

Emotions-at-the-Bargaining-Table--The-Core-Concerns-Approach...

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SPEAKERS

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Chris Casillas 00:09

To say that sometimes things get hot at the bargaining table is probably an understatement. Many, if not all of you have experienced moments during bargaining when emotions rise to pretty high levels, if not boil over sometimes. To some extent, the expression of emotions during bargaining is natural, healthy, and important. After all, we're all human and often confront topics in collective bargaining that are deeply meaningful to the parties and naturally carry with them high levels of emotions. But if our emotions run too high for too long, it can really serve as an impediment to making progress and bargaining as our ability to think more rationally and clearly becomes impaired. While the emotional state of things seems to suck up all the oxygen in the room. When these moments hit, our natural responses tend to go in one of three directions, we might seek to confront the emotion head on, we may ignore the emotion altogether, or we may seek to minimize its significance. While any of these three approaches can work, at least temporarily, they each carry with them significant risk and oftentimes may not be the best approach. In this episode of the PERColator, please join Matt, Emily and Chris as we explore a new possible pathway for confronting intense emotions during bargaining, referred to as the core concerns approach, the approach, first coined by the authors of the book *Beyond Reason, Using Emotions as you Negotiate*, written by Roger Fisher and Daniel Shapiro, urges negotiators to focus their attention on a set of core relational concerns experienced by your negotiation partner, rather than utilizing some of the more conventional approaches just listed. Please join us as we describe and discuss these core relational concerns. And you might be able to use this technique in your next negotiation.



Chris Casillas 02:13

Hello, and welcome to our next episode of the PERColator podcast. I am Chris Casillas, with the Washington State Public Employment Relations Commission and again, joined by my wonderful colleagues, Emily Martin and Matt career Emily, how you doing today?

E

Emily Martin 02:27

I'm doing great, Chris, how are you?

C

Chris Casillas 02:29

I'm awesome. Thanks for asking, Matt, how you doing?

M

Matt Greer 02:33

I'm doing great as well. Good to be here.

C

Chris Casillas 02:35

Good. Good to connect with you both, again, as we tackle today's episode, which we're gonna focus on emotions at the bargaining table. And a while back, we did lunchtime zoom, where we talked about the core concerns approach, which is a book from Roger Fisher and Daniel Shapiro, or concept, I should say, from Fisher and Shapiro, out of their book, *Beyond Reason, Using Emotions as You Negotiate*. And both are familiar names in the conflict resolution space, having been connected to the Harvard Negotiation project or program on negotiation, as it's now called. And they published this book about 15, 17 years ago, where they talked about this kind of different approach for thinking about how we confront emotions at the bargaining table. And as we all know, you know, having been in many negotiations in our careers, you know, things can get pretty hot at the bargaining table sometimes. It's probably an understatement for some of you in certain cases, but we know that bargaining can invoke some really intense emotional states, on both sides of the table, and in many cases, understandably, so. And when we think about that, and how that might impact our process. We know kind of both just from our own experiences, but also from research, that if we get too overwhelmed by our emotional state, you know, it's hard to think really creatively or think really critically, because we're so engaged in in that in that moment. And maybe we're really angry or really upset or really sad or frustrated, or whatever emotional state we're experiencing, it becomes harder to think about, you know, how to how to maybe redesign a particular proposal or come up with a new concept that we can help the parties move forward in reaching the resolution. And so to kind of think about how we might kind of bring us back down so that we can get in that more problem solving state of mind. We have to think about how we're going to confront those emotional situations and I think kind of traditionally, or naturally, there's maybe a few things that we kind of default to. So for example, we might just try and ignore the emotion that's, that's happening, if somebody's being really angry, maybe we just kind of deflect that and try and move on to another topic, or we might confront the emotion directly, and just kind of take it head on. And, and, and deal with it that way. Or, or we might kind of seek to minimize the emotional reaction that somebody's having, and maybe acknowledge that it's there. But, you know, say something like, you know, you're overreacting, or something of that effect. And what Fisher and Shapiro kind of argue is that those more kind of natural traditional responses to those situations may not be the best way of really managing and addressing that emotional state. And so their, their, their idea, the core concerns approach really takes a different approach to the whole thing. And rather than confronting your opponent's emotion, emotions directly, or certainly, you know, not

