Anxious Moments: Openings in Negotiation

Michael Wheeler

Even experienced negotiators often feel anxiety about beginning a new negotiation. Subjects in this study described these opening moments with vivid imagery and metaphors, among them: lurking wolves, alligators, tightropes, and rushing trains. People's deep-seated worries can be triggered by several factors: doubts about personal competence, fear about the attitudes and behavior of other parties, and the inevitable uncertainty about what path negotiation will take. The author compares openings in other contexts, notably in the arts, to illustrate how the impact of anxiety need not be entirely negative. These feelings can also spark creativity and support constructive relationships.

Antonio Damasio begins his book, *The Feeling of What Happens*, with the following passage:

I have always been intrigued by the specific moment when, as we sit waiting in the audience, the door to the stage opens and a performer steps into the light; or, to take the other perspective, the moment when a performer who waits in semidarkness sees the same door open, revealing the lights, the stage, and the audience.

Damasio offers "stepping into the light" as a metaphor for the birth of consciousness, "the simple and yet momentous coming of the sense of self".

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into the world of the mental." (It is also a tantalizing way of opening a book.) I want to appropriate his metaphor here as a way of introducing openings in negotiation, specifically those moments where we move from solitary anticipation to mutual interaction.

Openings can give rise to deep feelings for both actors and audiences. As the theater lights dim and we settle into our seats, the buzz of the crowd softens, yet the air of expectancy intensifies. We sit straighter, alert as the curtain parts to reveal the lit stage. The first words are spoken and the play unfolds.

And what must it be like for the actor waiting behind the curtain, hearing the audience go still in anticipation? All the training and rehearsals notwithstanding, her pulse may quicken and her face flush as she feels that something new is about to begin. Is this transitional moment that much different for negotiators at the bargaining table?

Openings get scant attention in the standard negotiation literature. Much of what is written tends to be around narrow tactical questions: should you make the opening offer, for example, or wait for your counterpart to go first? Opening in negotiation is implicitly regarded as an economic game in which each side is trying to discover the other's walkaway price while masking their own. Nothing is said, however, about how it feels to resist another person's pressure to name an asking price or to dare to make an extravagant demand. Nor is much thought given to how such micromoves fit into the larger process of mutual engagement or confrontation.

Instead, popular writers liken openings in negotiation to first moves in chess or fencing where each player must decide how to thrust and parry. Some advocate all thrust (Burgess 1998). A classic article on tactics for legal services lawyers (Meltsner and Shrage 1973) catalogs a string of aggressive tactics: arrange to meet on your own turf; set preconditions for negotiation; outnumber the other side; state your major demands up front; etc. All of these moves aim at immediately seizing the upper hand in order to make your "adversary" feel cornered and psychologically disadvantaged.

Opening aggressively is also a way of stiffening one's own backbone. Jim Camp (self-described as "America's number one negotiating coach") trashes the "win-win" approach and asserts that the key to effective negotiation is unblinking resolve. He titled his recent book, Start With No.

Why are the tiger's eyes set in the front of the head, facing forward? Because the animal is a predator always on the lookout for prey. Why are our own eyes also set in the front of the head, facing forward? Because we are predators as well (Camp 2002: 21).

According to Camp, the most critical thing in starting negotiation is saying a flat "no" to the other party's demands. Otherwise, you risk getting taken for a patsy.
There is serious research to the contrary, of course. Studies have shown that pairs of negotiators instructed to "schmooze" for ten minutes before getting down to business have higher rates of agreement and reach more creative deals than do those who just plunge in. The warm-up process significantly changes how people negotiate, even when they know that they are only engaged in mandatory small talk.

Such research still does not get to the experiential, emotional aspects of openings, however. Even Camp acknowledges that these moments may be highly charged for novices and veteran hard-ballers alike. "When you become excited or nervous," he asks, "where in your body do you feel it first? Where do you get butterflies before a speech or a public performance of any kind?" His answer: we feel these things in the gut.

