Fine negotiation steps that produce a win

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Always be good at handling disagreements and allow the possibility of losing. FILE PHOTO | NMG

Political machinations often involve collaboration and bargaining. European diplomats in the middle ages used the French word for speaking, parlez, that transformed into the English term “parley” to specifically mean discussing and negotiating between two opposing sides. They recognised its power as opposed to outright conflict.

Recently, US President Donald Trump on the campaign trail touted his ability to cooperate and bargain, but since his inauguration shows no sign of negotiation ability or reliability whether with North Korea, Venezuela, or even within his own political party.
So, in Kenya’s reelection period surrounded by intense posturing and negotiations, let us reflect on different negotiation techniques that politicians and business leaders alike can use to enhance effectiveness and results.

Thus far, it seems that our political leaders of all sides follow the standard Robert Lussier defined first and third stages in the negotiating process.

First, plan. Research the other parties, set objectives, try to develop options and trade-offs and then anticipate challenges and objections, and prepare answers and action responses. Second, enter the actual negotiations. Develop rapport and focus on obstacles, not on the specific person.

Let the other party make the first offer. Listen and ask questions to focus on meeting the other party’s needs. Don’t be too quick to give in, and ask for something in return.

Third, postponement works well in raising tension and therefore a possible deal prospect with the other parties. However, if one of the other parties starts postponing, you may create urgency and time constraints in order to bring them back to the negotiating table.

On the other hand, if your team wants to postpone, then the other party may create urgency. Fourth, regarding the outcomes, if you come to an agreement, then push forward and close the deal. However, if you fail to reach an agreement, find out why so that you become a better negotiator in the future.

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In Kenya, we excel at studying other parties prior to negotiations and we aptly know how to create urgency in bargaining positions.

However, like Americans, we culturally dwindle in the actual negotiation interaction by taking up the forcing conflict style position. The five different conflict positions to negotiate from include the following.

The avoiding conflict style occurs when one holds low concern for others’ and their own needs. It involves passive behaviour and a you-lose and I-lose mentality. Next, the accommodating conflict style happens when the negotiator holds high concern for others’ needs.

It also involves passive behaviour but a you-win and I-lose attitude. Then, the collaborating conflict style takes place when one possesses high concern for others’ needs as well as their own needs. It requires assertive behaviour and a you win and I win approach.

Next, negotiators often employ the forcing-conflict style whereby they hold high concern for themselves and little or no concern for the other party. It clearly requires aggressive behaviour and a you-lose while I-win approach.
However, in order to become effective at negotiating, one must handle disagreements with the negotiating conflict style that involves assertive behavior, but a compromising you win some while I win some attitude. Do not focus on a winner takes all mentality.

Research by social scientists Wendi Adair, Laurie Weingart, and Jeanne Brett highlight that negotiators should not follow the American model. Americans typically put forward a first negotiating position in the forcing-conflict style that clearly disadvantages the other party.

In today’s political and business climate, leaders should actively consider the Japanese approach to solving disputes that creates effectiveness, trust, and resolution instead of more harsh entrenched positions.