

Entrepreneurship Curricula

Case studies: Three Short Stories on Negotiation

Story #1

In a faraway land a man left his three sons 17 camels. To the first son, he left half the camels. To the second son, he left a third of the camels, and to the youngest son, he left a ninth of the camels. Dividing the camels, the three sons got into a heated negotiation. Seventeen doesn't divide by two. It doesn't divide by three. It doesn't divide by nine. Brotherly tempers started to get strained. Arguments ensued.

Finally, in desperation, they went and consulted the Wise Woman. She thought about their problem for a long time, and finally she came back and said: "Well, I don't know if I can help you, but at least, if you want, you can have my camel." So then they had 18 camels.

The first son took his half; half of 18 is 9. The second son took his third; a third of 18 is 6. The youngest son took his ninth; a ninth of 18 is 2. In all the brothers now had 17 camels.

They had one camel left over. They gave it back to the Wise Woman.

And the three brothers rode off into the sunset all happy with their camels.

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Story #2

On reading the story above, it may bother you that the Wise Woman did not make anything out of her intervention. After all, she first gave the brothers her camel and then got it back, gaining nothing from her work.

News spread about what the Wise Woman had done for the three brothers and soon after a wealthier man passed away, also with three sons to whom he bequeathed 35 camels. They too had to divide the camels $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{3}$, and $\frac{1}{9}$ for the oldest, middle and youngest brother. The same acrimonious squabble broke out; the three brothers could not decide how to divide the 35 camels as willed by their late father.

As all wise negotiators, this time the Wise Woman thought creatively about how all can benefit from the situation and how to go about dispensing her sage advice. "Also," she thought, "it has been a long time since I bought myself a new dress".

Again the wise woman did her trick – but this time with a twist. She added her one camel to the brothers' 35 to get 36. Then she gave 18 or $\frac{1}{2}$ to the first brother, 12 or $\frac{1}{3}$ to the second, and 4 or $\frac{1}{9}$ to the last of the three brothers.

Now there were two camels left. One camel was hers in the first place.

The second camel? The Wise Woman kept it as her fee.

Later that day, the Wise Woman walked away into the sunset, smiling and wearing a beautiful new dress.

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Story #3

On a day the three brothers returned to the Wise Woman and asked: “Teach us about negotiation for we too want to have more camels. Clearly you know things we don’t and you are wise in the ways of the world”. “Well let me teach you something that is easy to say but tricky to do” said she.

“Two of you will each take your best camel to race to the tree on the horizon and back”. Two brothers, always eager to race, each selected their fastest camel. “However, said the Wise Woman, “in this race the owner of the losing camel will keep the other’s camel.” “The loser?” asked the youngest brother. “But that will take all day and all night and it is a very strange race indeed”

With that the Wise Woman walked over to the other two brothers who were already waiting to start, and she whispered something to them. Immediately they set off and ran the camels to the tree as fast as they could.

“You see, when you go camel-trading you have to think of the usual things differently.” said the Wise Woman to the youngest brother who was looking at all this in astonishment. “What did you say to them?” he asked. The Wise Woman replied: “I gave them a short instruction: “Switch camels!”

The three brothers left the Wise Woman at sunset, one the poorer, one the richer and all three the wiser.