

Get Ripped and Cut Before Training: Adventure Preparation for the Negotiation Trainer

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***Editors' Note:** In this entertaining closing piece to the *Beyond the Classroom* section, Efron and Ebner argue that adventure learning cannot work unless the instructor is "up" for it. Using a metaphor from the world of professional bodybuilding to provide a useful acronym ("RIPPED & CUT"), they prescribe nine practical pre-training exercises to inspire negotiation teachers to be at their best.*

Introduction

As described elsewhere in this book, the 2009 Istanbul Conference highlighted different uses of adventure learning for expanding the students' learning area beyond the classroom. Participants experimented with direct exercises, such as negotiating in a bazaar. In addition, they participated in indirect exercises, such as being given a team assignment, unrelated to negotiation, to complete around the city, in order to later examine intra-team negotiation processes. In this manner, the conference challenged participants to reach beyond the constraints set or implied by the classroom setting.

As we participated in the exercises, and on our own journeys to the conference and back home, it struck us that the type of real-life exercises that are the basis of adventure learning may serve yet another purpose. While the value of different types of experiential learning has been explored (both in *Rethinking Negotiation Teaching*

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(Honeyman, Coben, and De Palo 2009), the product of the 2008 Rome Conference, and other chapters in this book) in the context of enhancing *student learning*, we suggest that it may have implications for a relatively untouched corner of the negotiation training workshop: *trainer preparation*.

As evidenced elsewhere in this book, an important element of the new approach to negotiation workshops and training developing in Negotiation 2.0 involves taking a step away from some of our more constraining practices, in terms of both workshop content and style. These constraints would include, for example, use of off-the-shelf generic material, or applying a trainer's individual style across an undifferentiated range of training situations (see Lewicki and Schneider, *Instructors Heed the Who*, in this volume). It would seem that there is a clear shift towards preferring a student-focused approach in both design and implementation: tailoring workshop content to students' particular needs and context, and running the training sessions using pedagogical methods that appeal and speak to the students we are working with. Instead of hearing calls to focus on "what do we want to teach them, and how do we do that best," we are hearing a call to focus on "what do they want to know, and how do they want to learn it?"

While these two questions might be partially answered by preparation (such as conducting preliminary talks with the client organization, sending preliminary questionnaires out to students, etc.), the most important elements of the answers might only be available, ultimately, in the classroom itself. In order to receive this information, though, a trainer must be prepared to elicit it, and be open to receiving it. How can we attain this degree of openness and curiosity? We suggest that a pre-training exercise, aimed at buffing up the trainer's level of curiosity, openness to new information and adaptability might be a good way for trainers to spend their time on the way to the training room.

The road from the trainer's home to the training venue presents many opportunities for this type of "tuning-up" exercise. The list presented below was originally formulated in the context of the airport setting in which this chapter was originally mapped out and planned, but each individual exercise can be adapted for implementing while driving alone or with others, while riding a bus, or over the course of a five-minute walk from a hotel to the training site.

This new model of preparation requires a bit of a change in habits for some trainers. No longer is the long and winding road leading to the training room "down time," in which you may, at best, be able to clear a few emails out of your inbox. This road is, in fact, your in-

ner prep and setup time. The moment you start your journey, you are engaged in the game.

Of course, many trainers do in fact use this time to prepare by going over their prepared notes for the training. We are certainly not suggesting you forego reviewing your notes! However – if you *only* go over your notes, you will probably walk in to the room and conduct the training you prepared. We are suggesting that you go over your notes at home, but spend the journey priming yourself to engage with your students.

A metaphor providing a useful acronym for this exercise comes from the world of professional bodybuilding. Before competitions, bodybuilders attempt to reach a peak of being “ripped” and “cut” to have maximum impact on audiences and judges. While sometimes used interchangeably, “cut” involves achieving a balance between being lean and bulging: stripping the body of excess body fat while retaining maximum muscularity. “Ripped,” on the other hand, is a condition connoting extremely low body fat with superior muscle separation and vascularity. It focuses on discrete definition of each and every visible element of the physique.

Playing with this metaphor, we are looking for preparation that combines the power of the content we are about to deliver, with an enhanced degree of clarity and an increased ability to notice and appreciate distinctions. Side benefits may include our own enhanced motivation, and, of course, a story or two to tell in the classroom in the venerated “an interesting thing happened to me on the way to the classroom this morning...” tradition.

RIPPED & CUT

How do we get RIPPED & CUT? By performing some (or all!) of the following exercises incorporated in this acronym as we make our way to the training venue. Depending on your level of motivation and energy, this can be done in two forms:

- Passive: noticing when these interactions occur to you, or to others in front of you, and conducting a conscious self-debrief; or
- Active: setting yourself missions, targeting people for interactions, purposefully engaging with them and conducting self debrief.

1) ***R**elationship*

Engage with another in a way that enhances your relationship. This may be a minor interaction, or a more substantial piece of relationship building. Examples:

- Choosing a stranger on the street or riding the bus with you, and seeking to engage them in a conversation.
- Deciding that you will somehow make the person selling you a cup of coffee smile at some point during your interaction.
- Attempting to make a bystander respond to you by sharing a thought or an observation with them (weather and traffic comments are suitable for this purpose in some cultures, sports in others, etc.).