ignoring them. What they advocate is to focus on some what they call core relational concerns. And those relational concerns and the focus on them, helps develop a more positive self image in your opponent with the idea of kind of naturally trying to kind of stimulate a more positive environment and emotional state, and refocus things back on the the problem that you need to solve. So with that kind of setup and understanding, let's dive in Emily, and Matt and talk about, what are these specific core concerns? What do they look like? How do we understand them? And then maybe we can have some dialogue about the overall approach here. So Emily, you want to kind of start us off?

E

Emily Martin 07:00

Great, great. Yeah. So the book talks about five core concerns. And the first core concern that's discussed in the book is Appreciation. And this is about understanding the opponents view, and being able to reflect back that you understand what they're talking about that you're showing that you're listening, you've heard what they said. And that they're, you can acknowledge where you can see some merit in their point of view, you can, you can agree to the fact that they might be some saying something that you disagree with on the whole, but you, you see some merit to their argument, or you see some understanding, it's really showing that you're being a good listener, that you're respecting them enough to listen to their, what they're talking about, thinking about it, absorbing information, not just rejecting it out of hand, but, but being a good, good part of the conversation about appreciating what they're bringing to the conversation. So that's the first core concern discussed in the book. The second is Autonomy. And this, this one is about listening to the opponents needs, brainstorming options with them, seeking their views. You know, this is the one that really reminds me in labor relations, of why the IBB process was established. And this book came out sort of, at the beginning of the IBB movement, with the idea that you come to the table, you listen to what the problem is, you understand what the interests are behind the problems, you brainstorm options, and you try to reach consensus. And that, that comes with the core concern of autonomy. So you are working with them, you're both being a part of the process together. You're not just trying to railroad one option over the other side. The next one is Status. Matt, do you want to pick up on on status?

M

Matt Greer 08:49

Sure, yeah. So status, you know, that's, that's that has to do with respect, respect for the role that the the other party or negotiator is bringing to the negotiation and, and kind of acknowledging that and the ways that it makes sense in that in that conversation. So you know, treating that person with respect in that party with respect, seeking their advice, sometimes that's a powerful thing to do is kind of acknowledging that, Hey, we're in this together, or kind of have different roles in this process. But, you know, you might have some advice or some feedback, that might be helpful for me, even though we're kind of in an oppositional positions here as well. So kind of using that in finding ways to treat their side with respect and acknowledging their role in the process and talking more more about role and minute here, but you know, kind of acknowledging that there's a mutual process here. So I think status is an important one there and it might also involve acknowledging the emotion like you know, this approach is kind of like trying to deal with emotions in a positive way. But sometimes if your, other negotiating partner is in an emotional state, acknowledging that and and realizing that there's some status components there can be helpful. So that's the third one.

The fourth one, which I guess is all good and go into as well as the Affiliation piece. So trying to figure out a way to find sources of commonality with your your opponent, kind of bringing it, figuring out if there's any kind of common ground that you can identify and acknowledge and say, hey, you know, we're here, we're opponents in this negotiation process in some way. But hey, here's something that kind of brings us together, something that we can kind of look at and kind of refocus our conversation around, some sort of commonality in what we're talking about here. The book kind of refers to the in-group, which I think has maybe a little bit of a negative connotation to that, in terms of it can have a component of, hey, you know, we're, we're an in-group, and there's that kind of implies that there's outsiders as well. So trying to use it in a positive way, I think is important. But you know, again, just trying to find the way to find out where we have some commonality and using that as a way to move the negotiation forward can be important. So I know Chris, did you want to call the the last one, the Role piece?