This essay explores the visceral feelings that are stirred in the beginning moments of negotiation. It considers the source and nature of our emotions when we shift from solitary planning and preparation to face-to-face interaction with our counterparts. It also considers how these feelings shape our own behavior and perceptions — and those of the people with whom we deal.

The emphasis is on pure openings, that is, situations where people are meeting for the first time, hence there is a sharp divide between preparing and acting. The focus throughout is on interpersonal experience, leaving to others important institutional and organizational issues; for example, the essay does not consider ceremonial rituals that sometimes kick-off formal bargaining sessions in collective bargaining or diplomatic contexts. Because the negotiation literature has little to say about the emotional aspect of openings, examples are drawn from other settings, notably the arts.

Images: A Collage of Feelings

Even experienced practitioners feel anxious about pending negotiations. The depth of that anxiety is revealed in a study underway by Kimberlyn Leary, Gerald Zaltman, and myself. The project uses Zaltman's patented Z-met interviewing process to elicit the imagery and metaphors underlying people's thoughts and feelings on anticipating negotiation. Subjects are asked to select photographs and drawings that reflect important aspects of negotiation. They are then interviewed in depth about the meaning of those images as well as the associations that the images surface.

Some of what particular individuals reveal is unique to them, yet much of what they express proves common. Anxiety is almost universal. Some subjects admit a lack of personal confidence or concern about not being in full control. Others worry about difficult relationships where people may not be ethical, cooperative, or respectful. Still others connect anxiety to the uncertainty of the process: they cannot be sure what the other parties really want or how they will behave, nor do they know how long it will take to find agreement. Some of these concerns are linked in intricate feedback

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loops, so that worry about unethical behavior is tied to worry about resulting frustration and anger, which doubles back to doubts about competence.

People also report many positive images about negotiation, of course, but the abiding anxiety expressed in their metaphors is striking. Consider the following capsule summaries of specific images offered by each of the ten people in the pilot study, along with their own *verbatim* explanation of their meaning.

**Train**: "The train racing along the track... represents either time pressure, a deadline approaching or other unrelenting pressure... from some other source."

**Profile of a woman**: "[She] is in great pain as she is not vacillating; she is overwhelmed by the magnitude of the decision that she has to make."

**Man walking a tightrope**: "You need to know... to walk that fine line of not pushing too hard, yet pushing hard enough."

**Banana peel and dissected brain**: "One of the main concerns is for failing in the negotiation; another fear is fear of being outwitted by the other participant."

**Harpoon, snake, arrows, and Arnold Schwartzenneger**: "Parties go to a table into a dispute where they start and the pie seems awfully small."

**Mouse; woman in mud**: "The mouse represents the insecurity of your position. You get dirty and you don't communicate straight up."

**Snake oil salesman**: "An unworthy opponent, the silly opponent, the person who we're stuck with and we have to play tennis with and it's going to be very difficult to play good tennis with."

**Wolf lurking under a man's face**: "To make the wolf extinct will harm us as human species and as individuals. So you want to keep the wolf within yourself alive."

**Open mouthed alligators looking up at a knock-kneed naked man**: "Negotiation is a game of very high stakes, both emotionally and personally."

**Alligator with a small frog hanging out its jaw**: "There is tremendous ambiguity about why the frog is there, who is in control, what are the circumstances of that interaction."

Each of these subjects also selected sunnier images suggestive of constructive relationships and agreement. However, if there were these silver linings, there certainly were clouds. All the participants were explicit about perceived perils of negotiation and the emotions that result. Given anxiety over external pressure, balancing competing objectives, coping with antagonists, and possible failure, to boot, it is small wonder that openings are critical moments in negotiation.
Openings, after all, are different in three important ways from everything else that takes place before negotiation begins:

1. Negotiators' effectiveness is put to the direct test when they move from rehearsal to performance;
2. Impressions and relationships — good and bad — form quickly.

