

THE

POWER OF

YOU

Negotiation Psychology is about  
controlling yourself, not your opponent.

A man in a dark suit and light-colored shirt is walking from right to left across a sidewalk. He is looking towards the left. The background is a large, light-colored wall with a grid of rectangular panels. On the right side of the wall, there is a 3x2 grid of small, dark, square ventilation holes. The ground is a grey concrete sidewalk with some dark spots. The overall scene is outdoors, possibly in an urban setting.

GET INTO  
YOUR HEAD

NOT THEIRS

## PSYCHOLOGY IN MIND?

For many of us, the words ‘**negotiation psychology**’ conjure images of dealmakers playing artful mind games, cleverly manipulating and brainwashing their susceptible opponents into accepting every proposal. Like a hypnotism stage act, it only takes a “**Three, two, one...**” and a final click of our fingers to get the deal done.

All fantasy, of course. Even if it could happen, this spellbinding trickery would be deemed seriously unethical. Yet many of us are still mesmerised by the notion of applying ingenious psychology to keep our negotiation opponents in check.

Understanding and curiosity are the essential tools for any negotiator. But leave the Jedi mind tricks to the movies where they belong!

### GET CONTROL. NEGOTIATE WITH YOU.

Back in the real world of negotiation, psychological techniques have proved relatively useless when it comes to controlling the opposition. The best way of getting better deals is to forget trying to change behaviour on the other side of the negotiating table and instead focus on mastering your own thoughts, impulses and actions.

Self-control is one of the negotiator’s most powerful assets. Without it, you are prone to all kinds of ill-conceived decisions and destructive fallout. Control-loss often comes down to your brain struggling to balance competing priorities. Psychology textbooks are full of examples of internal conflicts, from ‘**head vs. heart**’ and ‘**chimp vs. human**’ to ‘**id vs. ego**’ and ‘**left vs. right brain**’. With so many inner struggles to manage, it’s not surprising that the most important negotiation you ever undertake is with yourself.

OPEN THINKING



OPEN OPPORTUNITIES

# WATCH OUT FOR STRATEGY BLINDNESS

Strategy can be a beautiful thing. But sometimes we are so wedded to our perfectly researched plan of attack that we lose sight of real time shifts in negotiations as they unfold. Blinded by our masterful strategy, we miss critical signals and opportunities. Known as **Gate Theory**, this blinkered state of mind makes our performance inflexible, self-limiting and one-dimensional. It's an experience that rarely ends well.

## QUESTION YOUR GATES

But cognitive '**gates**' come in other shapes and sizes too. They can happen whenever you hold a belief or preconception that skews your subsequent actions or decision-making. Usually, they relate to an event or emotional reaction you have experienced in the past.

Gates are often based on logical instincts and crop up completely naturally as an everyday phenomenon. However, **Scotwork's Advanced Gate Theory** holds that, unless you have the foresight to identify your gates and question your potential responses, the consequences could 'box you in' by restricting options for moving the negotiation forward.



CHECK YOUR GATES

ALWAYS

# ADVANCED GATE THEORY.

## PRACTISE TO PERFECT.

Never ignore or underestimate a gate. Once you have identified one, take stock and decide your best response or action. The more you learn to recognise and challenge them, the more self-control you bring to the negotiating room. Here are some typical examples of gates:

### 1. THE 'NIL SUM GAME' GATE

Built on the narrow-minded assumption that any gain or loss incurred by you is exactly matched by the gains and losses experienced by your negotiating opponent, this gate can direct you into a unilateral approach where you focus exclusively on securing value for yourself. This 'one-way street' prevents you exploring opportunities to create value for both sides.

### 2. THE 'NOT INVENTED HERE' GATE

If they want to do it their way, you couldn't possibly agree, right? Wrong. This deep-rooted and misleading supposition makes it easy for you to mistakenly devalue or dismiss any strategy, proposal or concession produced by the other side. Rather than be objective, your tunnel vision assumes that nothing your opponents ever put forward could be in your best interests.

### 3. 'THE IRRATIONAL DISMISSAL' GATE

Through your highly 'subjective lens', your adversary's perfectly reasonable behaviour appears totally irrational and unacceptable. Of course, from their perspective everything they say and do is logical and rational. This gate results in an inability to empathise with your opponent and a tendency to all too easily reject their observations, proposals and demands.

## 4. THE 'ME, MYSELF AND I' GATE

Many negotiators struggle to stay objective. After all, it's usually much harder for us to understand issues from someone else's perspective than our own. But sometimes our self-centricity fools us into a misleading belief that everything is working in our favour. We create a rose-tinted interpretation of events that suits our interests perfectly and paints the opposition at a disadvantage. We then go on to devise ways of proving and justifying our skewed version of reality. This can result in the 'One eyed pitch' - a proposal that we consider to be overwhelmingly convincing and fail-safe, but our opponents quickly reject as way off the mark.

