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# Column

## Teaching Students How to Use Emotions as They Negotiate

*Daniel L. Shapiro*

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*Given that emotions are inescapable and complex, how do you teach students how to deal with them? This article offers instructors a practical approach. It suggests that instructors and students turn their attention away from emotions and toward a more limited set of core emotional concerns that stimulate many emotions. The article describes ways to teach students how to use these core concerns as tools to understand the emotional terrain and to stimulate helpful emotions.*

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### **The Power and Complexity of Emotions**

In *Beyond Reason: Using Emotions as You Negotiate*, my colleague Roger Fisher and I offer a framework to help negotiators deal effectively with emotions (Fisher and Shapiro 2005). The ideas are prescriptive and immediately applicable. Yet our book leaves unanswered an important question: As a negotiation teacher or trainer, how do you teach people to use emotions effectively to enhance negotiation success? In this column, I highlight some of the challenges inherent in teaching students how to manage emotions. I also describe ways to circumvent those challenges, and I close by offering practical teaching ideas.

There is a great difference between teaching students the process of interest-based negotiation and teaching them how to deal with emotions.

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Interest-based negotiation involves the application of several “simple” steps, such as looking beneath positions to interests and inventing options before deciding (Fisher, Ury and Patton 1991). Applying these steps can transform an adversarial interaction into a cooperative search for mutual gains.

In contrast, teaching students how to deal with emotions is complicated by the very nature of emotions. Unlike the constant, unchanging process of interest-based negotiation, emotions are:

- **Unavoidable:** A negotiator cannot avoid emotions any more than he or she can avoid thoughts (Fisher and Shapiro 2005; Shapiro 2001). Suppressing the expression of emotions tends to consume mental resources, affect the cardiovascular system, and, surprisingly, even lead to increased blood pressure in one’s social partner (Gross and John 2002).
- **Numerous:** In any single interaction, a negotiator may experience dozens of emotions such as anger, pride, frustration, and enthusiasm.
- **Fluid:** Emotions often change from moment to moment such as from annoyance to anger, excitement to anxiety, resignation to resentment.
- **Multilayered:** You can feel multiple emotions at once — even multiple “opposite emotions” such as love for your spouse and anger toward him or her for not consulting you on an important issue.
- **Varied in impact:** The impact of emotions varies from person to person, negotiator to negotiator. (Person A may be angered easily, while Person B may be more even-keeled.)
- **Triggered by multiple possible causes:** The source of an emotion is not always easy to identify. The emotion may be triggered by a thought, a new situation, another person’s action, or by the levels of specific neurochemicals present in the negotiator’s brain.

Because of the dynamic, complicated nature of emotions, it is difficult to teach students how to deal with them. No all-purpose strategy will work to help students deal directly with every emotion that arises.

## Focusing on Core Concerns

In *Beyond Reason*, we suggest a simple framework for circumventing the complexities of emotion. We suggest that negotiators *not* focus on every emotion that arises in themselves and in the other party — such a process is overwhelming. Rather, we advise negotiators to turn their attention to five *core concerns*, matters that are important to most of us much of the time. These core concerns can be used as a “lens” to understand the emotional terrain in a negotiation and as a “lever” to stimulate helpful emotions. As a result, cooperative behavior becomes more likely.

The five core concerns we have considered in depth are appreciation, autonomy, affiliation, status, and role. Each is a dimensional concept:

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- **Appreciation:** Are our thoughts, feelings, and actions devalued, or are they acknowledged as having merit?
  - **Autonomy:** Is our freedom to make decisions impinged upon, or is it respected?
  - **Affiliation:** Are we treated as an adversary and kept at a distance, or are we treated as a colleague?
  - **Status:** Is our standing treated as inferior to others, or is it given full recognition where deserved?
  - **Role:** Are the many roles we play meaningless, or are they personally fulfilling?

Our approach to emotions simplifies the negotiation instructor's task. Rather than sensitizing students to dozens of dynamic emotions and their nuanced expressions, we suggest that instructors and students concentrate on learning how to use these five core concerns both as lenses and as levers.

