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# Hostage at the Table by George Kohlrieser: A Critical Book Review

## **Authors**

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## **Introduction**

George Kohlrieser is a professor of leadership and organizational behavior, psychologist, and veteran hostage negotiator. In his book *Hostage at the Table*, he contends that conflict resolution is not difficult if we understand how human self-esteem operates. He believes that deep within humans reside slumbering powers that most of us do not even activate. These latent powers can revolutionize our lives if aroused and put into action.

In the following pages, we explore his ideas in three steps. First, we look at his premises: the bonding and secure bases as a base of relationships and motivation of basic needs, the broken bond or loss as a source of conflict, and conflict management through the lens of healthy bonding. Second, we explore the tools that Kohlrieser offers to the negotiator: seeing through the mind's eye and understanding, controlling, and using these emotions. Finally, we discuss dialogue as the element that brings together the elements of bonding, seeing through the mind's eye, and harnessing energy for the common benefit. In this way, dialogue can be understood as an indispensable stage of negotiation in every step.

In our review, we aim to bring alive the concepts of the author through connections with the responsible negotiation approach; however, this exercise is also vigilant of potential limitations of Kohlrieser's approach and tools.

### **I. The building blocks of *Hostage at the Table***

#### **A reflection on secure base and bonding in negotiation**

The key in understanding every human action, according to George Kohlrieser, lies in understanding the human need to bond with others, and often with their most important goals (as a manner of identifying themselves through a goal or boosting self-confidence). According to the author, when we make a connection with somebody, i.e. we attain *attachment*, it gives us comfort. If the attachment develops, we experience *bonding*. The emotional exchange with the person follows. "Bonding creates a synergy whereby a mutual impact on emotions is created. It is an exchange of energy" (Kohlrieser, 2006, p.42).

While we bond with many people and in many situations, we create bonds of different intensity with some people and goals. When an especially powerful bond is created, Kohlrieser describes it as a *secure base*. "They serve as anchors in our lives" (Kohlrieser, 2006, p.67) is a description offered by the author that really helps us understand this concept. Further, he states that not only are secure bases important, they are necessary. In his analysis, the ability to find

suitable and willing figures to gain as secure bases, and the capacity to form mutually enriching bonds with them, lies at the essence of a healthy personality.

Thus, it is understandable that the author explores all relationships, even between a hostage taker and hostage, and between any dialoguing or negotiating pair (or group), through the lens of bonding and secure bases. Bonding and secure bases are two important aspects that, in many ways, inspire motivation to the negotiating parties to come to a mutually agreeable solution. The bonding cycle explains human motivation (Kohlrieser, 2006). Understanding why an individual does what he does is achieved by putting that actor in the context and analyzing interrelationships of that actor with others, and with themselves.

If a positive relationship exists, then a chance of transformation exists to transform from a conflict situation to cooperative endeavor, and vice versa. In the same way, a secure base not only offers a sense of protection and comfort, but also energizes the actor to explore, take risk, and seek change. Both of these acts have cathartic value. Therefore, they are instrumental. Thus, bonding and the secure base can change the negotiation game.

Biologically, a human brain accommodates threats. The amygdala inherits such trait. However, a human person is a political entity (Nietzsche, 1901). Bonding and finding a secure base in the other tend to empower the power-seeking human. In empowering others, the secure base and bonding help shift the paradigm to make the negotiator more powerful than before. Once negotiators feel that they have achieved power through the process, they are comfortable to deal with even hard issues with confidence and togetherness. This time, it is the power of value, morals, and ethics. It creates trust, empathy, and belonging. An act performed under a condition of mistrust and alienation produces a negative mindset. A negative mindset impacts the result of negotiation adversely. Negotiation, therefore, must be performed in a trustful environment, free from stress and disorder. To create this environment, one must learn to become a secure base for the other party. Employing a secure base, a negotiator can dictate or direct the mind's eye and focus towards the positive aspects of the deal. It can inspire through intrinsic motivation, rather than extrinsic motivation, like tangible materials. A secure base offers a sense of protection, belongingness, and, above all, solidarity to the parties engaged in negotiation. Moreover, it creates a sense of ownership of the contract to the parties involved.

Different cultures have different strategies to share information in negotiation (Hall, 1976). No universal approach exists to deal with a hostage taker. Identifying the hostage taker is important to understanding the negotiation process. In many cases, negotiation fails because

we do not know who they are, what they want, and why. A hostage might not be informed about the worldview of the hostage taker. In such a situation, exercising empathy and assertiveness might help.

But can we negotiate with a serial killer? Can we negotiate with an Islamic State member? Can we negotiate with a border guard? Can we negotiate with an agent of structural violence in the contemporary world order? A secure base and bonding are based on achieving a similar set of mind. The mindset is necessarily not the same at the start. The author uses his experience to suggest that we can change our hearts and minds in almost every situation, but this can be problematic in many cases. Forming secure bases and bonding might be relatively easy at a human resource department of a business enterprise, but not in an organization having theological goals and political objectives.