3. Immediate strategic and tactical choices tip the interaction in certain directions and foreclose other possibilities.

The three sections that follow explore how openings in negotiation are affected by performance anxiety, impressions, and uncertainty. Each begins with illustrative examples drawn from the “thoughts and feelings” study mentioned earlier.

**Performance Anxiety**

Sometimes I fear I will feel, during the negotiation, as if I am out there on my own without support. Or feel that my position is up there on that mountain without support. You’re probably wanting to make sure that you are being realistic and that your position is not unrealistic or too high to be accomplished. I want to feel that I am down on level ground, because in negotiation people are not going to go — they usually are not going to take the risk to follow you up the mountain.

Coming apart would mean losing my temper, losing control of the situation, being unable to think clearly about the options because of whatever the emotional situation is. And the end result of that might be that when you come out and look at it, it has all kinds of come apart and gotten into these little blocks. I feel that if I am going to come apart, then everything will come apart. Especially if I am negotiating alone on an issue. If there is more than one person, maybe not. I think the coming apart may be personal, too. It might be that that is the way I will feel in a negotiation and that to me is a threatening feeling. The loss of control.

It is a city scene with the tall buildings lining a street. The street is abandoned and all you see is the pavement. On the pavement is an unlit pathway and on either side of the pathway are many banana peels. This image [represents] that I am concerned when entering into negotiations about slipping up.

--- Excerpts from student interviews ---

The prospect of performing sparks anxiety, especially if substantive or emotional stakes are high. For an actor, the mere thought of the tightened throat and rigid muscles that might render him speechless casts a frightening shadow, foretelling its appearance. Athletes likewise know performance anxiety as “choking.” For them, it is both the fear of failure and its aftermath, being branded as a loser.

Negotiators do not have to worry about blowing their lines or dropping the ball in front of a paying audience. Instead, for them, the critical voices often come from within. The strategic nature of negotiation, the way that it prompts people to be guarded, creates ideal conditions for cultivating self-doubt: have I demanded too much (or too little); am I being naïve or too suspicious about the other person’s intentions; have I won their respect or their contempt? The negotiation process does not provide clear answers to such
questions, certainly not in the opening. When negotiation opens, the only thing of which we can be sure is that things are seldom as they seem.

Like actors and athletes, negotiators who stumble at the beginning cannot go back and start again. Harsh words or careless concessions, once uttered, cannot be easily expunged. Negotiators, moreover, must perform without a script or clear rules. What they do and say in opening a negotiation must depend on the attitude and behavior of the other parties they are dealing with, each of whom will have his or her own agenda, expectations, and style. Of all the arts, negotiation has the closest kinship with jazz.  

Consider critic Philip Schaap’s description of the disastrous beginning of Benny Goodman’s legendary Carnegie Hall concert in 1938. This was the first time that jazz had been performed in the hallowed hall. The musicians were scared. Old footage shows them peeking nervously from the wings as the audience, dressed to the nines, filed into their seats. The band opened with a dull rendition of “Don’t Be That Way.” Only the drummer, Gene Krupa, seemed able to break through the collective anxiety. Schaap hears Krupa’s performance as insisting:

“This band sounds sad. We’re going to bomb. We’re in trouble.” He knows he has to do something. He’s not trying to wake up the crowd. He’s trying to wake up the band. He’s trying to relax them or scare them beyond their fear.

When Krupa’s solo comes in the arrangement, he attacks his drum kit in a way that Schaap calls “nearly cacophonous.”

It doesn’t make any sense except in the emotional content of, he’s trying to bust this band’s hump: “C’mon up on my back and I’ll teach you how to swing again, ’cause you guys forgot!”

Even today, hearing Krupa’s electrifying assault and the change it made in the rest of the band makes your hair stand on end. According to one trumpet player, “By the end of that first piece, we were back home.”

