

## VIVIDNESS: TIP 52

An article in the March 2016 “Negotiation Briefings” (Negotiation Briefings, Vol. 19 Number 3, March 2016, Program on Negotiation Harvard Law School) cites work by Professor Max H. Bazerman discussing the use and bias of vivid data in negotiations (“The Power of Vivid Data”, June 28, 2010, Business Negotiations Daily, Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School, as adapted from the article: “What’s really Relevant? The Role of Vivid Data in Negotiations” by Max H. Bazerman, Harvard Business School). The authors describe the vividness bias as an individual’s tendency to overweight vivid or prestigious data and give less weight to less apparent or less appealing issues that will impact their outcomes. The authors cite, as a reverse example, a case where someone may accept a deal that focused more on the less flashy relational, living and family issues rather than a deal solely focused on more vivid flashy big money. In that example, the party differentiated between issues and realized the less flashy issues were of more import. However, often the parties may be so caught up in the vivid data that they do not give adequate consideration of less flashy but perhaps more salient issues.

Bazerman found that vividness bias is ingrained in an individual’s status identity. The research supports that vivid data in a negotiation environment, whether it relates to the use of descriptive language, visual presentations or is more focused on self-interest issues such as relevancy or status will have a more profound impact on negotiators or decision makers. This can impact the parties making an offer as well as those considering it.

A party making an offer may focus on the vivid and exciting elements conveyed as opposed to other less flashy issues that actually may do more to meet the interests and needs of their counterpart. Yes the vivid information needs to be conveyed, but not to the exclusion of additional salient elements that may do more to bring resolution. That is why all the more reason parties should not skip the information gathering stage in their headlong rush to bargain. Know what you and your counterpart value most. Frame those issues with positive highlights.

The authors offer the following three guidelines:

- 1) Decide what you value up front. What are your long and short term goals? What resources are available to meet them and how can they be brought to bear on the outcome? Do you know the interests and needs of your counterpart? What does she value? How will you frame your positions to meet these needs, to address what she values?
- 2) Choose the right comparison group: Don’t make an unrealistic social comparison. Look for standards that reflect your situation and are relevant to the subject matter. The authors point out that Harvard Kennedy School professor Iris Bohnet finds that negotiators may measure themselves against those who have what the negotiator desires as opposed to how they are actually situated.
- 3) Make Vivid Claims Cautiously: When ethically permissible point out other relevant positive attributes that may benefit them. Use language, visuals and other vivid tools to convey your message.

Vividness is a tool that can help you communicate effectively. Look for opportunity to use it, but not to the detriment of the totality of your position. By understanding the interests and needs of your counterpart and yourself, you can highlight the terms that can create value and best meet those and your needs and screen incoming offers for vividness so you are not unduly influenced.