### Teaching the Core Concerns

Roger Fisher and I have taught the "core concerns framework" to college and law school students, business and management students, corporate executives, government and nongovernment employees, lawyers, high school students, psychologists, labor/management negotiators, international negotiators, and small business employees. For the past five years, we also have taught a course at Harvard Law School entitled, "Negotiation: Dealing with Emotions."

Based on our experiences, I suggest several possible ways to incorporate the core concerns framework into the negotiation instructor's teaching repertoire:

*Apply the "core concerns framework" to a personal negotiation or conflict.* The instructor can begin by explaining how the core concerns can provide both a *lens* to understand the emotional dimension of a negotiation and a *lever* to stimulate positive emotions. As a lens, each of the core concerns offers a hypothesis to consider what might be upsetting someone. Is the person feeling unappreciated? Disaffiliated? Belittled in status? As a lever, each core concern can offer prescriptive advice on how to improve the emotional tenor. Can you appreciate the other person? One way to demonstrate appreciation would be to ask that person's advice in a way that will help him or her build a fulfilling role in the process.

The instructor can ask students to use the core concerns as a framework for analyzing a recent negotiation or conflict they have experienced. Students might consider such questions as:

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- How did the core concerns affect my interaction?
  - In similar situations in the future, how might I better address the other party's core concerns to stimulate helpful emotions?
  - How might I better address my own core concerns?

*Have students observe and address the core emotional concerns in their own lives.* In my course at Harvard Law School, we spend two weeks exploring each core concern. During the first week, students *observe* for the specific concern in their own lives outside of class. They write up their experience in a journal that they submit each week. For example, during the first week dedicated to affiliation, a student might write about his or her frustration at being excluded from a student-organized study group. During the second week, students proactively *address* that same concern in an interaction outside of class. A student might, for example, try to build affiliation by discussing a difficult issue with a roommate or colleague. Students write up their experiences in the second week's journal, noting what worked well and what they might do differently in the future.

A quicker method would be to have students spend one week observing *all* the core concerns. Have them write in a journal, documenting the situations in which they noted the impact of the core concerns being addressed or unaddressed. For example, one student wrote: "My sense of autonomy was impinged this week when my roommate redecorated our living room — without first consulting me!" During the next week, ask the students to use at least one of the core concerns to try to stimulate positive emotions in themselves or others. Encourage them to write about a situation and its impact on people's emotions. During the appreciation week, for example, one student wrote: "I challenged myself this week by trying to appreciate the perspective of a friend of mine on his political views — which are *very* different than mine — and to do so without starting a debate. I just listened and tried to find merit in his view. It wasn't easy, and I wasn't persuaded by his views. But I saw how he sees things, and I let him know. I now have a better sense of where he's coming from. And he's now been much more open to listening to my views."

*Show a video clip and have students analyze it.* Using videos is often an effective way to help students "see" the prevalence of the core concerns. An instructor could rent a movie and show an emotionally charged clip. (Virtually any movie will do; but generally, clips that relate to students' own experiences work better.) Ask them to analyze the video clip using the core concerns. Which core concerns were unmet? By whom? Why? What advice might be given to each party to enlist positive emotions? To reduce negative ones? As students consider advice for each party, encourage them to draw on the core concerns for guidance.

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*Review a case simulation using the core concerns framework.* After participants conceptually understand the core concerns, they could use them while negotiating a case simulation. Virtually any case simulation could work. After they negotiate the case, review with them how the core concerns affected the negotiations. Did they respect the other person's autonomy and status? What was the impact? Did they feel respected for *their own* core concerns? What could each party have done to improve the emotional tenor of the negotiation?

Instructors should make sure that students understand that even as they enlist positive emotions, they need not give in to the demands of another party. Substantive issues should be decided upon on the merits, not based upon the presence or absence of good feelings. (Of course, it is often a lot easier to deal with the substantive issues if there is rapport between the negotiators.)

Whether a negotiator is a hard bargainer or an interest-based negotiator, emotions are inescapable. Rather than overwhelming students by having them learn how to deal with the nuances of scores of emotions, this article suggests that negotiation instructors can have students apply a "core concerns framework." Students can use five core concerns (appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, status, and role) as a lens to understand the emotional terrain and as a lever to improve their situation. As a result, relationships improve, and mutual gains become more likely.

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