

## **What Is Perceived and How May It Affect How I Negotiate?**

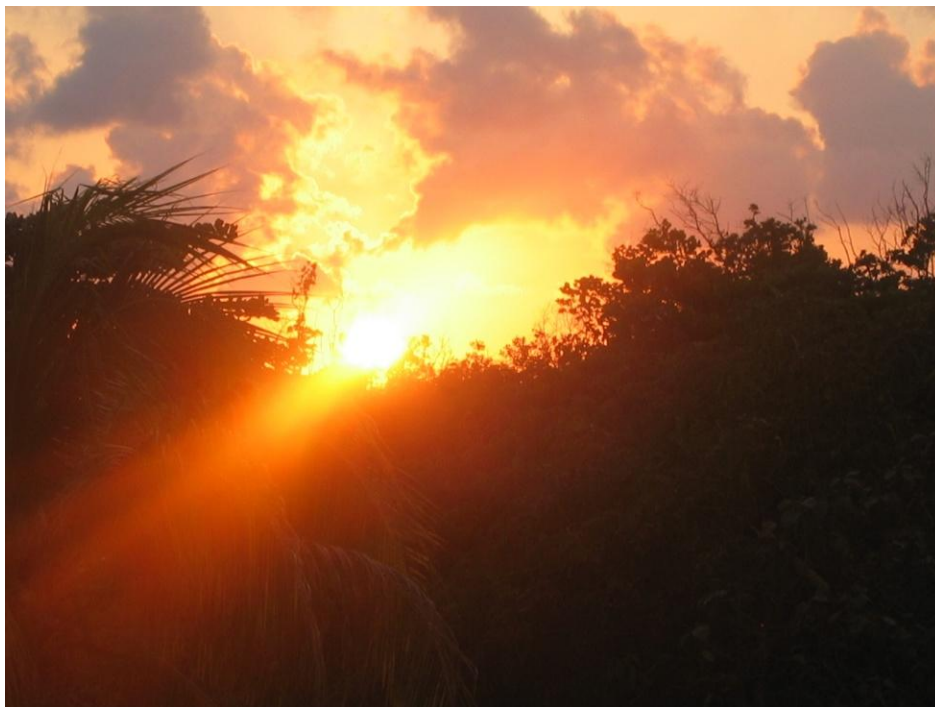
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### Shadows:

A beautiful warm sunny day in Tulum Mexico and a sense of adventure had me wanting a journey. I spoke to some travellers experienced in this area and a local guide that opened our journey to Mayan temples hidden in the forests and in the mangroves. "Is it safe to travel alone in this part of Mexico by car?" I inquired. The answers may be stated as "yes, as long as you stay off the smaller highways and roads after dark." And "If the police signal you to stop, unless you know you have done something very wrong, don't stop." "Be Careful."

So I rented a car and explored parts of the Yucatan away from the tourists. Punta Allen was recommended to me by a local as a beautiful untouched tiny fishing village an hour's drive on a muddy road down a peninsula just outside the Biosphere. One evening as the dawn set I drove down that tiny road. At places, you could see the Caribbean on your left and the inland waters on the right. Most of the time, as I drove slowly down that road all I could see was trees surrounding the road and allowing no view beyond the sides of the road.



As the darkness was almost complete, a pickup truck with 8 men in the back carrying machine guns slowly passed by. Entering the tiny fishing village, it soon became apparent the only people outside of the locked gates and derelict buildings were those men in the truck and others drinking outside a closed cafe on the beach. My intuition said; "better create some space between me and all this, this is not feeling right." With others and in daylight this tiny place would have been more welcoming.

Driving in total darkness now, I headed back up the narrow muddy road. Ten minutes in, a vehicle came from behind. As I edged over to let them pass, I could not see faces but I could see there were four adults. After they passed, their vehicle stopped. I stopped about ten metres behind. All I could see in my headlights were the backs of the four and the bottoms of the trees hugging the sides of the narrow dirt road. I locked my doors. I waited. And waited. After ten minutes, I knew there was no reason to back up and no place to go sideways. I gradually moved to the left to indicate I wished to pass. Their vehicle moved to further block my way. So I stopped, still 5 metres behind. Waited and waited to see what might happen next. My mind/ fears went to “stay off the smaller highways and roads after dark.” What are my options and strategies? What is negotiable from this place?