The mental channel we hope to clear through this exercise is the relational channel, the part of our brain that appreciates the complexities of interpersonal interactions, particularly those in which there is a confusing mix of assumptions, perceptions and interdependence – a mix that well characterizes negotiation training.

2) *Information*

Gain a piece of information from someone else. At a basic level, this may involve asking a person filling a mundane role a contextually suitable question (such as enquiring at the information desk “Excuse me, where is gate 216?”). A more advanced exercise would be targeting a stranger and giving yourself a mission (“My goal in engaging with that person is to make her share something about her family”).

This exercise seeks to prime us for engaging in an elicitive, learning mode as opposed to a top-down, imparting mode.

3) *Problem Solving*

Identify someone having trouble or needing assistance. Ask the person if you can help them, and choose between assisting passively (doing what the other tells you to do) or assisting proactively (making suggestions, doing things unilaterally). Alternatively, you might self-debrief a situation in which you tried to solve a problem of your own, asking yourself what approach you took and what stages did your process go through.

This exercise will prepare us to notice problems as they arise, including clashes between students and between their goals and ours, and prime us for engaging with them through different approaches.

4) *Pretend to Be Someone Else*

In the training room, you will be stepping into a role and on to a stage. You will be focusing on the needs of the role, not the needs of the actor. Prepare doing this consciously and practice interacting

with others consciously “through” the role. Here are some things you can do:

- Speak to people while faking an accent.
- Ask for something you don’t need.
- Lie about something.

5) Entertain

Like it or not, the reality of negotiation training is that part of what we do is entertain our audience. However, not everybody is looking to be entertained, and not everything we consider entertaining (and therefore, do by rote after our first few dozen trainings) will resonate with any given audience. Entertainment, as a source of motivation and engagement for students, is something worth doing right. This includes consciously considering how someone else may (or may not) consider you to be entertaining. This priming will serve us well in the classroom. Exercises you might consider:

- Make someone smile.
- Tell a stranger a joke.
- Play with a kid on the street or with a baby on the bus.

6) Describe

Watch an interaction between two people: ask yourself “How would I tell that story to my students?” This primes you for story-telling mode. Next, ask yourself “How would I like to *hear* that story?” – to transition into a story-hearing mode. Finally, you might ask “How do I think my students would like that story told?” Many of the themes in *Negotiation 2.0*, as presented in this book as well as the previous volume, require that teachers travel a linguistic and mental journey from focus on self to connecting to others via their preferences and needs. Storytelling is a powerful tool for making this journey explicit.

7) Curiosity

Adopting a curious stance towards your students – as opposed to assuming curiosity directed at you from their side – seems to be a central theme emerging in *Negotiation 2.0*, mirroring the notion of adopting a curious stance towards a negotiation counterpart (for more on this notion, see Guthrie 2009). Given the internal pressures involved in initiating the first steps of a training (and the early morning hour at which this may occur), it may be difficult to achieve this “curiosity frame.” We suggest you give this ability a

warm-up on your way to the training room. Here are some exercises you might enjoy:

- Choose a stranger on the street. Be curious about them: Ask yourself a question about them, make up a story about them, or guess what they might be doing.
- Zoom in on a phenomenon on the street: traffic suddenly halting, people moving quickly in the same direction, etc. Ask yourself about this phenomenon (“why is everybody running?”) and give several answers.

“Applied curiosity” might incorporate the “information” and “relationship” exercises discussed above. After noticing the phenomenon, ask a stranger to explain it to you. Perhaps, invoking the “Take” exercise (see below), ask for their advice, or even help, in dealing with it.

8) U

Take care of you. Our most important training prop is ourselves. Checking the hardware – the room, the seating arrangements, the computer and audiovisual equipment – is something we do proactively, as is checking the software (such as presentations, movie clips, etc.). Internalizing this, trainers need to give their own physical and emotional energy status a quick going over. If either of these is weak, recharge! Eat, drink, do something calming, smile, meditate – whatever the source of the energy leak is, find a way to plug it and stock up on what is missing. Training while off-balance, you might naturally gravitate towards your “certainty zone” – your prepared training plan and notes. Student input might be internally perceived as an attempt to push you further off balance, and perhaps result in pushback and defensiveness rather than listening, considering and adapting.

9) Take Something From Someone

As trainers, we have many goals in conducting training. We might want to affect people's perceptions, achieve change, impart knowledge, enjoy a spotlight, have fun, earn a living – or any number of other goals. Likewise, trainees participate in negotiation training for a variety of reasons. However, it is safe to assume that students (in the executive training programs this book is centering on) will usually share one primary purpose: to gain. Participants are *probably* there at least in part because they want to learn skills that will help them gain resources. By practicing *taking* before walking into class, we are putting ourselves in our students' shoes, and opening up a channel to connect with their goals and motivations.

We are not, of course, prescribing theft. However, engaging with another for the explicit purpose of gaining something for ourselves is a valuable exercise. Here are some possibilities:

- Ask a stranger for a cigarette.
- Ask a sales clerk for a discount.
- Ask someone at the bus stop, or at the copying machine, if you can go before them.

Whether or not the interaction results in your actually obtaining that advantage or resource is of secondary concern; the core activity which will keep you congruent with participants' state of mind is the *attempt* to gain.

Get RIPPED and CUT, and your engagement with students is bound to include a new level of give-and-take, of mutual learning and of decentralized process- and content- related decision-making.

References

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