The negotiator must make the negotiation beyond the table involving and considering the interest, position, and needs of the stakeholders. Lempereur describes this approach as exploring the forest beyond the trees, where he suggests the involvement of seven clusters of stakeholders: namely (1) me and the other, (2) my and their principal, (3) my and their implementers, (4) the absentees, (5) the legal gatekeepers, (6) the universal audience, and (7) the next generations (Lempereur, 2012). In the types of negotiations where many stakeholders are at the table or as principals or stakeholders, an individual negotiator can find it very difficult to establish bonding or become a secure base. We must be very careful in distinguishing what bonding can and cannot achieve, and that perhaps the other party's secure bases are in extreme opposition to our chance of bonding. This is where Kohlrieser's reach is weak, because most of the situations that are the backbone of the analysis are individual-level, where few external actors exist to complicate the matter.

However, there is always a chance in negotiation. A responsible negotiator must be aware of the changing dynamics of the situation. Weakness can be transformed into strength at an opportune time. Therefore, the negotiator should never give up. Rather, the negotiator must keep the negotiation process ongoing until a favorable agreement is reached. Disrupting the process does not help. Kamandaka says:

At night, the owl kills the crow; and the crow kills the owl when night passes away...A dog can overpower a crocodile when it is on the land, and the crocodile can overpower the dog when it is in water. Therefore one (a king) exerting with the advantages of the place in his favor, enjoys the fruition of his acts. (Verse 37 and 38, Page 222).

### **Broken Bonding as Source of Conflict**

In negotiation, we face conflict. In fact, conflict lies at the very heart of the need for negotiating: the parties disagree about how to solve problems and about what the problems are. These disagreements are rooted in conflicting interests. However, often a conflict of interests can contain or flow from a deeper conflict, the conflict of needs. Needs have much deeper motivations than interests – they touch upon the very identity of a person or group.

The treatment of conflict of needs receives deep attention in *Hostage at the Table*. The author is able to analyze these deeper motivations by tapping into the deeper roots of needs. He proposes that deep conflict is rooted in the existence of a breakage of bonding and in dealing with the breakage. Bonding – with people and with goals – follows a natural cycle, where any bond ultimately gets interrupted, as a result of growing up, getting older, completing a mission, or unexpectedly through sudden loss like death. This process, described as *separation* by Kohlrieser, provokes strong emotions that have to be dealt with through the process of *grieving*. If the process of separation and grieving is not appropriately completed, the person or collective cannot move forward, look ahead, and open up to new bonds.

The understanding of deep conflict through the lens of a broken bond gives the negotiator powerful tools to deal with this type of conflict. First of all, although broken bonds and losses are expressed through emotions like anger, even violence, and block the person from “being rational” about a solution, we no longer view the situation as “irrational,” thus intractable. On the contrary, because we know that expressed emotions stem from a deep motivation rooted in a broken bond, it is easier for us to do what *The First Move* (Lempereur & Colson, 2010) indicates as an appropriate response – acknowledge the emotions and validate the right of the person to feel them.

Second, understanding that there is a source of the emotions we perceive helps us to refocus and separate the person from the problem. This is fundamental in order to be able to manage the conflict, as will be explained in the next chapter.

Third, if we can identify the source of the breakage, its internal logic is revealed. Kohlrieser points to multiple types of losses that people experience. These relate to broken bonding with people (loss of attachment, territory, structure, and loss of secure bases) and deep goals (loss of identity, future, meaning, and control, Kohlrieser, 2006, p.105). Additionally, in ongoing relationships with a negotiating partner, we can break our bonding over differences in perceptions of goals, solutions, roles, status, or values, if we attach more importance to those

differences than to the bond with the person. In any negotiation, if people come to the table with strong involuntary emotions, it is likely that an important bond has been broken, whether by our actions or not, and the negotiation of interests and solutions cannot proceed without acknowledging these.

Finally, perhaps the most important contribution of the author is the understanding he affords us regarding the dynamic quality of bonding and loss. As bonding follows a naturally creative-destructive cycle, when we encounter a negotiating partner suffering the loss of a bond, we know that she is going through a process (or perhaps is stuck in that process without progressing). This provides an entirely different perspective on how to deal with emotions. A static view no longer exists – “you are feeling loss” - which only allows for the first step in managing the emotion, i.e. acknowledgement. We can proceed, after identifying the loss suffered, to understand where in the cycle of separation or grief the person is located. Often, the emotions expressed can be an excellent guide. Kohlrieser builds on the scholarship on stages of grief to isolate eight stages of this process. Grieving starts with denial, continues with protest and anger, then sadness and longing, fear and loneliness, to finally evolve into acceptance, the ability to make new attachments, forgiveness, and gratitude. The first four stages provoke the negative emotions that we can encounter in conflict situations, like (apparently) unfounded resistance to change, anger, cynicism, mistrust, and violence. Kohlrieser’s analysis thus clearly connects external “irrational” expressions during dialogue to internal states that are rooted in psychological change processes.