The anxiety that the musicians brought to the concert made its opening moments critical. Their fears about being flat, bombing, were contagious and quickly could have been caught by the audience. Krupa met emotion with emotion. The worst fears of fellow band members about what could go wrong in the performance were overwhelmed by his insistent, even reckless drumming. Band members were brought back to the here and now, and the tone was set for musical triumph.

It is worth asking whether the band’s stage fright could have been foreseen and, more to the point, what difference that would have made. All the ingredients for trouble now seem obvious. The concert was a controversial break with Carnegie Hall’s classical music tradition. (One of the players said that it made him feel “like a whore in church.”) The
audience would be seated and staid, with no place to get up and dance. And there was lots of talk that Goodman's band could not hold a candle to Chick Webb's hot musicians who would be playing uptown later that same night.

Even if Goodman could read all these signs correctly, he was poorly cast to deal with the consequences. Jazz historians describe him as cold and aloof, disliked by many of the men who played for him. But how about Krupa: how much foresight would he need to react as he did? Was his a practiced response or brilliantly spontaneous?

In this day and age, we have created a cottage industry of trainers who teach people how to react effectively in emergencies. Fire-fighters are run through simulations that are made as realistic as possible, for example, so they do not panic and can make instant decisions in a real blaze. The goal is to make their reactions almost automatic.

With jazz and perhaps negotiation, however, there is a risk of being too prepared. Just imagine if Krupa had foreseen the problem and somehow had gone through set after set of simulations, maybe practicing with a band that played elevator music. He might have experimented with different techniques to break them out of possible doldrums, but doing so would have been at the cost of getting used to the blandness. It was his own shock and anger at his band-mates' playing that generated sufficient energy for him to "scare them beyond their fear." Dampening those feelings surely would have muted his response.

Opening effectively thus may require a fine balance between solid preparation and maintaining the capacity for surprise. Actors, after all, use anxiety to summon and express a whole range of feelings. Athletes, in turn, are coached to get "up" for a game. For negotiators, some degree of anxiety may spark our energy and focus our attention. Too much, of course, can be distracting, even paralyzing. We will return to this idea of balance toward the end of the paper, after looking at other manifestations of anxiety in the first moments of negotiation.

Getting Off on the Wrong Foot

There's an image of people appearing to shake hands but they're actually holding guns... it appears to be an act of greeting and cordiality, but in reality it's pointing a gun at somebody. So there's a difference between the appearance and the reality... If I'm outsmarted, I feel like there was a missed opportunity... When I have been outfoxed by deceitful behavior or something; that is the worst. It makes you feel foolish.

I hate confrontation. I don't deal well with other people's anger. I think anger blocks both creativity and understanding because real anger is just such a boiling emotion that it overtakes you. I think that is what is negative about it. It blocks further communication.

Sometimes I fall short of meeting my objectives and sometimes the negotiation might fall apart. Sometimes I may harm a
relationship in that negotiation. So that is what I always have a concern for at the onset.

I think posturing is more a matter of style. There is posturing in virtually all negotiations. I'm using it in the situation when you have people transparently miscast the facts.

— Excerpts from student interviews

Research shows that first impressions are formed in a matter of seconds, and once in place, they are hard to dislodge (Ambady and Rosenthal 1992). A combination of primal instinct and personal experience quickly determines whether we regard another person as friend or foe, threatening or harmless, strong or weak.

It is not easy to tell why we are drawn to some people and put off by others (sometimes before they have even said a word). We vaguely attribute these judgments to good or bad chemistry, yet our impressions drive our behavior.10 Our own actions, in turn, can inadvertently elicit from others exactly the qualities that we expect, even if they are not in our interest. If we label someone else as belligerent, for example, we may be quick to defend ourselves against imagined assaults. In turn, that person may interpret our defensiveness as hostility and a negative spiral can rapidly ensue. As British psychoanalyst Henry Dicks put it, “The cat and the dog create one another, in order to fill deeply felt needs.”

