

John Sturrock Podcast

(transcript)

Better Conversations, Better Outcomes

Session 11: The Power of the Pause

People often ask what is the most important thing I have learned as a mediator and conflict resolution specialist? There is no simple answer but, undoubtedly, along with listening and asking open questions, pausing is critical.

This may be a pause to draw breath as the adrenalin pumps. It may be a pause to formulate a question carefully, or before jumping in with a knee-jerk response. It may be taking a few moments to compose myself while under pressure or taking time out to go for fresh air or grab a cup of coffee. It may be a longer break while people obtain more information in a negotiation or take stock of proposals which have been made.

As we have discussed earlier in this series, we are programmed to react under pressure, instinctively, often in a protective way, which may come across to others as aggressive. The trouble is that our initial reaction may not always be the wisest or most helpful. It might even escalate a problem or induce an unhelpful further response. Once something is said, it can't be taken back. It is so easy for small things, apparently inconsequential comments, to take on a life of their own. We discussed that in the previous podcast about separating people from the problem.

It is not easy to resist the temptation to rebut, reject or denigrate. But, to be effective communicators, negotiators, mediators and problem-solvers, we must learn to do so. In my experience, this is a life-long challenge.

We need therefore to engage our conscious thinking, to override what the Nobel-prize winning Daniel Kahnemann calls System 1 thinking - and pause and consider before we speak. It takes self-discipline to do so, probably courage and humility also – and a willingness to take responsibility for the impact of our responses. We may need to endure silence, listen even more carefully, process and distil before we speak. The benefits make all this worthwhile.

I use a slide in mediation and negotiation training which summarises all the benefits of the pause. It is included here:

The Power of the Pause in Communication



- formulate words
- consider response
- take stock
- consider notes
- provide punctuation
- add emphasis
- enhance authority
- make impact - grabber
- control pace / timing
- breathing / adrenalin
- observe others
- make eye contact
- convey interest
- engage audience
- enable digestion by audience

So, there we are the power of the pause....time for a pause now. Until next time....