

UCT course offers the tools for win-win negotiations

Issued by [UCT Graduate School of Business](#)

28 Mar 2007

The UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) this April runs a short-course geared to provide dealmakers with the negotiating skills to turn tough stand-offs into win-win situations.

According to course director Barney Jordaan, a director of Maserumule Employment Consultancy, a specialist employment law and relations consultancy, the course is the distillation of years of experience in negotiation and addresses an important shortfall in skills development in the field.

“Negotiation is an all-pervasive practice for individuals, businesses, and countries. Negotiation happens every day in personal lives, such as between husbands and wives or in buying a car or house,” said Jordaan.

“In business it happens at all levels – between employers and employees, in business deals, in sales, and at board level to name a few. At a global level there are trade talks, political and economic alliances, and other major international disputes, all of which require negotiation skills that are effective – just recently, for example, a tough stand off involving North Korea over nuclear fuel was ended amicably after intensive rounds of negotiation.”

He explained that the one thing that all these examples, and indeed the great majority of negotiations, illustrate is that there are long-term relationships involved that need to be preserved.

“Yet, despite this fact, few people have the inherent ability to negotiate deals that are good for both sides. Many still cling to an outmoded view that they can only win if the other side loses.

“While this may result in a deal, the deal itself is often not the best one that could have been obtained but worse still, the relationship that was supposed to be maintained or established starts off on a strained note or is destroyed altogether,” he said.

“Very often, the losing party feels hurt or humiliated and may try to claw back in whatever way possible the gains that the other side have made. Soon disputes arise about what was agreed and what not, leading to a further cycle of acrimonious engagement, hostile emotions and shattered relationships.”

So what are the right ingredients for a modern negotiation?

Jordaan said the first of these would be to prepare well. “Successful negotiators make detailed plans. They know what is most important to each side, why they want what they want and what each brings to the table. By being well prepared, each party will be able to manage the negotiation process much more effectively and make whatever strategic and tactical adjustments may be required.”

“Secondly, be flexible. The best outcome is not going to be your outcome so it is important to be prepared to allow for some concessions. Taking the fixed approach can result in a missed opportunity to get what both parties want.”

Thirdly, he recommends that all the relevant stakeholders are involved. “For example, in negotiating change, such as a merger or downsizing within an organisation, time and time again decisions are made without participation at any stage by those affected by the decisions,” Jordaan said.

“Finally, use power wisely. In any negotiation, it is important to be assertive in a way that preserves the dignity of the other party. Basically be hard on the issues on the table and soft on the person across from you. On the other hand, many

people cave in too easily because they have a desire to be liked – they are not assertive enough and lose out.”

Negotiation, according to Jordaan, is a learnt skill and no one is born with any more ability than anyone else.

“What people are born with is a competitive spirit - and that is sometimes what gets the better of us. In negotiation a draw is usually the best result for all.”

Jordaan explained that the course, running from 18 – 20 April, will explore different approaches to negotiation in detail and teach negotiators how to advance their interests in a co-operative manner.

“It combines both theory and practice and uses a host of relevant real world case studies. Negotiation is like training for long distance running - being good at it requires training and thorough preparation. To be an effective negotiator, you also require problem-solving, analytical and communication skills - essential life skills we don't get taught as a standard part of our secondary or tertiary education. Yet they are critically important in today's changing world,” he said.

The course is being run by the UCT GSB's Executive Education unit, which was recently rated in the global top ten for executive short courses by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2006 and 2007.

For more information on the course contact Tracy on (021) 406 1346 or . The website is www.gsb.uct.ac.za/negotiation.

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