

Is Getting to a Specific Yes Always the Point?

Getting Together: Building a Relationship That Gets to Yes

By Roger Fisher and Scott Brown

Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988, 216 pages, \$17.95

Reviewed by Mary P. Rowe

Yes! It is a good idea to read this book, and yes, it would be a good present for a colleague or a friend. Roger Fisher and William Ury's original book, *Getting to Yes*, and this sequel are both delightful, easy to read, and for that matter largely correct, as far as they go. Moreover, if you constantly experience difficulty in your negotiating relationships especially with people you deal with regularly, these books are more likely than most to make a difference in your understanding of what is happening between you and others. (If your negotiating relationships are almost always rewarding, these books will help you understand why, and will make you feel affirmed.)

In the technical jargon of a negotiation specialist, these books are about *integrative* negotiations, that is, collaboration, or "win-win" bargaining in which one works *with* another person, solves problems *with* another nation. These ideas are contrasted with *distributive* negotiations. Distributive bargaining is often referred to as "win-lose" bargaining; one tries to decide matters solely in one's own interest, or only in the interests of one's own team. In a sad case of win-lose behavior, a person may listen poorly if at all, and utterly fail to convey respect toward the Other. A hotly motivated win-lose specialist may be prepared to take the Other by surprise, or to deceive the Other; an aggressive win-lose bargainer may be prepared to coerce rather than persuade; a highly competitive win-lose negotiator may be determined to "win" each encounter with another person (or nation), just for the sake of doing better than the Other. *Getting Together* tries to help the reader escape the less desirable patterns of distributive bargaining.

In real life one may not wish to separate integrative and distributive strategies too sharply; few sit-

uations call for the purest form of win-lose bargaining, and few public negotiating situations demand or permit purely integrative bargaining. Real life is a mixed bag. In real professional and personal life one should probably negotiate integratively as long and as thoroughly as possible, meantime safeguarding one's own interests; finally one "claims" one's proper share of whatever is at hand, if "claiming" is appropriate, after creating as much value as possible. *Getting Together*, like its predecessor, teaches mainly the integrative side of negotiation; it suggests that one should not be wholly trusting, but it does not set about to teach the process of distributive negotiation. (You will not learn much about win-lose bargaining from *Getting Together*, nor about how to defend yourself against it.)

However, let us assume that what you want is to learn more about problem-solving behavior and especially about effective problem-solving relationships. Will this book help? I think so. *Getting Together* discusses the balance of emotion with reason, as well as some elements of effective listening. It lays out the necessity of consulting with the Other. It discusses the importance of being reliable (whether or not the Other is reliable), of persuading rather than coercing, and of behaving respectfully toward others, no matter what differences may exist. Major emphasis is laid on one's own independent behavior. Fisher and Brown argue that, regardless of substantive disagreement, regardless of concessions from the other side, different values, or the existence of reciprocity and trust, one can always be unconditionally constructive in negotiations. Have I mentioned any topic that you want to learn more about? Then you will probably find this book worthwhile.

Now let us go into more detail. If you have thought deeply about negotiations, then this book, like the first one, may cause you to discover that you and the authors differ on some important points. For example, both books urge that you "separate the people from the problem"; this book also urges that you "balance emotion with reason." Neither of these ideas is simple.

Many readers, and especially many women, have taken issue with the idea of always being able to "separate the people from the problem." Of course, much of the time Fisher's maxim is a good prescrip-

Sloan
Management
Review

89

Winter 1989

Book
Reviews

90

Winter 1989

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tion in negotiations; for example, one may couch criticism abstractly, rather than *ad hominem*. One may reject a child's bad behavior rather than the child itself; one may affirm the pride of a person or nation while working to change behavior or solve a problem. But sometimes the relationship is the substance. Many people, perhaps especially many women, may care much more about the feelings in a negotiation than about a particular agenda item—or even the agenda itself. They would say the medium is the message, in certain circumstances. Balance reason with emotion, they would say, not emotion with reason—at least sometimes.

This subject is a subtle one. Some readers criticized Fisher's first book for the implication that the person might always be separated from the problem; this new book in fact may be an attempt to address the value of relationship per se. It is actually consistent with one strand of Fisher's thinking that he should write more about the value of relationships—as I recall, he was one of the first formally to add the "power of relationship" to the standard "Sources of Power in Negotiation" list so beloved by teachers of negotiation. On the other hand, there is another strand in his thinking: he appears to believe that one can ultimately separate the process from the substance in negotiation. (I do not know how he reconciles these two points of view.)

This same problem appears in *Getting Together*. Fisher writes, "It seems best to work on the process of a relationship—how we deal with each other—independent of all substantive differences." For people who think that the process sometimes cannot be distinguished from the substance, this advice will sometimes seem unreasonable.

Does it matter? Fisher and Brown give terrific advice about effective interpersonal process: unlimited respect, commitment to being trustworthy, negotiation side by side with your "negotiating partner" rather than in opposition to your "opponent." If we follow these prescriptions, won't we all get to the same place, whether the medium is the message, or the medium is just the medium? Well, sometimes. But for some readers, it depends on why you are playing the game in the first place. For some people, the outcome may also depend on whether you are negotiating for professional (conceivably even Machiavellian) reasons, or whether you are negotiating in your personal relationships, or whether you are negotiating for some issue that

you consider central to your values or your survival.