C

Chris Casillas 11:10

Yeah, and you've you've mentioned that a little bit. But this is, you know, a circumstance in which you try and kind of acknowledge the the importance and, and merit of of everybody who's participating in the process. And sometimes, I think, through that, especially when we have kind of larger bargaining tables with more team members, you know, some feel, sometimes people can feel kind of left out of that process, that they're not able to contribute or that their voice isn't being heard. And, and that can manifest itself in kind of some emotional outbursts, or strong emotional feelings. And so to address that kind of thinking of ways we can create roles for for everyone, or particularly that individual who might be experiencing that kind of emotional reaction, and trying to create a space or a place for them to make some contributions that they might find fulfilling. And so I always think of this as a situation where maybe there's one member on the team who's not kind of central to the negotiation process and the discussions, but certainly has something of value to add to the process. And maybe they could be tasked with kind of researching a particular topic, or maybe leading a subcommittee of the broader negotiation process to work on a specific issue. And in helping to kind of create that role for that person. There's a lot of satisfaction that can come from that. And in turn, can kind of deal with some of the maybe the initial emotional response that was that was coming out at the table. So that's the fifth and final one that they that they talked about in the book, to kind of try and address these relational issues as a way to get at the underlying emotional responses coming out. So what are you, just kind of curious, what you two, you know, think about that approach overall? is this, is this practical? Is this viable? Have you seen it out in the world? Have you ever tried it yourself? What do you think?

E

Emily Martin 13:29

I think these are good things to keep in mind. I think it's hard when you're in the middle of the negotiation to try to think, oh, yeah, status or appreciation. But, but I think, you know, when you think about people who are good at negotiating, you can realize you've seen those moments. And I feel like that, I think one of the things I got about reading this book is is then looking for it in an action, whether it's at a table or just within a group, you know, Chris, you're graded appreciation. And and after I read this book, sometimes you would do things I'm like, Yeah, look, Chris is really good at applying that skill. So I feel like that made me better at conflict resolution by reading the book, thinking about it, and then thinking about real life examples, and then I can reflect upon how I might be able to apply it. I do think what Matt

brought up about the affiliation in group there, there was some moments of this book that felt like the book was written, what it was, you know, 20 years ago, and, and if the book was written today, it might not be the same book or it might not be discussing some of the ideas when it comes to diversity, equity and inclusion, or even even when it comes to status, the different cultural, cultural roles, the different roles, status plays in culture. I feel like those are some conversations that we've had in the last decade that we didn't necessarily have 20 years ago. But I do think this book is is really useful.

M

Matt Greer 14:56

I agree. I think it gives some really good tools for refocusing our, at least on internal even though even if you're a negotiation partner is on the same page with you and thinking this way, I think even just internally kind of gives you some things to think about and tools to use to, to refocus your conversation, I will say I was a little struggling a little bit once I was going through some of these concepts and kind of figuring out how it fit into the collective bargaining labor relations world a bit, because emotions are really important and play an important role in collective bargaining that might be a little bit unique. In that, you know, you know, the people who are coming to the bargaining table for collective bargaining are representing a wide variety of interests, the union obviously has the whole entire membership, that they make sure that they're representing thoroughly and in demonstrating that they're doing a thorough job and doing that. And sometimes that means that there's some emotional components or, or some strong feelings that are expressed at the bargaining table, I kind of felt like, at some point that this was, you know, this approach does try to keep that emotional piece in a box, which I think can be a little bit challenging, and maybe kind of goes against that collective bargaining culture a bit. But I think certainly in a lot of a lot of situations that this, these approaches can help. And just realizing that, you know, the collective bargaining process does have, is built with a little bit of the the emotional piece built into it. And I think that's one of the the good things sometimes about it, is does does provide a little bit of that outlet for things that are going on in the relationship and back on the work floor, that can get expressed at the bargaining table. And so I think to just be realizing that there is that piece too, as you're thinking through these, these tools, I think, is also really important. So just one of the thoughts that I had there.

