, but it is important to understand how power is projected. In attempts to gain power, negotiating agents use both positive and negative tactics. Positive tactics include collecting data, putting the request in writing, projecting confidence through your physical posture, reframing the issue, and utilizing the power of silence (Stark and Flaherty, 2002). Negative tactics include building negative coalitions, pursuing the optimum outcome at all costs (“my way or the highway”), and using emotionally-charged arguments. Barbara Butterfield made a point of particularly cautioning against negative coalitions. While there is a fine line between a “stirring the pot” and being an agent for change, building a negative coalition is a high-risk tactic because it discourages productive collaboration, innovation, and creativity.

For women in academia, negotiation is a necessity, not a choice. By using proven tactics such as those outlined above, women will not only be more assertive, but they will also progress faster through the tenured ranks. As women scientists and engineers become more experienced in projecting their own value, the persistent disparities between men and women in these professions will decline. The final message Barbara Butterfield and Jane Tucker offered at the ADVANCE workshop is powerful one: negotiation, while inherently confrontational, ultimately benefits everyone.

- Jennifer Laird, ADVANCE Program Coordinator

References

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