

Madame Chair, dear guests,

I am here to talk to you about negotiations techniques for women – and the title of my talk, “Her Seat at the Table” refers to the idea that women often are excluded from negotiations, whether these are meant to address matters of state, such as war and peace, the workplace, or their personal lives. I am often asked why I teach negotiations to women’s groups, and the answer is twofold. First, women behave differently in single sex groups, and second, difference is not an issue if you’re a part of the majority, or stronger group. For women, their sex can feel like an impediment in negotiations. Furthermore, it is my firm belief that a society in which all members have a vested interest is better than one where the interests of a homogenous group are dominant. Diverse voices must be heard. Therefore, women – and other disenfranchised groups – must get greater access to the tables where decisions are made. They must be empowered to participate. And once at the table, they have to be able to read their environment, know how to ask for what they want, and how to follow up their requests. All this, without feeling guilty about being pushy, without believing that they are taking something away from others. In this talk, I am going to present four lessons that have had a significant impact on my own ability to stand up for myself – and I hope they will help you to do the same.

Let me start by saying that all the things I'm talking about can apply to men as well. When we talk about gender, we're not saying every single woman or every single man acts like the group "women" or the group "men". Rather, we are talking in stereotypes. When I say "women are", I am saying this is behavior researchers more often note in women than men. There are men who feel uncomfortable asserting themselves – just as there are women who feel comfortable doing so.

First things first. What is a negotiation? Generally speaking, a negotiation is an attempt by two or more parties to figure out how they can reach an agreement. Negotiation is a process by which individuals with initially divergent interest can resolve their differences to reach mutual agreement. Often, people think they should try to win, but in most cases we're actually going to have a relationship with the person we're negotiating with, so a compromise or agreement should be the objective. *Every desire that demands satisfaction and every need to be met – is at least potentially an occasion for negotiation; whenever people exchange ideas with the intention of changing relationships, whenever they confer for agreement, they are negotiating.*

It may come as a surprise to many of you, that you really are experienced negotiators. When I run courses with women, I usually start by asking if they feel that they have experience in negotiations. Most of them say they don't. But when I ask if they have children, and most of them do, and follow that up by asking how they manage to get

through their daily routine, it turns out that not only do they have experience, they are quite successful at it. Who gets to pick the movie we're going to watch? When does the homework get done? What time does the teenager have to be home on a school night? And when can you go to a café with a friend, take time to go to the gym? Then it turns out we're negotiating practically all the time, every day. The problem lies in our not defining these simple acts as negotiations and realizing that they provide us transferable skills we can bring to the workplace, to enhance our success, increase our salaries, and boost our self-esteem.

One of my favorite books is called: "Women Don't Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide". A good friend and an ardent feminist reacted strongly to the title: "I can't stand these books that tell women it's all their fault", she said. "There are societal structures at play that prevent women from succeeding, a single woman can't change everything." And she's right, there are strong societal factors at play. Women are socialized, from an early age, not to promote their own interests, and to focus instead on the needs of others. This message is so powerful that as grown women, we don't even realize we've internalized it. If we do realize it, we may not realize the impact it has on our willingness to negotiate. We tend to assume that we will be rewarded for working hard and doing a good job. The authors of this book make the point that it's probably hard for women, who until about 100 years ago didn't have the right to vote, to inherit, or to own property, to state

what they want, need, and wish. We just haven't been taught that we can ask for these things – that we can ask for more than we're getting. And when we do, we're called bitchy, pushy, overbearing. Look at the reactions to Hillary Clinton in her campaign for the Democratic Presidential Nomination in the US. Here in Iceland, our current Minister of Foreign Affairs, who addressed you this morning, could tell you similar stories. But, we do need to ask for what we deserve. Justice doesn't happen just because. If women hadn't campaigned for the right to vote, men wouldn't have felt it was just to give them that right. So, the first lesson of negotiating is you have to ask. But, in order to do that, you need to know what you want.

Assessing your needs is a vital step in negotiations and one that is often forgotten. I've had more conversations than I can count with friends who are gearing themselves up to ask, yet they don't know what to ask for – and they don't know what they will accept. The key to success in any negotiation is knowing when you're going to walk away. The academic term for this is to know your BATNA, which is short for the Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement. If you're not going to get what you want in the negotiations, you should know your options outside of it. What will you do? If you ask for a raise and don't get it, will you stay in your job? Will you quit? This assessment is difficult for many women. A friend whose workplace was undergoing organizational changes recently called me for advice. Her position was being shifted around in the hierarchy and she was not

happy with the proposed landing. When I told her to think about her BATNA and asked what it was, she said: “I don’t want to think about that, because then I’ll just go for that and not try to negotiate.” At first I thought this sounded a bit foolish, but in fact research indicates many women would do this. A lot of women are afraid of negotiating and if presented with a better offer they may just accept it, rather than use it as leverage in a negotiation. Thankfully, this friend didn’t have a better offer. She requested a meeting with her boss, stated what she wanted and got it – before lunch the next day! Sometimes, you just have to ask – but make sure you know what you’re asking for!