In conclusion, the book, in its treatment of conflict, offers a unique perspective on how to put people first, one of the basic precepts of responsible negotiation. Furthermore, especially when there are heightened emotions in play, the analysis permits us to understand putting people first as a process in itself – acknowledging, finding the root of the emotion, and helping the person to go through the grieving in order to refocus on new bonds.

While the tools appear powerful, again, the weakness can be found in the individual-level analysis carried out. In the case of negotiating with agents that represent complex collective interests (like ethnic groups, armed guerillas, and even countries), even if we can identify a deep need based on a collective loss (like loss of identity), it might prove difficult to allow for the completion of the grieving process within the context of negotiation. Certainly it takes a longer-term relationship (long-term negotiation practice) that perhaps can slowly ease the tension produced by loss. It could be very powerful if Kohlrieser’s approach could be adapted to collective conflict negotiation.

### **Dynamics of healthy relationship in conflict management**

Having a conflict is normal and a basic part of human life. If a conflict is mismanaged, it is capable of producing greater harm, especially to the people involved. In negotiation, relationships are very important and necessary in successful conflict resolution. When problems emerge, people often only focus on the specific issues at hand, and they fail to realize the larger issues at play. This failure to understand the dynamics underlying our relationships often makes it more difficult for people to resolve conflict.

George Kohlrieser, in his book “Hostage at the Table,” identifies a number of interpersonal actions that are very instrumental and can play a vital role in keeping the relationship intact during negotiation. As a psychologist, he believes that the human mind is governed by emotions. Emotions are normal, necessary, and often essential to problem solving, but in pursuing a purpose, we time and again act emotionally not logically. Emotion and mood can affect temperament, personality, disposition, motivation, initial perspectives, and reactions (Boundless Management). Kohlrieser is of the view that emotions such as fear, anger, frustration, or even love may disrupt our ability to decide rationally. Balance between emotion and logic is a practical path to prevent being held hostage (Kohlrieser, 2006, p.113).

During negotiations, the quality of the relationship also depends upon how well we understand each other. Getting to know another is a slow process. It is hard to trust strangers. Many groups neglect this reality, assuming that the issue at hand is more important than their relationships. Individuals tend to take their own interests disproportionately. Understanding others’ interests, perceptions, and notions of being treated fairly is key to achieving a mutual outcome (Uhle, 2006).

Conflict resolution requires effective communication. In negotiation, the ability to show that understanding of how the other person feels is perhaps the single most powerful communication skill. The more effectively we communicate our differences, the better we understand each other’s concerns. Open and honest communications reduce uncertainty and breed a trustworthy and healthy relationship (Kohlrieser, 2006, p.113). During negotiations, effective communication can create a successful linkage to reach a mutually acceptable agreement.

Another important feature in relationships is reliability. We often desire quick solutions of our problems, but our desire for an immediate outcome suppresses our ability to create a bond and will have a profound effect on the quality of relationships. Kohlrieser argues that the more

honest and reliable we are with each other, the better our chances of producing good outcome (Kohlrieser, 2006, p114).

Kohlrieser advocates cooperative approaches during negotiation. In a cooperative approach, the negotiator shares information, seeks creative solutions, is willing to disclose sensitive information, and overall seeks to cultivate an environment of mutual trust and fairness. Kohlrieser believes that in negotiation, less coercive and more cooperative approaches move forward our ability to work with each other, and this persuasive process brings in mutual benefits (Kohlrieser, 2006, p.114).

Many conflict theorists blend the concepts of interests and needs, but a clear distinction exists between them (Kohlrieser, 2006, p.115). Interests are tangible things, such as land, money, or jobs that can be traded and compromised, while needs are intangible things, such as identity, security, and recognition, which are not for trading. Since needs are intangible, they are often hidden underneath the more visible conflict over interests. But when human needs are in conflict, too, resolving the conflict of interest will not remove the conflict. Sometimes, attempts to deal with the conflict of interest will actually make the situation worse, as people get angry at the thought of having to compromise, as is usually done with interest-based conflicts. Similarly, the fundamental rule of "separating the people from the problem" can also make matters worse as the identity of the person is the problem (Kohlrieser, 2006, p.115).