A full twenty minutes after the dark vehicle stopped in front, it slowly moved forward. I slowly followed. And then the reason for all this was revealed in my dim headlights on that narrow muddy road; late at night crabs cross the road moving from one large body of water to another. The dark vehicle that acted so strangely (and ominously) was protecting those crabs. No bandits here; more like environmentalists! And for the next ninety minutes, I too slowed/ stopped every time I could see crabs on the road in their migration.

### Perceptions:

This experience a few months ago reminded me that what we see, what we believe, what we know ...is only our interpretation given our experiences, information, senses and judgements. What we project as real may not be real at all. Through my work with the Global Negotiation Insight Institute, I have learned that curiosity, being open to all our wisdom, embracing diversity of opinion and allowing space for those that come from a different place is a powerful way of allowing agreements to be built that may never have otherwise. My lack of information and increasing concern for my safety could have led me to very different actions and outcomes.

What perceptions get in the way of allowing agreements to be built by you that may never have otherwise? What assumptions are you making about the other? When do you wish you would have known more, acted differently, invested in a negotiation with different people....? How might you further develop your awareness of your own barriers? Where are the crab crossings in your life?

### Where May This Take Me?

With Erica Fox’s “Beyond Yes: Negotiation Mastery From The Inside Out” method, I can check what is going on for me, what are my values, what are my interests and how may I communicate and listen from there. From there, I can then mine for underlying interest of the other, develop my BATNA and WATNA and come from a place of clarity and respect for the other and myself.

My best alternative to a negotiated agreement and my worst alternative when clearly developed and established in advance of the negotiation allow me to be clear on my boundaries; where I will play and where I will not.

A key lesson in negotiations that North Americans have often failed to appreciate (at our own risk in international negotiations or those here with persons from other cultures); you must go slow before you can go fast.

## Checking, Creating and Ensuring

To develop and succeed in agreement building that serves you and your organization in the best way, don't be a lazy negotiator! Take the time to develop and reach agreement on your negotiation process, values, desired outcomes, limits and alternatives. As in dispute resolution and in the mediation process, invest the majority of your time designing the alliance, the resources/ authorities do we need, the rules of engagement, how we get this done to benefit us both, what is the time line and what are we accountable for? In most negotiations, the time spent actually negotiating terms should be less than a third.

Some will say; "that's a big time waster" or "my deal isn't that complex". What I know is without an agreement as to how we negotiate and shared expectations for time, costs, values and outcomes; many deals die or never reach their potential. My experience in our industry is that sending a positional one dimensional email and expecting a positive and timely response are most often mutually exclusive. Even on the small deals, try establishing the framework and who we will be in this negotiation first. You will be rewarded with a little new territory and some very effective outcomes. If the other party has no interest in this approach, take that as a signal that they may be old school, hardnosed, this is not a priority for them or even they are afraid of you. With that awareness, you may adjust how you negotiate with them and even whether you do negotiate with them. The relationships you build and the time you save in the long run will be significant.

Negotiating is an important part of every day in every part of our lives. Growing your awareness, preparing better, checking perceptions, allowing differences and developing stronger business relationships are some of the reasons I invite you to try new things and find what serves you best. What serves you best will be to develop a wide range of negotiating skills and an awareness of when to employ them. And that journey is far more fun and interesting than sending a one dimensional note looking to make the same deal you have made for years. Times are far more demanding; our stakeholders are far more demanding as well.

Negotiation mastery is not about hard-line positions or even winning specific deals. Negotiation mastery is about presence, connection and mutual exploration to create meaningful, sustainable and significant success together. Such outcomes are those that may never have been believed possible before the negotiation commenced.

PS: The crabs all got to the other side without any robberies involved. Life isn't always like that but checking perceptions, being mindful and creating pre-negotiating agreements are ways to get you to the warmer water.