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Speak Persuasively

Persuasive negotiators have learned the art of speaking to be heard. The following is a classic example of what happens when people are talking past one another or when they are not sufficiently clear or forthcoming with critical information. This is one version of a story that is based on a radio transcript released by the Chief of Naval Operations from October 10, 1995:

Station 1: Please divert your course 15 degrees to the North to avoid a collision.

Station 2: Recommend you divert YOUR course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision.

Station 1: This is the Captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course.

Station 2: No, I say again, divert *your* course.

Station 1: This is the aircraft carrier Enterprise, we are a large Warship of the US Navy. Divert your course now!

Station 2: This is the Puget Sound Lighthouse. It's your call.

What is likely to persuade your counterpart in a negotiation that you are right? Tell a coherent story about what you want. In addition to legal arguments, you might also base your argument on good policy, a principle to be upheld, the better consequences of your agreement, or the general custom in that type of business.

Use metaphors and labeling. In a negotiation, are we partners or opponents? Use framing and analogies. When trying to motivate U.S. involvement in Kosovo, was this another "Vietnam" or was Milosevic another "Hitler?" Our leaders must act to solve the nation's pending "financial cliff." These labels simplify a complex situation to convince and persuade the recipient. How you view the situation affects what action you think is appropriate.

Use specifics and detail, such as statistics or expert authority to frame your argument. If applicable, tell a story about a personal experience. Personal stories presented at Congressional hearings have persuaded lawmakers to change laws. Other times you can tell the story using vivid detail to describe what happened and bring the listener into the situation. Trial lawyers use this type of framing with juries, such as "day in the life" videos showing the daily struggle of an injured victim.

Speak persuasively, and your negotiation won't end up on the rocks.