Conflicts between ethnic groups, for example, are almost always needs-based conflicts, as one group feels that its identity, security, its fair place in the social, political, or economic system, or the recognition of the value of its culture is being denied. This is particularly apparent, perhaps, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Palestinians feel they are being denied their legitimate national identity, while the Israelis feel a need to prevent the formation of a Palestinian state, because they see such a state as a threat to Israeli security. Tim Cooper in his article "Keeping the Peace or Making Peace" explains about the mediation of gang conflicts in the United States. Cooper points out the fundamental human needs that are served by gang membership and argues that those needs must be addressed if gang violence is to be diminished (Cooper, 1991).

Conflict resolution is a complex process. Successful conflict resolution requires the ability to continuously maintain the bond. Being curious, creative, and searching for compromise and cooperation have their advantages, but during negotiation, our focus should be avoiding being taken hostage by these elements. Treat the other person with dignity and respect. Never create

an enemy, and do your best to be courteous. By separating the problem from the person, you can discuss issues without damaging relationships (Kohlrieser, 2006, p.114).

Individuals, NGO's, and the corporate sector can also benefit from these techniques to ensure harmony and viability of relations. Organizations must encourage a climate of trust and openness in which people feel that it is safe for them to raise questions or concerns without fearing consequences. In the absence of such, climate concerns will become "fish under the table" and will result in tension and other disruptive behaviors (Kohlrieser, 2006, p.119).

Professor Alain emphasizes that humans are born negotiators, and what we need to learn is how to be good or responsible negotiators (Lempereur & Colson, 2010, p7). We live in a world where human needs are dependent on each other, so he illustrates negotiation as an art of survival. Alain elaborates a negotiation methodology based on three pillars: people, problem, and process. He puts people first in the pillar, because relationship, trust, and bonding are at the core of problem solving and are basic techniques for successful negotiation (Lempereur & Colson, 2010, p.31)

Conflict is everywhere around us, and we go through different experiences during our personal and professional lives every day. The talent of handling conflict begins with the technique of respect, bonding, and bridge building. Feeling accepted, worthy, and valued are basic psychological needs, so during conflict, we must stay engaged, understand the other's interests, needs, and desires and the pain they are going through (Kohlrieser, 2006, p.121). We can only do so with a "hostage free state of mind."

## **II. The art of building bonds**

### **Seeing with the Mind's Eye**

The "mind's eye" refers to the ability of human beings to visualize images in their minds. In other words, it refers to the ability of generating images regardless of whether or not an object is seen by our eye or not (Rogers, 2008). This mental imaginary can be translated into the reproduction of life's images, of our worlds, that can affect us in profound ways (Rogers, 2008). Mind's eye gives us this opportunity to imagine the world around us in a different way, through images that may be far from reality or that might happen in the future (Pearson, 2010).

According to Kohlrieser (2006), the mind's eye has two systems of selective attention, as well as a system of interpretation. It forms the way we look at a particular situation and determines how we will act or react in that situation. The imagination of things that have not taken place or do not exist enables us to create possible future events in our mind's eye

(Pearson, 2010). This ability is used to improve the performance of athletics, to install positive thinking, and to treat the symptoms of certain mental conditions (Rogers, 2008).

Many of the most successful performances, leaders, creative artists, and great teachers all know that positive imagination of success is helpful in making it happen. They use their mind's eye to focus on the benefits and positive aspects, and not the pain, because they believe that through visualizing our success, we embrace our victory. It means that more focus on the benefits equals a greater probability of success in our practices. In contrast, focusing on the negatives and visualizing the pain and frustration in our mind's eye will determine the way we view the world. Generally, if we believe something will happen, it does happen (Kohlrieser, 2006).

This model is also applicable in a negotiation cycle. When we are preparing for negotiation, we consider the preparation method by addressing the three dimensions of people, problem, and process (Lempereur & Colson, 2010). Understanding the role of the mind's eye in the people and problem dimensions will be discussed below.

### **People dimension**

In each negotiation, it is very important for the negotiator to have a clear picture of what he/she wants in his/her mind's eye. In other words, the negotiator should be clear on his/her motivations, feelings, and goals and focus on them. Our mind's eye can direct us to focus on the failure and frustration (negative) or on the success and benefit (positive) (Kohlrieser, 2006). So it means that we have two options when we are preparing for negotiation or even during any negotiation. One option is to concentrate on the "losing cycle" (Kohlrieser, 2006). It involves surrounding ourselves with the setbacks, focusing on the failure, and being the hostage of our negative mind-set. In this situation the negotiator will be trapped by hopelessness and frustration and unable to continue in an effective way. As a result, no strong relationship and no positive outcome will exist. On the contrary, the other phase is to use "winning cycle" (2006). Through a positive mind's eye, we focus on the beneficial aspect of the negotiation and create successful relationships with the other party, helping achieve a positive outcome. The difference between these two situations is the perception of the situation that we create in our minds (Williams, 2015). Constantly, our state of mind is reflected in how we present ourselves. The way that we talk, our gestures, posture, and tone of voice all reflect our mind's eye (Kohlrieser, 2006).

