

## **Dirty Tricks handout**

In the worlds of selling and negotiating the greater percentage of people tend to be ethical, honest (on the whole) and fair. This said, most negotiators with experience have witnessed behaviours that are somewhat questionable – deviousness, playing with the truth, lying, aggression, and coercion. These types of behaviours can often manifest themselves in the form of “Dirty Tricks”, as they are called. Many people use these tricks subconsciously, whilst others use them consciously in an endeavour to be Machiavellian in their pursuit of ‘good’ deals..

The following ‘Dirty Tricks’ are some of the most prolific techniques in existence in negotiating and it is worthwhile familiarising yourself with them as a precautionary measure.

### **Dirty Tricks: Some typical techniques**

Please keep in mind that the following techniques come in all shapes and forms; they may be more subtle or extreme than the examples given below...

#### **Columbo**

Like the television detective, the client lulls you into a false sense of security then nails you with an apparently innocent request:

- “Yes, I’m happy with that – looks like we could sew this deal up. There’s just one small thing...”

This technique works surprisingly well. Often it can be in conjunction with deliberately making you work very hard during the negotiations first so that by the time the deal is almost done you are keen (or desperate!) to sew up the deal.

#### **Mother Hubbard**

This is the ‘cupboard is bare’ mentality. The client implies, in a subtle or overt way, that he or she is willing to do business with you but that the budget simply is not available or sufficient funds are not available:

- “I would very much like to do business with you but I simply can’t afford to pay that much...”

Many buyers report that one of the easiest ways to get a cheaper deal or immediate discounts is to simply say, “I can’t afford that.” Time and time again salespeople and negotiators fall for this tactic. Rather than simply saying that they cannot afford something the phrasing can be frequently coupled with a

suggestion that they would like to do business with you, as this can psychologically keep you ‘hooked’.

### Old Pal’s Act

This technique involves taking advantage of the relationship. When clients have been dealing with you for some time, they can potentially utilise your history together as a means of emotionally coercing you into submission. The method is to play on your sense of ‘guilt’:

- “Oh, come on, how long have we known each other, eh? How long have we been doing business together? You can do better than this for an old friend!”

Clearly, this example is very direct and hence not particularly skilful. Listen carefully for variations on this approach; a typical example is for the client to state or ask you questions calmly about the transactions that you have agreed in the past. Another example is when they promise you ‘something in the future’ for a favour today.

### Job’s Worth

This can be a very stubborn technique. It can be hard to determine whether the client genuinely doesn’t care whether they agree to deal with you or not. Sometimes the technique is born out of a deliberate attempt to force you to concede. Sometimes it’s the consequence of an inability to negotiate, frequently because they don’t know how to:

- “It would be more than my job’s worth to pay what you are asking...”

Alternative responses to the example above can include, “I simply will not entertain that proposal...”, “My manager would never allow that...”, “My organisation can’t negotiate at those levels...”, “That proposal doesn’t stand a chance of being accepted...”

### Nice ‘N’ Nasty

Another form of psychological and emotional game-playing, the aim is to pressure you into submission. This is the ‘good cop, bad cop’ style that seeks to coerce you into an allegiance with the ‘good guy’, who holds the real agenda:

- Buyer 1: “That’s totally ridiculous! Are you living on another planet!?! I think we should forget this whole deal and walk away, it’s a complete waste of our time...”

- Buyer 2: “Look, my colleague is clearly frustrated by this offer and we’re in a difficult position. Though it’s looking unlikely, it would be good if we could find some way of compromising, after all, I feel that there might be an alternative if we get some concessions...”

### **Nice ‘N’ Nasty con’t**

Often employed by two buyers, this routine is designed to encourage you to soften and succumb to the nice person’s proposal. The ‘bad cop’ role is to use threats, blame attacks and a sense of irritation to generate worry, concern and fear in you in the hope that you will see the ‘good cop’ as a lifeline that can save the deal. Often, the ‘bad cop’s’ proposals and offers are deliberately exaggerated and not genuine ‘wants’ at all – the true ‘wants and needs’ lie with the ‘good cop’, who also aims to offer the lowest rewards as a result of your hopefully desperate position.

### **Number 1 Fan**

This technique, like the ‘Old Pal’s Act’, aims to take advantage of the relationship that you have together. Unlike the aforementioned technique, this can be employed by someone who has just met you or who has a relatively short history of working with you:

- “I simply love talking to you... You’re one of the few people who knows how I work and how to strike a sensible deal...”

The aim here is to soften you by using excessive statements of praise, or calculated comments to endear you to the client. Sometimes the attempt is obvious, sometimes it is very subtle indeed. By ingratiating themselves to you the hope is to encourage you to make concessions because you feel a sense of compassion or altruism towards them.

### **Noah’s Ark (‘about as old as’)**

The implication here is that you are lying or ‘trying it on’. The client insinuates that you are trying to trick them and that they see through your strategy, consequently accusing you (sub-textually) that you are a liar or a trickster.

- “You’ll have to do better than that! The competition is much cheaper...”

Once more the aim is to make you feel emotionally guilty or that you are inexperienced and don’t have your finger on the pulse of current business affairs. The technique can be very effective, especially with inexperienced and/or younger salespeople and negotiators, who can start to question their

own sense of reality.

### **You Need Me More Than I Need You**

This trick is designed to literally force or bully you into accepting the client's offer. Clearly, it is a risky tactic, but again, with inexperienced and/or younger salespeople and negotiators, it can work very well indeed. It is also particularly effective when the client is an unknown quantity, i.e. you have never met them before or done business with their organisation:

- “Just having me as a customer will bring a lot more business to you...”

The method is one of ‘disguised threat’, i.e. “If you don't give me what I want I am going to walk away...” and about bringing an air of ‘needlessness’ to the situation, i.e. “I really don't need to be having this discussion...” These phrases can be combined with attempts to demonstrate benefits to you of agreeing their proposal. The suggestion is that by joining forces with them under their terms, certain ‘undisclosed’ qualities about them and their organisation will yield great dividends to you in the future.