### a. **Vividness bias:**

In this case, the negotiator focuses 100% on what they see as the most obvious benefit or need and ignores just about everything else. That's fine if their judgement of what's important is correct, but often it isn't. For instance, a salesperson might think their buyers are only interested in securing a great price, whereas in truth they have a shopping list of other criteria to be met.

### b. **Overconfidence:**

Whilst confidence is an essential attribute for any negotiator, overconfidence is most definitely not. Typically, overconfident people overestimate their power and draw a falsely optimistic picture of their negotiating position. On the other hand, dealmakers who lack confidence often feel powerless and inferior to their adversaries.

## 5. THE 'COMPETITIVE AROUSAL' GATE

Many of us are competitive animals. Our sense of competitiveness helps us strive to achieve bigger and better. But in a negotiating context, heightened feelings of rivalry can create a dangerous desire to win at all costs and without considering the high risk of collateral damage.

## **6. THE 'NON-RATIONAL ESCALATION OF COMMITMENT' GATE**

We all feel a strong psychological need to justify our decisions, actions or words. But sometimes we go too far, become unreasonably defensive and stubbornly dig in. Before we know it, we've backed ourselves into a corner of our own making and can't get out. This tendency to overcommit manifests in other ways too. We've all said something provocative in the heat of the moment that we regret and don't really mean. But, instead of retracting, we feel obliged to go on and back up what we said. Rather than raise our hands and acknowledge we are wrong, we prefer to battle on and try to defend the indefensible.

## **7. THE 'REGRET AVERSION' GATE**

Regret is a painful psychological state. That's why we are naturally inclined to steer clear of anything that causes it. In fact, regret is usually triggered by something we've done, rather than something we might have done, but chose not to. So, it's not surprising that sometimes we prefer to pass on the opportunity of making a proposal, rather than expose ourselves to the risk of regretting the consequences. This aversion stifles our ability to operate proactively and gives the upper hand to the opposition.

## **8. THE 'EVALUATIVE SELF-JUSTIFICATION' GATE**

Whenever we look back and review our negotiating performance, we like to post-rationalise and understand the causes behind our wins and losses. But it only takes a lapse in objectivity for our evaluations to become warped. More often than not, we are happy to take full credit for the wins and attribute the success to our own personal skills, judgement and tenacity. Losses, on the other hand, we usually blame squarely on external factors such as the deeds of our opponents, the economics of the deal or simple bad luck.

QUESTION YOUR GATES



FOLLOW

THE PROCESS

**FIND THE WAY FORWARD.**

**TAKE A STEP BACK.**

So, what happens if we just react to events in our negotiations rather than act proactively? Most commonly, we end up confusing getting even with getting what we want. This is especially true if the opposition behaves aggressively or unreasonably. Instead, one of the most powerful strategies is to step back from the emotion, sit above the detail and take a helicopter view. Taking yourself out of the heat of the situation makes it easier to see clearly what's really happening and choose the best way to respond. How is this done? Simply follow this four-stage process:

**i) Buy some time**

First, before responding to any claim or demand from the other side, give yourself some thinking time. Take a time out by pausing the discussion, summarising the situation, adjourning the session or reverting to deadlock.

**ii) Separate influence from information**

Next, put some context around what's been said. Are your opponents telling the whole truth? If not, how much of their information is false and how does this alter the power balance? Be aware of your susceptibilities by knowing your own emotional triggers. The more you understand them, the better your chances of neutralising the effects of the opposition's tactics. Finally, keep a careful watch on your emotions and look out for any early signs of triggers being activated.

**iii) Win the objective, not the argument**

Often, it's tempting to point-score and try to prove the other side wrong. But simply winning an argument rarely helps you achieve your end goal. So, the next step is to reassess and sense-check your objectives. Are they still realistic? Is there any way you could meet your opponent's needs and still reach your final goal?

**iv) Revert to the process**

Finally, pinpoint exactly where you are in the negotiating process and then decide where you want to go next. Reorienting yourself will help to ground you and make a more considered response by exploring, blocking or counter-proposing.



CONTROL  
YOUR GATES

DON'T LET  
THEM CONTROL YOU

# MAKE OBJECTIVE YOUR OBJECTIVE

We all have good days and bad days. Even the most experienced negotiators.