### **Problem dimension**

This dimension talks about the content or issue around which the negotiations take place. One of the “trumps” in dealing with issues is the motivation of the actors (Lempereur & Colson, 2010). People with different views come together to negotiate and attempt to reach an agreement. To reach this point, understanding the mind’s eye of another person in the negotiation is very crucial, and it happens through understanding the motivations and interests of the other party. Recognizing others’ motivations and interests is as critical as knowing our own motivations. Considering the other party’s motivation is important since without it we cannot establish effective and strong relationships. Through active listening, speaking, and taking into account the other’s motivations, we can create bonds that allow us to influence the other person in each negotiation (2010). Understanding the motivations of the negotiators will help us avoid getting caught in a trap of “positionalism,” in which only one solution is available (2010).

### **Conclusion**

The mind’s eye is an important part of the brain. Although our brain is hardwired to look for danger and pain, our mind’s eye can also direct us to focus on the positive or negative aspects of any event (Kohlrieser, 2006). The positive and negative state we create controls the result we will achieve. People who push their thoughts toward the positive have more control of the situation than those who have a negative mind-set. People with a negative mind-set feel that their situation is hopeless and powerless. Feeling powerless is one of the signs of being a hostage to your mindset.

Understanding the mind’s eye helps us at the personal level to change our view regarding the environment around us. In addition, through understanding the mind’s eye of another person, we can influence that person for mutual benefit (Kohlrieser, 2006).

As Kohlrieser discusses, using the mind’s eye gives us the ability to stay focused when we are negotiating with others. It also helps us to manage our emotions and positively influence others’ emotions. When we have a clear and positive picture in our mind’s eye, we will be more focused in our goal and on the path to achieving it.

Visualizing is a method that is practiced by successful people. They visualize their success in their own mind’s eye. Concentrating on success in negotiation gives us the opportunity to focus on the possibilities. This will avoid the “unique solution” trap (Lempereur & Colson, 2010), and the negotiator will choose an approach that uncovers different solutions.

In any negotiation, visualizing success in the mind's eye, recalling the positive feelings and thoughts we have had in similar situations, and exploring the realm of possibilities all give us more self-confidence with respect to the skills that we have. In this way, we can overcome impasses in negotiation (Williams, 2015). So eyes on the prize!

### **Mastering our Emotions in Negotiations**

Human emotions are component parts of our evolutionary legacy (Adler, Rosen, Silverstein, 1998). Emotions play a key and, occasionally, dominant role in our everyday lives. George Kohlrieser weaves the fabric of the chapter "Mastering our Emotions" by bringing in facets of emotion-led hostage negotiations and indicates ways to hold power over emotions and avoid getting hostages to them. For Kohlrieser, the concept "hostage" takes a more significant meaning and stands not only for occasions when someone finds herself helpless in a physical sense, but in terms of psychology as well. Throughout the chapter, we can also endeavor linking the analogy of hostage situations charged with emotions with the people, problem, and process perspective.

### **Emotions in Negotiation**

Negotiations, owing to their characteristics, produce and promote strong images of emotions (Fromm, n.d.). It is not a wonder that sometimes emotions are stronger than facts in setting the mode and consequence of negotiations, where people come across to mainly advance their self-concerns or where the preceding accounts of the groups concerned have been colorized by bitterness. The way negotiators check those emotions, therefore, have an intense effect on the development and outcome of the negotiation. Understanding and dealing with our emotions and those of other people are some of the indispensable things we can do to avoid being taken as hostage during negotiations. Hence, in order to become a really expert negotiator, it is crucial not only to apply cognitive abilities and schemes but also to be sound in an emotional manner.

### **Positive and Negative Aspects of Emotions in Negotiations**

Emotions often erupt before rational faculties play a part in our activities (Goleman, 1995). When emotions run amuck, negotiators do not sense nuances, thereby losing position and making blunders or performing in a poor or unsatisfactory manner. An aggravated emotional state often sets off intense and, occasionally, irrational activities. Thus, anger and a disinclination to be humiliated or "lose face" overpower rational faculties during the

negotiation (Murnighan, 1991). At the extreme point, intense anger can lead to violence, hostility, and broken relationships.

