

# Trump needs to learn that great dealmakers listen, they don't tell!

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*When it comes to the art of the deal it would be better to act more like Mandela than self-styled dealmaker US President Donald Trump, says a local expert who believes that negotiation skills are critical for survival in a globalised world.*

The embarrassing defeat of Trump's new healthcare act last week has exposed the fiction that the US President is the great dealmaker he claims to be, says David Venter, a one-time head of the then government's communications department that was instrumental in supporting the negotiations between former South African presidents Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk.

House Republican leaders, facing a revolt amongst conservatives and moderates in their ranks, in a face-saving move last Friday, withdrew legislation to repeal the Affordable Care Act from consideration on the House floor. It was the biggest in a series of defeats that Trump's young presidency has suffered, lending credence to the assertion of two business school professors, Harvard Business School's Deepak Malhotra and Haas School of Business's Don Moore, who wrote in [Fortune](#) magazine last year that Trump is more a "charlatan or confidence man" than a dealmaker.

Venter, who convenes a course on Negotiation Skills for Managers at the UCT Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB), says that although Trump's books, such as *The Art of the Deal*, and his television show, *The Apprentice*, highlight the importance of strong negotiation skills, he has since proved that he does not grasp the fundamentals of good negotiation, preferring to resort to unilateral decisions.

"His style is more that of telling other parties what to do, and then browbeating them to succumb to what he desires," says Venter, who contrasts Trump's approach with that of Mandela, spontaneously referring to him as "the greatest negotiator of the 20th century".

Principled, value-maximising negotiation, he points out, is about building trust and encouraging parties to engage in joint opportunity-finding to explore and evaluate possible solutions, building package agreements that are mutually beneficial. He highlights the trade-offs Mandela and De Klerk made during their negotiations in the early 1990s as an example of this, contrasting it with the high-handed 'no choice' approach Trump adopted in threatening Republican congressional representatives with either voting for the healthcare bill or suffering not being re-elected.

"You cannot run the presidency like you run a real estate deal. You can't tweet your way through it. You can't threaten and intimidate and say I'll walk away. It's more complicated," Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer commented on [ABC's This Week](#).

In their best bestselling classic, [Getting to Yes. Negotiating agreement without giving in](#), Roger Fisher and William Ury define negotiation as the "back-and-forth communication designed to reach an agreement when you and the other side have some interests that are shared and others that are opposed."

"The vexing question is how parties work together to unpack situations in a manner that facilitates agreements that deliver optimal mutual benefit," says Venter.

This commitment to developing sustainable agreements that deliver mutual value is central to diplomacy and good dealmaking. In negotiating South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, this approach played a crucial role, as it also did in US civil rights struggle and India's road to self-determination. Venter adds that in the post-Brexit and Trump world, negotiation is destined to be a critical success factor. Despite the rise in an anti-globalisation and populist sentiment,

he strongly believes that globalisation, albeit in revised format, is here to stay, requiring leaders in all spheres to be more skilled than ever at principled, value-maximising negotiation.

“These are times where we, despite Trump’s rhetoric, are at a distinct disadvantage if we are unable to employ negotiation as a tool for navigating what is destined to be an increasingly isolationist world. More than ever, business leaders and managers will need to ensure that they do the business they should do, not the business they should not do, and act in a manner that does not inspire irrational behaviour. To quote Shi Jing Ping, the leader of China, globalisation is here to stay! The challenges are, however, considerably higher.”

Well-trained, skilled negotiators are critical for future success at governmental, business, community and personal levels, says Venter. Organisations that do well in the long run are those that appreciate that business is inherently about exchange – building partnerships, alliances and allegiances.

“In all communities, reciprocity, the strongest law of human behaviour, decrees that those who receive are obligated to reciprocate,” he adds.

*UCT GSB’s hands-on three-day negotiation course will be held from 2-4 August. The course is built around a number of case studies that are intended to empower participants to become more capable, competent and confident in negotiating mutually beneficial agreements that will pass the acid test, parties taking co-ownership of agreements that hold for the full term of these agreements. Interested applicants must apply by 3 July. Go to [www.gsb.uct.ac.za/execed](http://www.gsb.uct.ac.za/execed) for more information.*

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