



Will you still love me tomorrow?

Gerry Goffin & Carole King

We apologise to our readers in other countries. The title of this Goffin/King classic focuses this month's Insight on a recent, but rather parochial event.

For the first time since World War 2, the UK has a coalition government. It's not a minority government relying on patching together day-to-day alliances issue by issue. Nor is it a loose open-ended 'pact' of the sort that arose from similarly inconclusive elections in the 70s. No, it's a full-blown coalition partnership concluded after five long days of negotiation. As a result, we have one shared regret here at Huthwaite International and it's not politically partisan.

Our negotiation research database was built up from direct observation of thousands of hours of negotiations. But what we would have given to be a 'fly on the wall' at negotiations that have resulted in our new political landscape! Even from the outside though, we can see that they illustrated a number of the things we teach.

Power

'Power is in the head' is a Huthwaite saying. If you feel powerful, you are powerful and you'll act in a powerful manner. The Liberal Democrats had a good fallback – an alternative to a deal with the Conservatives in the form of one with Labour. Less attractive perhaps, but still viable. This meant that despite coming third and not converting their standing in the polls into votes, they felt powerful and behaved accordingly.

They even reminded everyone of their fallback by orchestrating an unexpected last minute meeting with Labour.

Bargaining

Effective negotiation involves bargaining – making trades, ideally using your levers. A lever is something that costs you less than the value the other side ascribes to it. It can be offered in return for something that you value using that key word, "if...".

We can perhaps imagine, *"We might consider agreeing to a referendum on alternative voting, IF you abstain from the vote on our proposal to introduce a marriage tax break."* And, *"IF you scrap your plans to reduce Inheritance Tax, we might be able to back renewal of the nuclear deterrent."*

This is how deals are done that feel win/win to both parties and are likely to lead to true coalition or partnership.

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Clarity

This will be the true test of the deal. Our research showed that 17.2% of everything skilled negotiators say is in pursuit of clarity – making sure all parties are absolutely clear about what's been agreed, how it will be implemented and what each will do when problems appear. We hope that much of those five long days our new masters spent was in doing precisely this. Only time will tell if the new partnership is, as the song goes:

...a lasting treasure, or just a moment's pleasure?

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