

Crying in negotiations can help gain concessions

August 11 2015, by Terry Kosdrosky

Tom Hanks established the "no crying in baseball" rule in "A League of Their Own." But how about negotiations?

New research by Shirli Kopelman, an assistant professor of management and organizations at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business, shows that expressing sadness in certain circumstances can be beneficial when negotiating.

Kopelman was one of the first scholars to study the effects of displayed emotions in [negotiations](#), and is now extending the conversation to include sadness.

"We know that emotions play a role in negotiations, especially because there's a lot at stake both professionally and personally," Kopelman said. "It turns out that sadness is expressed more often than one might imagine at work, and is important because it produces reactions of empathy."

Her study, "Weep and Get More: When and Why Sadness Expression is Effective in Negotiations," was co-authored with faculty at three business schools in France— Marwan Sinaceur of ESSEC Business School, Dimitri Vasiljevic of NEOMA Business School and Christophe Haag of EM LYON. It was published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

Their research suggests that people who show sadness during negotiations can gain concessions when it elicits empathy from others.

Sadness may be communicated in words and doesn't necessitate "crying." For example, one may say, "What you are saying makes me sad," or "I feel sorrow about the way things are going."

The key is that for it to have an impact on the negotiation, the recipients must have a reason to experience concern for the one who expresses sadness, the researchers say.

A series of experiments involving face-to-face interactions showed how the phenomenon works. The social context matters. Kopelman and her co-authors found that sadness increased concessions when people on the other side viewed the sad negotiator as having less power, or thought they'd be involved with them in the future.

Recipients who viewed the relationship with the person showing sadness as collaborative were also more likely to cede some ground in the negotiation. Sadness also was shown to be more effective than anger when people on the other side determined that blame was not appropriate.

"Our experiments showed that expressing sadness increased value claiming in negotiations, but only when the relationship provided reasons to experience concern for the expresser," Kopelman said. "Sadness is a powerful interpersonal signal, and it turns out compassion is an integral part of [business](#) negotiations."

It's important to note that feigning sadness to gain a strategic advantage would be deceptive and unethical. However, Kopelman, author of "Negotiating Genuinely," says that if you actually feel sad, there are situations where it may be appropriate and constructive to mindfully communicate [sadness](#).

More information: "Weep and Get More: When and Why Sadness

Expression Is Effective in Negotiations." *J Appl Psychol*. 2015 Jun 1.
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26030298

Provided by University of Michigan

Citation: Crying in negotiations can help gain concessions (2015, August 11) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-08-gain-concessions.html>

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