The notion of projection is a staple of analytic theory. In a nutshell, it says that we sometimes relieve ourselves having to recognize our own worst tendencies by visiting them on others. Our suspicions of other people may betray our own unconscious temptation to be less than trustworthy. Consider how this subject merges his impression of other people’s motivations with his own:

Sometimes you can be in negotiations, outfoxed by somebody perhaps not playing fairly and I think that is a real difficult thing when it occurs. You can have a lack of honesty or you can see that. Sometimes people can play it a little bit unprofessionally; I think that is being outfoxed. I think being crafty and shrewd is playing your side intelligently.11

Of the ten participants in the study, only two explicitly identified with the predatory side of human nature within themselves: one acknowledged the wolf within him; the other saw himself as rifleman taking aim. The eight others visualized themselves fending off dangerous creatures, notably alligators, though perhaps they were revealing something of their own nature, as well.

Followers of Melanie Klein put anxiety at the center of analysis, tracing its origins to either “hatred and aggression (anxiety about the safety of the self in the face of one’s own hatred and aggression, or of the aggression from another) or from love (anxiety on behalf of the loved object).” To an
extent this is true, anxious negotiators bring a lot to the table, though, as Dylan Evans suggests, the impact on our relationship may be positive.

Anxiety can also affect the way we see others. The precise way in which it affects such judgments, however, is quite surprising. Rather than making us view strangers in a negative way, being in an anxious mood can actually make us feel closer to them (Evans 2001: 125).

However, this is not the case when people feel anxiety about how their counterparts will see them. Claude Steele and others have investigated what he terms “stereotype threat,” the phenomenon in which people anticipate that they will be typed and found wanting (Steele and Aronson 1995). The resulting anxiety can be debilitating, even when the social cues are seem-
ingly subtle. Women score worse when taking math exams with men rather than other women, for example. White athletes score worse than African-Americans in a simulated golf game when they are told that it is a test of their natural ability, while African-Americans perform worse when the same game is described as a test of strategic skill. In each of these examples, anxiety about living down a stereotype substantially hampers performance. It is perfectly reasonable to assume that it is true in negotiation, as well.

Openings may be especially critical as anticipation meets reality. Ideally, our worst fears are not confirmed. We discover that the people we encounter are not the wolves and alligators we fantasized, so we can put our anxieties aside and get to work. Things may not be so clear in other cases, however. Our ongoing uncertainty about other people’s motives and trustworthiness may deepen our initial fears.

The roles in which we are cast often do not help matters. Social psychologists have identified the “fundamental attribution error,” that is, the common tendency to ascribe other people’s behavior to their personality rather than to the situation. We see someone who makes high demands as aggressive, when he himself may feel pressed by circumstances.

Interpersonal dynamics can get convoluted in the opening moments of negotiation when we believe we have to counter other people’s preconceptions. Imagine the initial encounter between car salesman and his customer, for example. The salesman may fear that he will be regarded as a shark and the customer may be afraid of being taken for a pigeon. In the process of over-compensating, playing against type, neither will seem authentic.

Choice, Commitment, and Uncertainty

Going into the negotiation when the outcome is unknown, the feelings that you get along the way as things or issues or positions are unclear. It’s anything where direction is uncertain or the tenor of the negotiation might be uncertain. When you might wonder, have I prepared adequately for this, so preparation issues. Negotiation is an interaction where two sides need to influence each other, so in any interaction like that, the outcome would be unclear. You might have more or less a sense of where it’s likely to go. Whenever you are going into any situation where you think you are uncertain there tends to be anxiety.

A question that I knew was going to come up; to anticipate where your target is going to be; it’s dancing a little bit — it is anticipating the person’s next step; it’s chess — it’s thinking multiple moves down the line and not attacking the person where they are or addressing just the issue at hand.

