



# EXPLORING THE POWER OF NEGOTIATION

By Terry Waite, CBE

In this article, Terry Waite, CBE, renowned for negotiating the release of hostages in the Middle East, explores the power of negotiation and identifies some core foundations for effective negotiation including credibility, reputation, trust, honesty, patience and risk calculation. Different circumstances require different behaviours, and while a life and death situation could never be compared to a business exchange, there are parallels that can be drawn. One common goal in both of these situations is for both parties to 'save face' – securing an effective resolution that does not leave the other party humiliated. Effective negotiation ensures that both parties walk away with their dignity intact and feel that they have been engaged in a win/win situation.

Situations that require negotiating skills vary considerably; from the exchange that takes place when a particular deal or contract is in the offing, to a situation where passions run high. One of the most difficult situations is the one facing the individual who is engaged in the task of negotiating for the release of hostages. It is this that I shall comment on and all examples used are drawn from personal experiences.

In working, as I have, for the release of hostages in Iran, Libya and Beirut, it was important to have credibility as a negotiator. In all three situations, credibility came from a combination of two factors.

Firstly, that I was acting as a representative of an internationally recognized religious leader, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Even though I was working in situations that were predominately Islamic, and in some instances, at the extreme edge of Islam, nevertheless there was a respect for this fact. A second factor that increased as time went by was recognition of my reputation for just and fair dealing.

The first obstacle was to determine whom to contact and how. I needed to be able to speak directly with those individuals who had direct influence over the fate of the captives, and more often than not, this meant speaking with those who had actually kidnapped the victims. Immediately one can see that this is a difficult and dangerous strategy, as one would be dealing with people who are highly suspicious, extremely volatile and liable to kidnap or kill the negotiator should their suspicions be aroused unduly.



## **TERRY WAITE, CBE**

As envoy to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Terry Waite successfully negotiated the release of hostages in Iran and Libya during the 1980s. In 1987, while negotiating the release of hostages in Beirut, Waite was himself taken hostage and held in captivity for 1,763 days. Following his release in 1991, Waite decided on a career change and now writes, lectures and devotes more than half his time to humanitarian activities.

In normal negotiating situations, a face-to-face meeting is desirable in order for a trusting relationship to develop. An effective negotiator must have the ability to build trust quickly. In the three situations mentioned, I went to meet kidnappers totally alone without bodyguards, weapons or tracking devices. The fact that I was vulnerable was proof to the kidnappers of my good intent.

Effective negotiators will be aware of non-verbal factors in the communication process. On several occasions, I had to meet and discuss with kidnappers whilst blindfolded and I found this to be a distinct handicap.

Negotiators working in many countries outside the UK will recognise the importance of social interaction before coming to the main reason for the meeting.

The resources available to me did not allow me the luxury of a de-briefing team but looking back on those days, I would regard such a team as being a necessity and not an extravagance. One needed to be able to check ones reactions and insights, as well as constantly reviewing the strategy being deployed.

There is a role for intuition in negotiating, but one would be extremely foolish to rely on intuition alone.

The ability to form a personal and trusting relationship is vital in so many negotiating processes. In Iran, I was able to form a genuine friendship with one of the Revolutionary Guards who eventually enabled me to bring home several British hostages and free some Iranians. I went to his home, listened to the troubles that had afflicted his family across the

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On one alarming occasion in Beirut, I almost ruined the encounter with kidnappers by asking them a question. The Americans had asked me to enquire what their demands were and if money was included, which I asked early during my first meeting with the kidnappers. There was a violent reaction from the abductors: "The Americans know very well it is not money we want" they shouted. It took all the skill I could command to calm them and to get the process back on track.

Patience is vital throughout negotiations. In the three places mentioned, I was required to wait for weeks, sometimes for months, before getting to the next step. Waiting to be contacted by kidnappers in Beirut was difficult. The country was in the midst of civil war and Westerners were disappearing from the streets with alarming regularity. I waited alone in my apartment for contact to be made in some way.

years and showed a genuine interest in his situation.

Although effective negotiators will calculate risk and take risks, one cannot live in a risk-free environment. I was eventually captured in Beirut because I fell victim to political duplicity and lost the trust of the kidnappers. Had I not been able to gradually regain that trust during my five years of incarceration, four of which were in solitary confinement, then I doubt that I would be writing this article today.

Having written the above, I of course recognise that hostage taking has become more ruthless today and the situation is even more extreme than it was when I was active in the field. I would argue that some of the policies followed by the West have encouraged extremism and demonstrate an abject failure of understanding. But that subject is for another article.