

Negotiating Within Your Club Yields Best Results

Second in a Series

One of the tools to keeping Ruritan clubs harmonious can be the art of negotiating. Although “negotiation” may be a rather intimidating word for some people, it may help to know that this is a skill which you have already used to some degree, and probably many more times than you realize. How many times have you been in one or more of the following situations? You need to ask your boss for a salary increase; you want to convince a son or daughter to complete a chore they may not wish to do; or you are representing your company in sensitive talks concerning a strategic alliance with another firm.

Typically, negotiation takes place informally: on the telephone, at a quickly called meeting, or during an impromptu conversation with someone you meet in town. Sometimes negotiation can take place abruptly, when you are least prepared, and be concluded in a matter of seconds. Regardless of the form negotiation takes, it is very important to have a well-developed set of negotiation skills in order to operate successfully in your club. Even if you feel you already have a talent for negotiating, there are always ways to develop and continuously improve your negotiation skills.

To develop these skills and use them effectively, you must know:

- What negotiation means and the various forms it can take,
- That negotiating, in the fullest sense, means forging long-term relationships,
- The role that the individual personalities play in negotiating and
- That you must take a variety of approaches to negotiation, since no single set of principles will suffice in all circumstances.

Most people, when they think of negotiation, have in mind those rare occasions when people sit at a table and hold intense discussions in some formal way. Most negotiations you will participate in will involve day-to-day operations within your club and will focus more on building long-term relationships than on making a deal.

The best way to approach negotiation is to be wisely cooperative. That is, look for areas of agreement that can benefit both sides. Of course, it is important to protect your own interests in such a way that you feel satisfied with the outcome of the

negotiation. Good negotiators are the people who understand how to build key relationships, how to identify what people need, how to give them what they need and how to get what they want in return, all in a way that seems effortless.

If you are a club officer it is especially important that you try to refrain from viewing negotiation as a competitive endeavor in which someone has to emerge as the “winner” and someone else the “loser.” Indeed, negotiation is best viewed as a stepping stone to forming relationships that have long-term consequences for your club and your community. In this sense, negotiation never really ends. One piece of negotiation is often the beginning of the next phase of negotiation.

Broadly speaking, there are two personality types among leaders, and the characteristics of these types can affect the way they negotiate. Autocratic leaders typically hold the view that they are going to get what they want when they interact with subordinates, because their inherent authority precludes the need to negotiate. These leaders do not realize that, in the process of handing out orders, they are engaged in a kind of one-sided negotiation that can antagonize

others, with the result that the tasks they wish to see completed may be carried out improperly or not at all.

The second personality type is the accommodating leader. These folks are more concerned with what others want than with their own needs. In order to avoid conflict, they do not negotiate at all and often end up overriding their own interests. Since negotiation often implies conflict (something these types of leaders avoid at all costs), it is critical for them to take responsibility for forcing a certain amount of compromise. If, after becoming aware of your personal strengths and weaknesses as a leader, you find that you do not feel comfortable negotiating in certain circumstances, it is probably best for you to have someone else negotiate on your behalf.

The good news is that like anything else, negotiation gets easier as you do it. With practice, you will develop your own personal style and become comfortable with your own limits. As in so many other things in life, experience is the best teacher when it comes to effective negotiations.

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