

THE MUSIC, ART AND SCIENCE OF NEGOTIATION

By Karen S. Walch, Ph.D.



As a Thunderbird faculty member, I have had the opportunity to work with alumni and executives from all over the globe representing a wide range of industries. On occasion, I would like to highlight here some of the diverse and interesting insights from negotiators who visit the World Café. Today's feature is **Kevin D. Asbjörnson**, who is a 1985 Thunderbird graduate. He and I share several common ideas about the art form of negotiation. Since social and emotional resonance is critical in any negotiation, Kevin's metaphor and analysis about musical resonance and alignment of tone provide a concise understanding about the art of awareness and artful negotiation competencies. Kevin and I agree that the science of strategic planning and good communication skills are only part of the foundation for successful negotiations. Kevin is founder and principal performing artist of Inspire! Imagine! Innovate! and is recognized in the 2009 Marquis Who's Who in the World of Global Citizens for his creativity with the integration of music, performing arts-based learning and 21st century Leadership. Enjoy his story below, and we look forward to your comments.

By Kevin D. Asbjörnson, MIM

I am often reminded as an international recording and performing artist, working with management and leadership audiences around the world, that my audience hears my "tune" as a contemporary pianist and performing artist, also but hears my "tone." If my tune and tone are out of alignment with each other, it impairs my ability to connect with and engage my audience.

My instrument and voice as a professional musician is the acoustic grand piano. There are two adjustments to an acoustic grand piano that require constant attention: tuning and toning.

Tuning the voice of an acoustic grand piano is the process of ensuring that the pitch of each key on the piano creates the intended sound of a musical note, such as A, B flat or C sharp. Tuning the voice of an effective leader or negotiator is the process of developing and maintaining the five keys or components of emotional intelligence which are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation and empathy and relationship management.

Toning the voice of an acoustic grand piano is the process of adjusting, through softening or hardening, the striking action of the hammers against the strings in order to fully utilize the dynamic range of the entire piano keyboard. Toning the voice of an effective leader or negotiator is developing the ability to recognize the personal and cultural differences among people, and recalibrating our tune or voice as a leader or negotiator, to effectively create a meaningful connection with each distinct person or audience.

When our tune and tone are out of alignment with each other as a performing artist, a leader or negotiator, it impacts our ability to connect effectively with and engage our audience.

The tune in negotiation is what we decide to employ as our tactics; however, the more important tone in negotiation is our strategy regarding how we employ our tactics. If our tune and tone of negotiation are out of alignment with each other, we can inadvertently send mixed messages, misread others or miss subtleties in the tone of voice or body language of the person we are engaging in negotiation.

The international language of effective negotiation is comparable to the international language of musicianship: emotion. Emotion is inherent in all negotiations and provides us an opportunity to really connect with those with whom we are negotiating, if we take the time to learn and practice "emotionally intelligent" negotiation.

On a global scale, "emotionally intelligent" negotiation includes awareness and orientation towards cultural competence and the ability to demonstrate and model empathy — the foundation of emotional intelligence. No two audiences of mine as a professional performing artist are ever the same, and I must make interpersonal adjustments and recalibrate my artistic orientation with each audience, in order to effectively connect with the nuances of each audience.

The same is true with effective negotiation. Through experience, we learn the difference between “hearing with filters” or “listening with intention” with our party in negotiation. It is as if we approach each audience or negotiation with a “beginner’s mind,” curious to explore and learn about the person(s) in order to create a more meaningful connection.

This requires practice and the lack of practice is not an option, especially in my profession as a performing artist. If I do not practice as a composer and contemporary pianist, I am aware of it, the engineers in the recording studio know it and eventually my audience will know it.

I am continually surprised to learn upon asking my international clients how they practice the art and science of negotiation, how little importance they give to practice. My response to my international clients is that international negotiation without practice is like an international performing artist without rehearsal; we both lose our audience.

When we lose our audience, we marginalize the negotiation and we marginalize the performance. Every audience of negotiation and performing art has a particular orientation, and as the negotiator or performing artist, we are responsible for observing, identifying and tending to the intersection point of the two or more orientations.

Negotiation is indeed a performing art and requires the acumen and competencies of inspiration, imagination and innovation.

Here are several questions to ask yourself in review of your last negotiation or in anticipation of your next negotiation:

- How do you inspire and emotionally connect with the person with whom you are negotiating?
- How do you evoke the imagination of the person with whom you are negotiating?
- Is your negotiation strategy resulting in real innovation for all parties involved or are you getting stuck in the tactics of your negotiation?