You can feel uncertain at lots of points during an interaction. It can be [at the start] ... it could happen during the middle where things take an unexpected turn. Where there is something on the line that you wouldn’t want to lose or the outcome was something that you wouldn’t want to have happen ... you might have thoughts about how you could resurrect it or how you could change the outcome.

— Excerpts from student interviews
Openings are momentous because they require us to commit to certain actions and foreclose others. Will we be open and friendly at the outset, for example, or must we be more firm and detached? Some choices must be made. We cannot maintain all our options. Complexity theory teaches us that initial conditions matter and that seemingly small differences can send interactions in diverging directions (Wheeler 2002). Poets know this, too. Robert Frost's famous poem "The Road Not Traveled" is about the consequences of sudden choices. As Frost observes, both paths equally "lay in leaves no step had trodden black." Although the narrator tries to tell himself that he could keep the road not taken for another day, experience has taught him that, as Frost said, "way leads on to way," hence he "doubted that he should ever come back."

Our beginning steps are daunting because their consequences are important yet often unforeseeable. In negotiation we move ever onward, with way leading on to way. In giving life to one course of action, we have to truncate others. As with many things, the first step can be the hardest as it involves surrendering options.

Artists and writers know this as they begin new work. Winston Churchill was already an accomplished statesman and historian when he took up painting at age forty. Getting started was not easy.

Having bought the colours, an easel, and a canvas, the next step was to begin. But what a step to take! The palette gleamed with beads of colour; fair and white rose the canvas; the empty brush hung poised, heavy with destiny, irresolute in the air. My hand seemed arrested by a silent veto. But after all the sky on this occasion was unquestionably blue, and a pale blue at that. There could be no doubt that blue paint mixed with white should be put on the top part of the canvas. One really does not need to have had an artist's training to see that. It is a starting-point open to all. So very gingerly I mixed a little blue paint on the palette with a very small brush, and then with infinite precaution made a mark about as big as a bean upon the affronted snow-white shield. It was a challenge, a deliberate challenge: but so subdued, so halting, indeed so cataleptic, that it deserved no response.

Churchill went on to become a fine amateur painter (among other things) which makes his confession all the more telling. The bare canvas and the poised brush represented countless possibilities, all open, none certain. Faced with so many choices, he found it hard to elect just one.

For blocked writers, their fingers suspended over the keyboard, the problem is compounded. One word connects to the next, to be sure, just as one brush stroke creates the context for all those that follow. Joseph Heller claimed to have conceived Catch-22 with only the vague idea that it was to be a novel about World War II and that it would open with the sentence, "It was love at first sight." Supposedly the rest just flowed from there, but Heller also had to imagine the experience of a reader opening his book.
Writing first chapters — or even first sentences — is devilish because the reader must be charmed, coaxed, or challenged to go deeper into the work. What the reader encounters on page one may have been finished only after many drafts of the whole narrative. It is doubtful that the first three words that came to Melville were, "Call me Ishmael," but in the process of writing and rewriting he had to imagine how his readers would experience the opening of Moby Dick.

For actors, even great ones, the opening moments of a play can be harrowing. Laurence Olivier had stage fright for years, overcoming it by recalling the thousands of successful entrances he had made earlier in his career. Negotiators can profit from the same advice he consistently gave himself: show the audience the exterior you want to show, and their reaction will inspire your own self-confidence.

Practice

This essay began with Antonio Damasio's image of an actor stepping into the light as metaphor for opening up consciousness. It suggests a bright and hopeful process. For negotiators, the prospect of stepping to the bargaining table stirs unsettling feelings about competence, relationships, and making hard choices.

This anxiety and its consequences are not addressed in most negotiation texts. One notable exception is Difficult Conversations by Doug Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen.

The most stressful moment of a difficult conversation is often the beginning. We may learn in the first few seconds that the news for us is not good, that the other person sees things very differently, that we aren't likely to get what we want. They may become angry or distraught or we may discover that they don't want to talk with us at all (Stone, Patton, and Heen 1999: 147).

