

True Stories: When You Need to Negotiate, PAUSE

A "heated" situation

Pastor John was barely controlling his anger when he called me for advice. "Someone has to do something!" he said. "My eight-year-old daughter just came home a second time with heat exhaustion after riding in a stifling school van." When I asked him to explain further, he described a frustrating and challenging conflict.

His daughter Cindy and eight other students in their rural community rode in a van to their school that was an hour away. Growing bored with the long ride, some of the children had begun to throw wads of paper and other small items out the windows at passing cars. When a motorist complained, the driver was ordered to keep all of the van windows closed, except for the one next to him. By the end of the afternoon drive, the van was so hot that Cindy and some of the other children were coming home with heat exhaustion.

Pastor John called the bus company to ask them to allow the windows to be left open. He talked to several people, all of whom refused his request. As his frustration grew, he concluded that he would have to file a lawsuit to force them to respect his daughter's needs.

An example from Daniel

After hearing his story, I encouraged him to use a negotiation process based on biblical concepts of valuing relationships and looking out for others' interests as well as your own (see Matt. 7:12; Phil. 2:3-4). This process is summarized in the PAUSE principle, which involves five steps: **P**repare, **A**ffirm relationships, **U**nderstand interests, **S**earch for creative solutions, and **E**valuate options objectively and reasonably.

To illustrate this process, I referred Pastor John to the story of Daniel. When Daniel and his three friends were forced into the service of the king of Babylon, they were ordered to eat food and drink wine that were ceremonially unclean. Instead of taking an adversarial approach, Daniel showed respect for those whom God had placed in authority over him. He realized that the officials simply wanted to keep the king's servants healthy and productive so that the kingdom would prosper (and they could keep their jobs!).

Having discerned their real interests, Daniel devised a way to convince them to allow him a diet that would satisfy both their manpower concerns and his religious convictions:

Daniel said to the guard . . . , "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days, they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead (Dan. 1:12-16).

A reasonable test

As Pastor John reflected on this passage, God gave him an idea. He called the president of the bus company and graciously presented his concerns to him. He affirmed the company's interest in vehicle safety, and said he was sure they were also concerned about the health and welfare of the children who rode their buses. When the president agreed, Pastor John proposed a simple test. He asked the president to personally investigate the situation by riding around in the back of the school van for an hour, with all but the driver's window closed.

This was such a reasonable request that the president could not say no. About thirty minutes into the ride, he was already convinced of how hot the van could get. When he returned to his office he called Pastor John to say that he was reversing the earlier decision and would give the children another chance and allow the windows to remain open. After thanking the president for his help, Pastor John assured him that he and the other parents would work with their children to make sure that they did not throw things out the windows.

Understanding interests

Pastor John's approach to this conflict follows a pattern found throughout Scripture. Many people in the Bible had problems with those who had authority over them. Joseph was imprisoned by Potiphar, Moses was opposed by Pharaoh, David was attacked by Saul, Abigail's family was threatened by David, and Esther was oppressed by Haman. Even Jesus and his apostles were persecuted by civil and religious authorities.

Although some of these conflicts required aggressive confrontations, most were resolved through respectful appeals and negotiations based on meeting the interests of others. This same response to conflict is applicable today when dealing with anyone whose decisions can make your life difficult, whether that person is a spouse or teenage child, a supervisor or co-worker, a civil official or a church leader.

The next time you find yourself in a conflict, remember Paul's instruction to the Philippians: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4).

The more accurately you understand others' real interests and find reasonable ways to help them evaluate possible solutions, the more effective you will be as a peacemaker in your family, church, and workplace.

For a detailed explanation of biblical negotiation, see *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, by Ken Sande (Baker Books, Updated ed. 2003).