

A Course in Discourse: WTS-LA Members Learn the Art of the Spiel



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Benjamin Franklin said, “Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.” In many ways, Franklin defined the ideal structure for an effective professional development workshop. And on September 15th, WTS-LA Professional Development chair and civil engineer for the Port of Los Angeles Mahsa Pan, PE, realized that ideal by presenting an exceptionally effective professional development workshop for WTS-LA members.

“During the mid-career program last year, we conducted a survey to see what our participants wanted for their careers,” explains Ms. Pan. “They said they wanted to learn more about negotiation. Negotiating is a skill that most people aren’t inherently familiar or comfortable with. But people face negotiations almost every day. From purchasing a car to asking for a raise, people negotiate. I’m a construction manager and often negotiate change orders. In transportation, people are always signing contracts that they need to negotiate. So, I wanted a workshop to help to ease the anxiety that people often feel when they enter a negotiation. I learned about a company called Insight Strategies that teaches a negotiation skills workshop. And, I decided to bring them to WTS-LA.



“There are a lot of professional development programs on negotiating, but we wanted to do something different, something that would be really helpful for all types of career levels, something that people could use both inside and outside of work. Also, while we certainly wanted to cover the theoretical aspect of negotiation, we were primarily concerned about the practical side. We wanted to provide tactics that were useful from the minute people left the program. We wanted it to be interactive, educational, and fun. And I think we succeeded.” Held at LA Metro headquarters in downtown Los Angeles and led by Teri Fisher, CEO and managing partner of Insight Strategies, the 4-hour WTS-LA Professional Development Workshop—Negotiating for Your Life featured instruction, handouts, and breakout sessions to help participants learn the art of negotiation.

Covering everything from the fears and caveats of effective negotiation to timing to conflict resolution, the workshop helped participants recognize negotiating situations and develop strategies for achieving desired outcomes. And according to participant feedback, it worked.



“The strategies that Teri explained helped participants gain a different mindset and framework for thinking of negotiations,” adds Ms. Pan. “Insight Strategies did a recap of the session and found that participants really responded well to what they taught. Most importantly, participants felt that the exercises gave them practical, real-world tips that they could apply at their next negotiation. And that’s what made all the difference. Accordingly, every respondent felt they gained something useful, something that they would take back to their office and

implement. And most participants believed that the range of strategies they learned will help them advance in their careers through greater efficacy in negotiation. Hopefully, by formally addressing the structure and philosophy of negotiation, the workshop will make WTS-LA members more confident when they enter into a negotiation.”

From teaching participants to recognize a win-lose proposition to understanding the emotional aspects of negotiation, Ms. Fisher provided expert counseling and insight into the range of negotiating skills and scenarios and how to approach them. Most importantly to Ms. Pan, however, was the way that Ms. Fisher and Insight Strategies transferred their knowledge.



“Negotiation is all about relationships. It’s something that we all need to use throughout different aspects of our lives, whether it’s at work or at home. This is something we can all use. But to truly learn negotiating skills, you really have to experience it with a guide or mentor. And that’s what this workshop provided.” Ben Franklin said, “Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.” Mahsa Pan knows this. And by bringing in Insight Strategies to teach it to WTS-LA members, she found a unique way to involve them in learning negotiating skills in a way where they could really learn and use them.