The authors observe that people often make the mistake of starting from an egocentric perspective, one that is implicitly judgmental and provocative. Such an approach can quickly provoke an emotional battle in which the participants struggle to justify their positions, indeed, their identities. For all the peril of openings, the authors believe that they are also opportunities to encourage constructive engagement. They maintain that, "It's when you have the greatest leverage to influence the entire direction of the conversation" (Stone, Patton, and Heen 1999: 147). "The third story," they say, "the one a keen observer would tell, someone with no stake in your particular problem," is the one they recommend to start with (Stone, Patton, and Heen 1999: 149-150).

Understanding this stance is one thing, practicing it is another, given the anxieties that we often carry with us. Seasoned psychoanalysts seek an open mind at the beginning of each new session (Caper 1995 and Goldsein...
1998), indeed, as each new moment unfolds (Leary and Wheeler 2003). Some of them, in turn, borrow from the Zen practice of beginner's mind: "The mind of the beginner is empty, free of the habits of the expert, ready to accept, to doubt, and open to all the possibilities." (Ringstrom 2001: 10) This attitude of openness and acceptance can lessen the weight of the initial moment, and give rise to fresh moments to come.

Epilogue
On September 16, 2001, Courtney Cowart was heading to lower Manhattan on the Lexington subway line. She was returning to Ground Zero, where five days earlier she had escaped a blinding maelstrom of dust and debris as the World Trade Center collapsed almost on top of her.

    Down the steps I went and boarded the first train. There in my car on one of the benches sat a skinny old wizened Sikh wearing an elaborate gray silk turban. No one would sit on the same bench with him. His bench was completely empty with everyone bunched up on the other side of the subway car. He sat there alone, perfectly straight and still, without a sound, but with tears just streaming down his face.

    As the train decelerated, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a crumpled dollar bill. Then he stooped over a Hispanic mother with an infant in her arms sitting by the doors. Into the baby's little fist he gently tucked the crumpled dollar bill, looking straight into the woman's eyes. She frowned back and looked at me with a huge question mark on her face and was about to protest when I blurted out urgently, "Don't stop him. He needs to do this."

    She was silent for a moment, then replied, "So we know that he is not cruel?"

    And I said, "Yes. So we know that he is not cruel."

    The doors opened. He stepped out. The doors closed. We looked at each other, and ALL of us, every person in that car, burst into tears. 80

    The anxiety that people bring to new experiences has many sources and can take many forms. That is also true for its release. The shared anxiety of the New York subway riders was palpable and overwhelming. The sorrow of the Sikh was different but no less intense. In that time and place emotions were laid bare. Then something happened.

    We cannot know for sure, but something in Cowart's face, perhaps an open attentiveness, invited the questioning look from the Hispanic mother. Although the two women had never met, they were connected by the mother's plea for help and reassurance. Cowart's spontaneous response was no less electric than Gene Krupa's at Carnegie Hall. It could not have been rehearsed. Its urgency had to match the emotional intensity of the moment. The protective mother who had felt threatened just an instant earlier was

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shocked into a new understanding and new relationships with Cowart, the Sikh, and everyone else on that subway car.

Openings are opportunities. They are critical moments in which mood is set, issues are framed, and relationships established. If these moments are recognized and lived emotionally, not just deliberately, they can be openings to new understandings and possibilities.

NOTES

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1. The apparent answer is "yes," if you give weight to research that demonstrates the psychological power of anchoring, but perhaps "no" if you believe their stated number may reveal the zone of possible agreement. G. Richard Shell, Bargaining for Advantage.

2. I believe win-win is hopelessly misguided as a basis for good negotiation, in business or in your personal life or anywhere else (Camp 2002: 1).

3. Reader can obtain a description of the methodology and examine the responses of participants in the pilot phase of the project at: http://www.hbs.edu/mnnegotiation. I am deeply grateful to my colleagues for their help and inspiration.

