

The Art of Diplomacy | Helpful for any negotiation

by Alexander Christiani



If you ask someone what is "diplomacy?" you get very different answers. But it's rather simple: diplomacy in a nutshell is "successful and winsome leadership in dealing with people" – no more no less – whether you are engaged in international negotiation or personal confrontation. There are, however many rules – ten of the most salient, I am stating as follows:

Rule No.1: "*Suaviter in modo-fortiter in re*" Gently in manner – firmly in action.

- Refined (polished) manners are always asked for.
- Negotiate, negotiate, negotiate!!
- Mutual commitments: promises could be broken, mutual dependencies create a firm bond.
- Smoke tactics: diplomats don't like to commit themselves...

Rule No. 2: Prove that you have more patience than your opponent.

- From the outset, plan more than one conversation,
- Never interrupt in the sentence,
- The 3-seconds rule: make it your habit, never to react immediately to aggression – wait 3 seconds before responding

Rule No. 3: Make peace before the conflict escalates.

The four forms of conflict conversation:

- Avoid unsubstantiated contradiction.
- Tolerance: *"I accept, that you see the matter differently, I see it in another light..."*
- Accommodation: *"What you say is a matter for consideration, I could agree to points a) and b), however with the proviso..."*
- Partnership: *"What is it you need to also accommodate my viewpoint..."*
- Diplomacy on a professional level sees different points of view as challenge and chance.

Rule No. 4: Help all concerned to save face.

The rule from 2000 years of diplomacy:

- Avoid everything which would drive your partner to enter into his own shell;
- lecturing and exposing forces into retreat and clandestine opposition;
- harsh contradiction triggers unnecessary defence reaction;
- moral pressure leads to refusal and counter-attack;
- pandering creates mistrust *"What is his hidden agenda?"*

Rule No. 5: Collect and cultivate information and contacts.

The basics of successful contact management consists of:

- Planning
- Establishing contact with selected friends
- Evaluation: save what you have learned in writing
- Further contact management

Rule No. 6: Be honest, but only reveal the information which is expected of you.

- Say only what you have been asked.
- Respond in a concise manner, avoid lengthy justifications.
- Re-establish leadership with counter-questions *"Why are you interested in this?"*
- Commit yourself to discretion

Rule No. 7: Even in the most fiercest conflict, look for common ground.

- Admit your own interest to come to terms with your partner.
- Don't pretence selflessness. No one will trust you that you have only the interest of the other in mind.
- Enumerate as many agreements as possible,
- Look for what adversaries unite. Diplomats are masters of the "biggest common multiples". Geniuses amongst them still find common ground, even if the matter has been given up as hopeless.

Rule No. 8: Declare yourself as ally, no matter how badly you are attacked.

- Always give unambiguous, positive relationship messages.
- Signal that the process will lead to a just and acceptable solution for both parties.
- Don't accept offences and targeted insults.
- Every verbal attack falls flat in having no effect, if the person whose insult is directed at, does not take notice of it.

Rule No. 9: Don't try to cut the Gordian Knot.

- Name and justify goals. Both partners admit to their goals, they say what they want to achieve and why their concerns are important.
- Find out basis for accommodation, despite diametrical interests.
- There are always possibilities to work out those areas which could serve as a basis for later agreement.

Rule Nr. 10: Try the art of small gestures.

The effect of small gestures is based on three effects:

- Positive effect of surprise: Every behaviour which your partner has already expected of you is not suited for a surprise. If you wish to be successful you must jump over your own shadow.
- Honesty: If you are suspected to play the generous out of self-interest, your forfeit any trust placed in you.
- Symbolism: your own gesture reveals the moral value you represent.

What are your experiences in negotiations if you take the above into consideration?
Please let us know! We are looking forward to receiving your comments!

About the author



Former Ambassador Dr Alexander Christiani is the Vice-President of the Austro-British Society and leads the ABS Expert Group which releases high-quality Policy Papers with first-hand background information on current political developments. Dr Christiani is a member of the board of the Austrian Society for Foreign Politics and the United Nations. His professional career led him to the hotspots of political developments all over the world (e.g. to the Middle East, South Africa, New York and many others) where he contributed reasonably to Austria's excellent diplomatic reputation in the world.

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