

Effective negotiation: Study finds flirting can pay off for women

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When Madeleine Albright became the first female U.S. Secretary of State, she led high-level negotiations between mostly male foreign government leaders. In 2009, comedian Bill Maher asked Albright if she ever flirted on the job and she replied, "I did, I did." Flirtatiousness, female friendliness, or the more diplomatic description "feminine charm" is an effective way for women to gain negotiating mileage, according to a new study by Haas School of Business Professor Laura Kray.

"[Women](#) are uniquely confronted with a tradeoff in terms of being perceived as strong versus warm. Using feminine charm in negotiation is a technique that combines both," says Kray, who holds the Warren E. and Carol Spieker Chair in Leadership at the Haas School.

The study, "Feminine Charm: An Experimental Analysis of its Costs and Benefits in Negotiations," was published in October in the journal [Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin](#) and co-authored by Haas PhD alumna Connson C. Locke of the London School of Economics and Haas PhD candidate Alex B. Van Zant.

Flirtation that generates positive results, says Kray, is not overt sexual advances but authentic, engaging behavior without serious intent. In fact, the study found female flirtation signals attractive qualities such as confidence, which is considered essential to successful negotiators.

To determine whether women who flirt are more effective in negotiating

than men who flirt, the researchers asked 100 participants to evaluate to what extent they use social charm in negotiation on a one-to-seven scale.

Earlier that week, the participants evaluated their partners' negotiating effectiveness. Women who said they used more social charm were rated more effective by their partners. However, men who said they used more social charm were not regarded as more effective.

In the second experiment, the researchers asked subjects to imagine they were selling a car worth \$1,200 and asked for how much would they sell the car. Next, the subjects read one of two scenarios about a potential buyer named Sue. The first group meets Sue, who shakes hands when she meets the seller, smiles, and says, "It's a pleasure to meet you,." and then "What's your best price?" in a serious tone. The second group reads an alternate scenario in which Sue greets the seller by smiling warmly, looking the seller up and down, touching the seller's arm, and saying, "You're even more charming than over email," followed by a playful wink and asking, "What's your best price?"

The result? Male sellers were willing to give the "playful Sue" more than \$100 off the selling price whereas they weren't as willing to negotiate with the "serious Sue." Playful Sue's behavior did not affect female car sellers.

Kray says many of her students who are senior women executives admit they love to flirt and describe themselves as "big flirts." Kray maintains flirting is not unprofessional if it remains playful and friendly.

"The key is to flirt with your own natural personality in mind. Be authentic. Have fun. That will translate into confidence, which is a strong predictor of negotiation performance."

More information: [Abstract:](#)

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