4. The quotes are taken from participant responses with linkages found in the following order on the website http://www.hbs.edu/mnnegotiation: Construct sub-map, linkages: Anxious, Worried → No Confidence; Anxious, Worried → Lose Advantage, Not in Control; and Anxious, Worried → Not Enhance Relationship, Rapport.

5. "By sabotaging a performance with anxiety, the athlete might be unconsciously avoiding pressure at the top, the temptation to be conceited, or, perhaps, the devastating realization that all the effort to succeed was not worth it." Joan S. Ingalls, "Reframing Mental Obstacles to Sports Performance: The Perturbation of a Complex Adaptive System," Emergence, 2001, 3(2): 45–56.

6. Trumpeter Wynton Marsalis has drawn the parallel himself. "The real power of jazz — and the innovation of jazz — is that a group of people can come together and create art, improvised art, and can negotiate their agendas with each other, and that negotiation is the art." Jazz, PBS Series by Ken Burns Vol 1, Gumbo, Introduction.

7. Anxiety is particularly contagious in groups and so, as it happens, is enthusiasm. See, Hatfield, Elaine, John T. Cacioppo, and Richard L. Rapson, Emotional Contagion, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 100.

8. "One of the main forces that affects consciousness adversely is psychic disorder — that is, information that conflicts with existing intentions, or distracts us from carrying them out. We give this condition many names depending on how we experience it: pain, fear, rage, anxiety, or jealousy." Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. 1990. Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience. New York: Harper & Row, p. 36. "[U]nconscious effects of emotions such as anger or anxiety can also induce error, by distracting people's attention from the task at hand." Amy Edmonson, "Learning from Mistakes Is Easier Said Than Done: Group and Organizational Influences on the Detection of Human Error," Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 1996, 32(1, 5): 8.

9. Participants' responses, found at http://www.hbs.edu/mnnegotiation, with the following linkages in order: Act Unethically, Without Respect → Not Fair, Balanced; Frustration, Anger → Not Willing to Cooperate; Anxious, Worried → Don't Improve Outcome.

10. "We are all now and then guilty of the folly of judging others at a glance, across a crowded room. It is the nature of first opinions to classify: in or out, strong or weak, dumb or smart, shrewd or naive. . . . At root the judgments are tribal: does the observed belong, or can I defeat him? This is not folly at the city gates in a time of siege. But it is as if we mean to understand human nature and not be admissions officers to our little aristocracies." Leston Haven as quoted in Kramer, 1997 (p. 256).

at the beginning of this section, particularly the person who said, "I think anger blocks both creativity and understanding because real anger is just such a boiling emotion that it overtakes you."


15. Thomas Schelling’s classic "Essay on Bargaining" describes situations in which we may increase bargaining power by eliminating options. Deliberately burning bridges behind us, we demonstrate to others that we are committed to moving forward. Thomas Schelling, *Strategy of Conflict*, Oxford University Press, 1962. This strategy may be easier for the analyst than for the person who actually has to strike the match.

16. Churchill was rescued by the fortuitous passing of a talented friend who chided him for his hesitation and grabbed his paintbrush. "Splash into the turpentine, wallop into the blue and the white, frantic flourish on the palette — clean no longer — and then several large, fierce strokes and slashes of blue on the absolutely cowering canvas. Anyone could see that it could not hit back. No evil fate avenged the jaunty violence. The canvas grinned in helplessness before me. The spell was broken. The sickly inhibitions rolled away. I seized the largest brush and fell upon my victim with Berserk fury. I have never felt any awe of a canvas since." Winston Churchill, *Painting as a Pastime*, 1952.

17. In some new multimedia art forms, the reader decides where to begin the story, not the writer. See, Tim Parks, "Hypertext or Hype?" *New York Review of Books*, October 2002.

18. I thank David Matz for this example.


REFERENCES


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