But how do you distinguish good from bad? Is success defined by what you feel about what happens in the negotiating room, or by the actual outcomes you achieve? Often, **subjective feelings trump objective reality** and this can make it difficult to stay level-headed and self-controlled in the midst of negotiation.

The cognitive gates you construct in your mind inhibit objective reasoning and self-control. If you're not careful, they can quickly turn you into your own worst enemy.

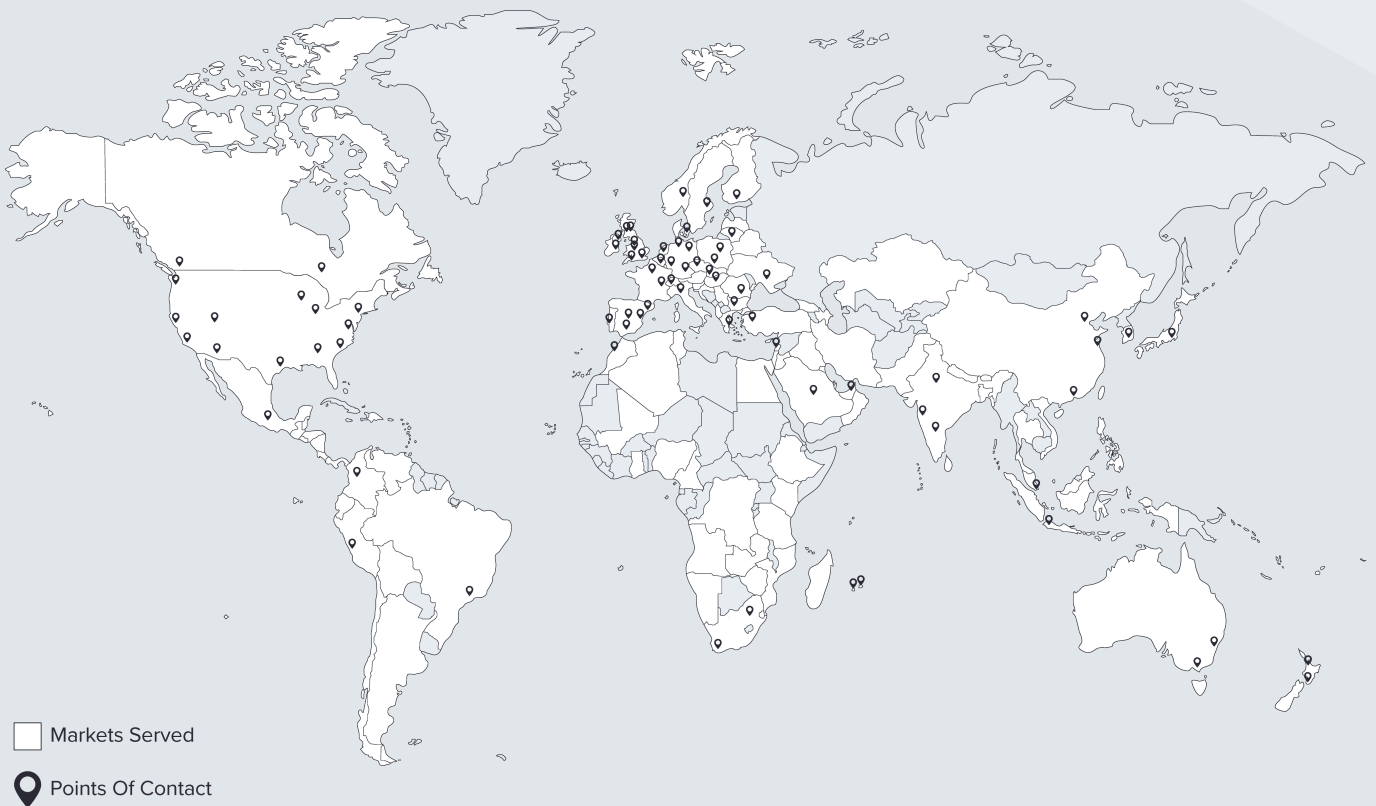
So, **don't be defined by your gates**, or any past issues that could hamper your thinking and negotiating behaviour. Learn how to be more objective by identifying and questioning your gates before deciding your best next move. Check your gates to become more proactive, less reactive and master self-control, essential skills for any winning negotiator.

**To find out more about how to improve your negotiation behaviour, contact Scotwork.**

# About Scotwork

## MAKING A REAL IMPACT WORLDWIDE

Scotwork has coached hundreds of thousands of senior managers in 30 languages. We have grown into the world's number one independent negotiation consultancy, with offices in 50 countries. We work with organisations large and small across all sectors. After more than 50 years we are still giving people powerful skills that transform their lives, and handing businesses more successful futures.



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