C

Chris Casillas 16:42

Yeah, I think that's a good caveat to put out there, Matt, and just, it reminds me of, with all of this, I mean, there's some some degree of balance, right? In the sense that, you know, this, this approach is not gonna work universally 100% of the time, or wouldn't necessarily be appropriate, because as you point out, I think there are moments in labor relations where that emotional energy is just running so high, it needs it needs to get expressed and put out there. And, and maybe it makes us a little bit uncomfortable. And maybe it's a little bit awkward, but it just needs to be out there. And that there's an important component of that. And so we shouldn't always be thinking about how to kind of manage that or keep it contained, because that sometimes is really an important part of the process. But I think in other times, you know, you can see the example I gave, you know, maybe somebody's just feeling kind of left out of the process, and that's manifesting itself in them being angry. And so instead of, you know, just saying to them stop being so angry, you're behaving like a child or something like that, that's not a particularly constructive way of dealing with that situation. You can think of, hey, maybe I

can kind of do something to acknowledge the importance of their status or their role in this process. And, and through that kind of dealing with the the emotion that is that is coming out, but it's coming out because of these kind of underlying things that are not being satisfied for that person. So I think it's a good reminder of how we can kind of change that conversation at appropriate times. But it's certainly not something that's, you know, to be used in all circumstances at all times, for sure.

E

Emily Martin 18:38

You know, one of the things that really struck me about this book is that some of the examples are sort of Cold War era. And when I looked at this book six months ago, it felt it felt even longer ago, but now with everything going on the world, maybe it doesn't feel so long ago. But I think, I think learning from different examples can be really great. So I'm wondering, does anybody else have other examples of some of these core concerns and ways they have seen that play out at at bargaining tables in Washington?

C

Chris Casillas 19:07

Well, one thing that I could share on that front, and this also kind of reminds me of a theme we've, we've kind of talked about throughout the broader negotiation project here at PERC and, and the podcast as well. But you know, just kind of giving some some labels and some structure to things that folks do on a regular basis, but maybe you didn't necessarily know that, you know, the thing you were doing is called something and I think this is a great example of it because I can remember back to a situation when I was still an advocate and doing negotiations and I won't name any parties here but the attorney on the other side, we were kind of butting heads over some some language that he needed. In in the final deal. And he had been kind of drafting some of this language and saying, Hey, we need to get this. And we would talk about it. And we would express, like, why this isn't gonna work for our team and the problems and went through several iterations. And it was just, it was not coming together. And, and admittedly, I was getting frustrated and kind of it was resulting in some, you know, heated conversations and whatnot. And at some point, the attorney said, you know, Hey, Chris, I think you understand kind of what we need to get out of this. And we're clearly kind of missing the mark and kind of doing this. So why don't you take this and you draft it as you see fit, you know, you know, what we want to get out of it. You you take the role here, take it on, draft something, if it if it meets those concerns that we've expressed, and we'll be good with it. And, you know, and that was kind of the breakthrough moment where we were able to move forward, because I think what he was doing in that situation was kind of acknowledging kind of my role as needing to kind of manage the language in that situation and acknowledging kind of my status as as kind of having some expertise or understanding around this. And, of course, I don't think, you know, he would say he was taking this core concerns approach in dealing with my kind of emotional reaction to the situation. But, you know, in hindsight, I think we can say that that's what would what had happened. And so I think a lot of people do this kind of stuff on a regular basis without maybe necessarily kind of even realizing it's just intuitive. But hopefully, what this does is kind of give you a framework for understanding this. So you can be a little bit more deliberate and conscious about it going forward.

E

Emily Martin 21:55

Oh, what a great example. I really appreciate that story. I think that's a really powerful way of somebody assigning a role that that helped achieve and help go over a roadblock and deal with the the pieces whether their role was drafter or whether that role was problem solver. I think I've seen that in other in other situations, but I think it's a great way to see how this stuff actually works in the wild.

C

Chris Casillas 22:17

Awesome. Well, thanks for the discussion today. Matt And Emily, appreciate going over this concept, we will publish along with this some an infographic that we had generated as part of this as well as a reference to the book we mentioned and we hope you all enjoy this episode. And maybe you can take a look at the book for yourself and start using this in your next negotiation.

M

Matt Greer 22:43

Great. Thanks, Chris.