Now, I said earlier, that one of my favorite books is called “Women Don’t Ask.” In fact, this is something you hear a lot. Women just don’t ask for raises. They just don’t ask for promotions. They just don’t ask for the top seat on the list, or that corner office. Well, one of the most extensive studies ever done here in Iceland for the purpose of assessing gender equality asked men and women whether they had asked for a raise recently. An equal share of men and women had asked in the previous two years. The difference, however, became apparent when the same respondents were asked how many times they had asked. It turned out that a much higher proportion of men had asked repeatedly. This brings me to the title of another book, one that makes me say “Yes, yes, yes!” every time I read a chapter, there is so much truth in it. The book is called: “My Answer is No... If That’s Okay with You: How Women Can Say No and (still) Feel Good

About It.” First, be sure to ask (and don’t take no for an answer). The second lesson of negotiating is never hesitate to say no if you’re being asked to do something that doesn’t suit you. A lot of women have a hard time saying no, because the need for acceptance and the unwillingness to hurt other people’s feelings is so strongly ingrained in us. But not saying no – not setting limits – will make you feel bad, make you feel like you are being taken advantage of, and may even make you resent the person who simply stated their wishes and got what you said was okay with you.

One of the most effective lessons in negotiations is that if you think about it, everything is negotiable. When given the assignment to negotiate something – anything – and report back in the next class, my students respond in the same way as the students of so many others who teach negotiations. When asked what made the difference in their success, most of them say it was the awareness that they could negotiate. A woman who suffers from psoriasis gets free access to the Blue Lagoon. She’s been going there regularly for years. Her husband has an undiagnosed skin condition and has been paying his own way through the years. (I don’t know if you’ve been to the Blue Lagoon, but it’s quite expensive.) Given the homework of negotiating something between our two sessions, this woman decided to ask if her free access could count for two. The immediate response was “of course”. Reporting back at our second session a week later, she felt

victorious, empowered, and successful. The third lesson, therefore, is: decide to negotiate.

The actions of this woman reflect yet one more truth about women as negotiators. We tend to not fight very hard for ourselves. This may be the reason women are portrayed as weaker negotiators. In the past few years research has told us that “women don’t ask, often let opportunities for negotiation slip by, typically set low goals, concede easily, and let their emotions show.” All of these things are supposed to be bad – but mostly they’re just not reflective of masculine behavior. Meta-analysis of 62 research reports on gender and competitive behavior, however, showed that “women appear to behave more cooperatively in negotiations than men, but this difference is slight.” Statistical difference was noted in only two aspects – women are more cooperative and they tend to receive lower outcomes when money is at issue. A possible solution for this is to reframe negotiations – especially ones that have to do with money. The conclusions of a number of research reports indicate that women are equally effective as men when they are negotiating for others; the gender differences disappear when women and men act as agents. “When women bargain for others, they set higher goals, make higher first offer, and perform better than they do when they negotiate for their own needs. In most instances, they outperform their male counterparts when they bargain for others.” A woman who attended one of my classes recently told me how she never dared stand up for

her rights, she felt overlooked and repressed in the workplace. Yet, when her child was sick and not getting what she felt was the right treatment, this same woman stood up to the entire hospital staff, including the medical chief of staff. Thanks to her diligence – refusing to take no for an answer – the problem was diagnosed correctly and her child is healthy. I hope she left having realized that these skills could be transferred into her daily life – and that they would be an asset to her and her boss. The fourth lesson of negotiating, reflected in this woman's actions, is to find yourself a client. A friend once told me when she has to make difficult decisions that involve mostly her own interests, she looks at a picture of herself as a child and asks: “What does this little girl deserve?” By doing this, she takes her current self out of the picture and fights for the future of her childhood self. I think it's a brilliant tactic to help women sidestep the tendency to devalue their own needs.

When we negotiate, we empower ourselves. By asking, saying no, deciding to negotiate, and fighting for ourselves as we would for a client, we shape our future, we feel more in control of our lives, and harness the power we have to effect change. Negotiations provide us with an opportunity to shape our own destiny and this can have a transformative effect on our lives.