

## NEGOTIATION AND GENDER:

### REFLECTIONS FOR THE XXI CENTURY

BY ELAYNE WHYTE GOMEZ

Negotiation is as inherent to human progress as is science. The more sophisticated and complex social interaction becomes, the more preeminence negotiation takes. In today's world, as societies become more diverse, negotiated solutions should guarantee inclusive bargaining processes that reflect all segments and groups of society, encompassing gender and culture perspectives.

Systemic thinking and action are of pivotal importance in the XXI century, in order to address all dimensions of highly complex and inter-sectoral problems. From my own experience in negotiating and in leading multilateral negotiations in the traditionally male-dominated field of disarmament, women's participation greatly contributes to making negotiations more systemic and holistic. For example, when addressing the problem of nuclear non proliferation and disarmament, a traditional orthodox state-centered approach of security can be challenged by the scientific evidence of the human and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons, which actually have disproportionate effects on indigenous peoples, women and girls and thus generate a more XXI century type of response.

Seeking comprehensive and effective approaches to negotiations in all fields, be them personal, commercial or intergovernmental, does require to promote a qualitative intervention to gain awareness of and to neutralize

Commonly held gender expectations place male negotiators in more competitive, zero-sum, adversarial and self-gain situations and bargaining styles whereas women are expected to behave less competitively, more cooperatively/empathic in problem solving kind of approaches and in negotiating for others or the community. But the truth is, despite the existence of patterns of behavior stemming from deep socially engrained gender roles, it is also true that women actually tend to be more able to adjust their bargaining styles. It is also true that both men and women are able to play different roles and bargaining styles according to the phase, kind and specifics of each negotiation process, especially when submitted to training.

My own experience suggests that there might be a little bit more inclination by women leaders to introducing methodological innovations, which does render results in many negotiations. Other factors such as formal education, training and experience play a pivotal role to diminish the presence of gender-based communication differences, speech patterns, negotiation styles and perceptions of performance.

When negotiating or leading negotiations it is fundamental to be aware of gender and cultural traits and work with them as elements of success rather than as hindering factors. Most successful negotiations benefit from diversity, a constructive combination of characteristics, styles and approaches that bring on board the traditionally perceived gender differences, in a transformative and productive manner.

#### Negotiation tips:

- ◆ When possible, use the negotiation counterpart's first name.
- ◆ In the preparation phase, seek for resources of humor or positive references from the counterpart's culture to have at hand to better navigate tense moments.
- ◆ In the preparation phase, take stock of your own negotiation experience and characteristics. Be aware of your gender and inherent social expectations. Ask yourself how you feel about them. Build your own negotiation persona and bring the best of you @the table.



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