Conversely, the concept that emotions can be sparked off so promptly - before our rational faculties can evaluate a situation - does not imply that we must submit ourselves for a limitless time to being misdirected by our emotions. One requires only reflecting briefly to experience a great deal of positive aspects of emotions during negotiations. If we are not concerned or interested about our true aim, we become apathetic, and thereby inefficient, negotiators. Emotions provide us with our values and give us an incentive to go after them. Moreover, the emotions expressed in a creative way and in a timely manner in the negotiation help us signal the other party about our views and provide us with important feedback about the other side's mood and willingness to be in agreement (Putnam, 1994). Hence, negotiators can ameliorate the efficiency and effectiveness of a negotiation by developing an intelligence of the information conveyed by emotions - their own and those of others. After all, emotions are what render energy to the values and goals that negotiators bring to the table (Callahan, 1988).

### **Overcoming Being Taken as a Hostage by Emotions during Negotiation**

In real life official negotiation, we have a very slim chance of being sequestered and taken as a hostage literally. However, very often negotiators are taken hostage by their emotions whenever they are confronted with some aggressive negotiators. Many negotiators in conflict situations are "hostages" to their inner fears and other negative emotions and fail to see the opportunities in resolving them. They are put off by the negative emotions associated with the other's proposal and provocative behavior and feel helpless and risk reacting with the same manner that often perpetuates the deadlock (Lempereur & Colson, 2010). Emotion-driven exchanges result in the making of extreme demands, which force people apart. Once extreme demands are placed, one or both sides feel compelled to fend for them. The more time and effort spent rationalizing these extreme positions, the harder it becomes for either party to put away their egos and take a problem-solving, win-win approach. Both sides get interlocked into their positions and their demands, feeling that they cannot afford to look weak by seeking compromise. Often the extreme demands are intensified, and all parties are driven further apart. In these contexts, they are too obsessed with external factors and neglect the importance of what should concern them the most. They start thinking with a hostage mind-set and believe that they have no alternatives but to change the external situation.

In that case acknowledging emotions of people is key, and negotiators need to be moving beyond a purely technical approach of negotiation. They can overcome this challenge by experiences and choice. Their responsibility should be to focus on the core matter and concentrate on what they want to achieve, not on the obstacles in the way. They need to be focusing on the benefits beyond the fear, the danger, or potential pain. In fact, as what Lempereur has said that “the aggressor’s violence can be put in a positive light by viewing it as an indication of the extreme importance they place on a given issue” is driven by deep motivation (Lempereur & Colson, 2010). In addition to the behavioral techniques for addressing the physical and emotional elements of anger, they need to find ways to communicate their dissatisfaction and express their worries. They need to empathize with the other and be self-assertive simultaneously without abandoning any ground on the problem and search for negotiable solutions through creating more values replacing the flow of complaints with the flow of ideas.

On the other hand, in extreme cases of hostage negotiations, solutions away from the table like an armed assault are very difficult to imagine, as human lives are at stake. Regarding this particular problem perspective, hostage negotiators have a responsibility to manage their emotions of fear and anger and to engage in negotiation with the hostage takers, if only to gain time to prepare an armed attack or bring them back to a more reasonable state of mind. So even when people are taken hostage, their situations are not desperate. They still have some power to think, feel, breathe, and speak. The negotiator’s priority therefore should be listening to the hostage taker in order to get as much information as possible about his psychological profile, logistical position, equipment, intentions, state of the hostages, and the motivations that incited such a gesture (Lempereur & Colson, 2010). By connecting through effective communication process, i.e. active listening, negotiators can create a relationship of trust in almost all cases in an attempt to bring the hostage takers back to a more sensible frame of mind.

### **Tools to Deescalate Emotions**

Three simple tools that Kohlrieser suggests for deescalating emotional situations are to give choice, provide perspective, and take a time out.

#### *1. Give choice*

A powerful tool to use when people are asking someone to change their mind is to give them a choice. Switching the focus from changing their mind to having a choice instead enables

the person to make a decision based on additional information that feels rational but is actually emotional.

### 2. *Provide perspective*

When people are overwhelmed with over escalated emotions, the goal should be to refocus and see the situation from another perspective, i.e. whether the situation is critical, all permeating, or will last for infinity to help deescalate the emotions.

### 3. *Take a time out*

When negotiators are in a high emotional state and perceive that they are overwhelmed, taking a time out or a pause to get some fresh air might be useful to let emotions cool down before continuing.

Depending on how people deal with emotions in negotiation, they may be either dominated by emotions or masters of them - with changing results. Available grounds powerfully indicate that negotiators can better their self-awareness of emotions and that they can check them to their advantage when they bargain. The one thing negotiators cannot do - nor should they attempt - is to eliminate emotions.

