

# RENEGOTIATING SUCCESS... WHEN “WHAT WORKS” CHANGES

By James Mitchell, Principal Consultant, Conversations Consulting

We all know that conditions for business or organizational success are never static – especially where human relationships are concerned. Creating, selling and delivering a product or service that meets the varied requirements of our internal and external stakeholders can be a complex task with illusive outcomes. We understand this. Yet as competition increases, or when a major client pulls out, or staff raise concerns, often we react with surprise, irritation, or worse – with worried indifference.

What will happen if we fail to incorporate a new reality, even a painful one? If in our response we neglect to remember our interdependence with others, to acknowledge shifts in their attitudes or ours, we may foster detrimental or even fatal elements in business relationships we depend on.

If we believe “change happens”, why do we begrudge customers, suppliers, staff or partners their requests to renegotiate terms with us? Why don't we negotiate changes we require? Do we think in the



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end we are immune? Do we even realize what is happening, or that a renegotiation is needed? Perhaps we think the new challenge is too great. Maybe we take a shift in a stakeholder's behavior as an assault on us personally and spend our energy on being upset instead of on problem-solving. In any case, I suggest we can and should work with these developments, to achieve a new best for ourselves and for our stakeholders. We can ask relevant questions, and initiate conversations to increase mutual understanding,



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and to improve our approach if change is needed.

Such a response is not easy to execute. But it may be less difficult than managing the negative effects of failing to take initiative. Let's be willing to hear from others even if we must deal with conflict in the process. Like you, I hesitate to engage, when unsure these conversations will be effective. But can we really afford not to pause, to listen, to learn...to apply what we learn?

**Recommended Reading:** The Living Company, Arie de Geus, Harvard Business School Press, 1997.

James Mitchell, principal consultant for Conversations Consulting, is a Certified Management Consultant and Chartered Mediator, with more than 20 years of experience helping construction companies, government organizations, professional firms and others navigate courses of change and the conflict that can develop during these times. 🏠



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