I will try now to explain why I think that a good cookbook does not by itself make an excellent cook—although all of us should have a good cookbook. Recipes leave out intuition, spontaneity, passion...and special circumstances. Integrative bargaining is seen by some theorists as an interesting math problem: we seek the maximum possible joint gain for given negotiators, or the optimum rational solution for the set of people we decide are entitled to be in the game. (It should be noted that some thoughtful theorists have worked hard on enlarging, or at least thinking about, the list of people whose interests ought to be taken into account.) I believe it is useful to do the analysis that tells us our closest possible approximation to a rational, optimal solution. But the question arises, how should we take emotional, subjective, and irrational factors into account? Some theorists would be quick to say that the feelings on each side should ideally be reckoned as part of the substantive gains and losses in order for a true optimum to be reached. But that is very hard to do.

Faced with this problem, some people suggest ignoring emotional factors, precisely because they are irrational. Others would prefer to try to separate the people from the problem, or at least to balance emotion with reason; this is the Fisher/Brown recommendation. My own view is that it is important to recognize that emotions play a role in negotiations, and to think systematically about both objective and subjective interests. And I would go further and say that ultimately most important decisions are made in part on subjective grounds. (I write this during the U.S. presidential elections.) This quality is, both for good and for ill, what makes us human. We need to take more account of it.

So I read Fisher and Brown with respect, but also with concern about the mechanical nature of the recipes they provide. Where is empathy? Where is my joy in your joy? If I *could* always be rational, would I always *want* to be? This conceptual problem also arises when, as managers, we must analyze painful transactions: exchange of injuries, people paying each other back, and so forth. Where is revenge? Where is fighting for the sake of the fight? Where is the negative power of a bad relationship? For that matter, where is mercy? (Presumably, this was one of the points of Portia's famous speech on the quality of mercy.) These are

subtle problems. In some moods you may think that process can ultimately be separated from substance; in some moods—or in some relationships—you may think not.

There are other subtleties that may interest you. *Getting Together* prescribes that one should “always consult before deciding—and then (really) listen.” Note the order of these two ideas; should one decide first to consult and then to listen? This might be appropriate in some business situations. But in personal relationships one might prefer always to listen and then decide on occasion to consult. For those of us brought up to think that taking care of others is the chief reason for being—that the point of a relationship is not just “to get to (a specific) yes”—we hope we always listen actively. (At least this is likely to be true with respect to one’s spouse or one’s children.)

If you follow the precepts of this book, you are not likely to do any harm to your professional or personal relationships. The book can teach you something about the form of respect; it may teach you something about the form of love. But it will not teach you about love itself. (To be fair, the authors of *Getting Together* explicitly warn against practicing these skills just by rote, as, for example, if you were to do it in a fashion out of sync with your own feelings and values.)

There are other criticisms one can make about the book. For example, some will question whether one should *always* be “reliable,” as a matter of strategy. One might have asked for more material on the nature of building trust. (I believe that trust builds most swiftly in interactions that are off the subject at hand, because it builds when we can let ourselves be a little bit vulnerable, and be accepted; doing this is often easier if interactions are off the subject of the negotiations.) Some readers will note, as with *Getting to Yes*, that the authors make little attempt to acknowledge that this book picks up on the work of others. (Carl Rogers wrote about unconditional positive regard; many people have written about active listening, and so on.)

On the other hand, *Getting Together* has real charm, and it contains wonderful gems: “Although it takes two to have a relationship, it takes only one to change its quality,” and “The ideas here are not notes for someone you should pretend to be.” Like *Getting to Yes*, *Getting Together* is more than worth the money to buy it and the time to read it.

The Huge, Hidden Nonprofit Sector

The Nonprofit Economy

By **Burton A. Weisbrod**

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988,
251 pages, \$22.95

Reviewed by Shlomo Maital

What do the following organizations have in common: National Geographic, “Up with People,” the Sierra Club, the Better Business Bureau, the YWCA, Rand Corporation, and the Snooty Pines Country Club?

All belong to America’s large, growing, and poorly understood nonprofit sector. There are nearly a million nonprofit organizations—one corporation out of every four. They control 2 percent of America’s assets, employ 12 percent of all workers (including volunteers), and generate about 4 percent of output.

This “hidden part of our economy, part of our daily lives,” is also, Professor Weisbrod rightly claims, “an enigma.” The time has indeed come for a thorough analysis of their functioning within the economy and their impact on the private and public sectors. His book is the best yet on the topic, summarizing more than fifteen years of his own and others’ research. (I recall Professor Weisbrod’s exuberance after he discovered an unmined vein of IRS data tapes; it was reminiscent of a prospector who has just panned up a six-ounce gold nugget.) *The Nonprofit Economy* tells us more about nonprofits than we may wish to know, though still far less than we should.

Years ago, many plants and offices had little signs saying, “We are a nonprofit organization—not by our choice.” Many organizations are nonprofit by choice and *do* in fact make piles of money. They may not, however, legally pay out profits to owners or anyone connected with the organization. In exchange for this constraint, their profits are tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and some nonprofits get lower postal rates. In addition, for more than a quarter of them, donations and contributions (totaling more than \$300 billion annually) are tax deductible. There are some 60,000 new applications every year for tax-deductibility status, and the IRS grants between 70 and 80 percent of them.

Sloan
Management
Review

91

Winter 1989

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