## **III. Dialogue and negotiation: the seeking of a greater truth**

Dialogue is an important tool that is commonly used in the field of conflict transformation. It is often presented as the main activity of organizations who are engaged in mediation, negotiation, and peacebuilding processes at the local or national levels. As it takes much effort for conflicting parties to engage in dialogue, the mere facilitation of a dialogue is often deemed a success in itself, even though it might not yet have led to an agreement or a change in the situation. One can wonder, though, what is the difference, if any, between dialogue and negotiation? Are they separate tools or different components of a similar process of conflict settlement? What are the key elements of a successful dialogue? What type of change does it bring forward? In his book "Hostage at the Table," Kohlrieser puts great emphasis on the importance of dialogue in any effort aimed at solving a conflict. It can be inferred from his arguments that an effective dialogue is the essence and condition for a negotiation to be successful. Returning to the definitions of mediation, dialogue, and negotiation, this section will briefly explore the specific nature of dialogue and what it brings to responsible negotiations. It will try to demonstrate that besides being a tool, an approach, or a strategy, a dialogue is above all an "état d'esprit" (mindset), because it requires a specific attitude and behavior towards oneself and the "other."

Dialogue is one of the several approaches used in the peaceful settlement of conflicts. The following definitions help shed light on the differences between dialogue, mediation, and negotiation as processes aimed at the nonviolent resolution of conflicts.

*Mediation:* A structured communication process in which an impartial third party works with conflict parties to find commonly agreeable solutions to their dispute in a way that satisfies their interests at stake. It usually includes four main phases: “talks about talks,” mediated negotiations, agreements, and implementation (OSCE, 2014, p.10).

*Dialogue:* It is a more open-ended communication process between conflict parties in order to foster mutual understanding, recognition, empathy, and trust (OSCE, 2014, p.10).

*Negotiation:* It is the ability to engage in a dialogue that can lead to resolving the real issue in conflict. In other words, negotiation is the art of saying “no” while maintaining bonding until an agreement is reached (Kohlrieser, 2006, p.150).

What can be inferred from these definitions is that dialogue is both a process and a tool. As a process, it differs from mediation and negotiation in the sense that it is not tied to achieving a specific objective or dealing with a particular issue. Thus, it is a safe and enabling space that allows conflicting parties to acknowledge the “other,” to get to know and listen to each other, and to try to understand the “other’s” perspectives and concerns. Since the focus is on the individuals and on the (re)building of a positive relationship between them, and not on the achievement of an agreement or settlement, it defuses tensions and negative feelings such as fear, anxiety, and anger that can arise when an issue at stake. This does not mean that mediation and negotiation processes are not concerned with individuals. Responsible mediation and negotiation need to put the people first in order to achieve a successful, sustainable, and ethical agreement. “If there is no relationship, there is no possibility for good negotiation” (Lempereur, 2010, p. 65). But mediation and negotiation will not achieve their objective if a solution does not emerge from the discussions. This does not mean that dialogue never leads to a decision or the undertaking of a commonly agreed on action. Rather, it can bring about such positive outcomes, but they are not its primary goal.

As a tool, dialogue is essential in both negotiation and mediation processes to connect with the other, develop trust, and nurture an environment conducive to open, peaceful, and fruitful discussion. “Negotiators start by creating a relationship, a bond through which people can work together” (Kohlrieser, 2006, p. 174). A comparison between dialogue and debate or discussion, as communicative tools, sheds light on the specific nature of dialogue. While in a debate or a

discussion, the focus is on the assertion of one's own arguments against the (views of the) other, a dialogue is more directed towards hearing the other's perspective and trying to understand them or at least to make sense of them. The tendency in a debate or discussion is to claim that we are right and to demonstrate that the other is wrong. We remain firmly grounded on our positions, which means that the only conclusion can be a loss or a win at the expense of oneself or the other. In contrast, as explained by Kohlrieser, dialogue is a "shared inquiry," and the pursuit of mutual enlightenment through listening to each other's perspectives, concerns, and needs. "It is not something you do to another person, it is something you do with another person. [...] The focus is on understanding the other person and not only on their understanding us" (Kohlrieser, 2006, p.124). Thus, it requires a shift in mindset and leads to a win-win situation where nothing can be lost as long as mutual respect, recognition, and commitment to the process are achieved.

What then would be the criteria of an effective and meaningful dialogue? What can a dialogue do (to us) that shows that something has changed, even if not in the form of a decision or an action? In a world where our attention is constantly diverted away by countless distractions and the use of new technologies, and where the focus is on the satisfaction of the ego, people are more engaged in mechanical dialogues than authentic and meaningful ones. Thus, what would a true dialogue look like between conflict parties, and should they be afraid of it? "Dialogue is a very dangerous business," asserts Mohammed Abu-Nimer (2002, p.15). "Once opponents meet in a genuine dialogue setting, they will never return to the same positions or level of awareness that they had before." Whether they agree with them or not, opponents are exposed through dialogue to new perspectives and additional knowledge that might broaden their views and provide them with greater understanding. It is like a puzzle whose scattered pieces are put together to shed light on a disturbed and complex reality. If well handled, dialogue can lead participants to an introspection of their own prejudices, a recognition of their misperceptions, and the breaking down of stereotypes. They come to realize that one's identity and feelings are not necessarily lost or betrayed in the expression of the other's identity and feelings. It is often thought that "conducting a war is far more virile and honorable than articulating in words one's envy for an enemy group" (Gopin, 2005, p.145). Rather, the ability to demonstrate empathy and tolerance are not signs of weakness but the development of a new relationship to oneself, one's group, and the "other." A true dialogue does not lead to the loss of one('s) truth but to the discovery of a "greater truth," to use the term of Kohlrieser, and the promises of a better solution than one could have achieved alone.

The possibility of a true dialogue lies in the ability to shift one's mindset from attitudes of exclusion, rivalry, and distrust towards an enemy to one that will foster a sense of togetherness, enrichment, and trust. An authentic dialogue requires an open, honest, and active communication. Active listening, or rather, "active perceiving" (Lempereur & Colson, 2010) is fundamental for the dialogue to be felt as safe, genuine, and reciprocal. But we should start by listening to our inner self and be in touch with our own feelings before we engage in a dialogue with the other, insists Kohlrieser. We might have to temporarily suspend our beliefs and emotions in order to be able to listen to the "other." We should be open to the presence of the "other" and to what is being said, but we should also be committed to the dialogue process. We might not agree with what is being revealed. We have the right to reject it, but because of our commitment to the process, we shall let it touch us without us breaking the dialogue. We need to keep the bond even when our views are challenged and doubts or fear arise. "If I do not let you touch me, influence me, change me, then I am not in a dialogue. [...] If you do not let me touch you, influence you, change you, then you are not in a dialogue" (Kohlrieser, 2006, p.126). It is not only our rationality that is engaged in the dialogue but our emotions, our body, and our spirit. The participation of our whole self in the exchange allows us to hear what is being said between the lines, through body language, and in the silences. It gives birth to what Kohlrieser beautifully calls a "heart-to-heart" exchange.

All this being said, what does dialogue bring to a negotiation? It prevents negotiators from throwing themselves into the resolution of a problem and instead to start considering the emotions, needs, and concerns of the conflicting parties. It develops their ability to establish an emotional connection with the "other" and be sensitive to what is being communicated beyond words. "If the peacemakers do not train themselves to watch all nonverbal cues, to see the depths and the power of human symbolism, sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious, then they will miss the most important opportunities for transforming relationships" (Gopin, 2005, p.146). When in "dialogue mode," negotiators are better able to separate the problem from the person and deal with the issue rather than judge the individual. This focus on the issues at stake and empathy towards the "other" allows them to keep the bond throughout the process. They are sensitive to the formulation and impact of their words on the "other" in the same manner that they are keen to understand the exact meaning of what is said to them. The attitude of reciprocity and sincere concern for the "other" that is demonstrated during the negotiation is conducive to the elaboration of a common goal between conflicted parties. "Dialogue helps create a shared knowledge of each other so that you can move from a

foundation of understanding to the bargaining toward mutual benefit” (Kohlrieser, 2006, p.154). As a means of communication, dialogue transforms negotiations from an exchange of words and arguments for the resolution of a problem into a process of discovery of the “other” and inner growth. It is more than a tool. It is an art and a philosophy of life.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, bonding in negotiation has two purposes. First, it is a positive tool, empowering all sides and setting the scene for a richer process. Second, it can refocus a person from a previously broken bond (between us or external), so they can heal and enter a new stage of interaction.

When we are blocked from bonding with others and ourselves, Kohlrieser explains that we can be a hostage of ourselves or to someone, something, or a situation. But the key is how the mind focuses on problem solving. When we understand the way the brain works, we are naturally going to look for what is actually wrong. Kohlrieser introduces us to the skills hostage negotiators use to resolve conflicts and shows us how these same skills can be used by business leaders, parents, and educators to prevent us from being psychological hostages to the everyday conflicts that come up in our lives.

Kohlrieser argues that conflict is often a reflection of broken bonding or lack of bonding. Therefore, conflict resolution depends on the ability to reestablish bonding. He emphasizes effective dialogue and communication. His idea of effective dialogue is that of people genuinely engaged in an exchange of thought and reflection and striving towards a deeper understanding of each other, even when they are in major disagreement. He puts forward this concept for negotiators, because negotiation is dialogue involving a process of bargaining to help further resolve differences through question-based clarification of motives while establishing the negotiator as a secure base who can be trusted.

During negotiations we must bring together the personal, professional, and the organizational sides of our lives for successful mutual outcome. “*Hostage at the Table*” is highly relevant to all people who want to get out of their own “hostage kind” situation so they can form and maintain successful relationships and perform well with a hostage-free state of mind.

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