Opinion Science Podcast

Hosted by Andy Luttrell

Negotiation with Kwame Christian

April 26th, 2021

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Andy Luttrell:
When I was navigating the confusing process of trying to get a job at a university, there were some things I understood. Make a good impression. Give a good research talk. Ask insightful questions. I'm not saying I'm amazing at doing these things, just that I at least knew they had to happen. But then there was the question of my salary and setting up a research lab. The first real interview I went on, the question of resources to start my lab came up and the person just said, "Oh yeah, that's something we can negotiate when the time comes." Negotiate? Like I have to ask for what I want and then you can say no? What if I ask for too much? Are you gonna laugh at me? I'm not trying to be arrogant. I don't know what too much is. I'll tell you what. How about you just tell me what you can give me, and I'll say, "Yes, thank you."

Negotiating is not in my bones, but it's how you get ahead or so the movies tell me. But it's also what we do every day when we encounter conflict. We negotiate. Your needs are different from my needs. Your opinions are different from my opinions. But we still need to come to a resolution so we can live in the same world together. So, how do we do that?

You're listening to Opinion Science, the show about our opinions, where they come from, and how they change. I'm Andy Luttrell and today I'm talking to Kwame Christian. Kwame is an attorney, the director of the American Negotiation Institute, and teaches at Ohio State University's Moritz College of Law. He hosts the popular negotiation podcast Negotiate Anything and he wrote the book Finding Confidence in Conflict: How to Negotiate Anything and Live Your Best Life. No surprise here, I talked to Kwame about negotiation. But what's interesting about him is just how broadly he thinks about negotiating. On the one hand, he cut his teeth in classic business negotiation, but we'll also talk about his work on applying principles of negotiation to difficult conversations we might encounter day to day. Talking politics, talking about race, advocating for diversity and inclusion. These are negotiations, too.

Kwame has degrees in psychology, law, and public policy, and spent time working at the Kirwan Institute doing civil rights work, so he's a smart guy with skills in a lot of areas, and I wanted to get the lowdown on what negotiation is and how we can learn to do it better.

I sort of thought that the place that we could start is just to define negotiation. So, as a persuasion researcher myself, often I think of persuasion as individual messages that are communicated to an

audience and an outcome that hopefully results from that message. Whereas my sense is that negotiation is a little more dynamic than just what does a single message produce change-wise in an audience. So, if you were to sort of define negotiation and give a couple examples about when people would be negotiating, I think that would be a nice place to start.

Kwame Christian:
Absolutely. So, my definition of negotiation is any time you're in a conversation and somebody in the conversation wants something. And so, my definition is intentionally broad because I think negotiation awareness is one of the biggest barriers people have to negotiation. They just don't realize when they're doing it. Now, I realize that I'm dealing with a highly sophisticated audience, so I'll take my standard definition and take it a little bit further, because a lot of people who listen to that, they might say, "Well, that really just sounds like persuasion," which is kind of steering a conversation, trying to get people to think differently. And I agree with that.

The more traditional description of negotiation, if we're trying to draw a distinction between persuasion in general and the school of negotiation, with negotiation it's a conversation with the stated intention of producing a specific outcome. And so, if we're taking it that next step and creating that distinction, that's what the distinction is, but I find it a lot more useful to think about it more broadly, because now we're able to interact with people with more intentionality. And so, now with my wife and my five-year-old, I think about these as little negotiations, and so now I'm a lot more strategic about that interaction. At work, we often think about it in terms of external negotiations. I'm negotiating this contract with a vendor or something like that. But the most important negotiations and the most frequent negotiations are going to be within your own team. Talking about roles and responsibilities, setting expectations, setting boundaries. Those are all negotiations.

And if we start to think about them in terms of negotiations, it makes it more likely for us to then think more strategically about the way we're interacting with each other. And that's why I called the podcast Negotiate Anything, to make sure that we're thinking about it in that type of way.

Andy Luttrell:
Yeah. Certainly, the first thing that comes to mind when I think of negotiation is like a salary negotiation, or these kind of like well-trodden workplace type things. But as I've listened to the podcast and looked at the kind of things that you've done, it's clear that yeah, negotiation cuts across lots of different things. In terms of you've done a lot of talking lately about communicating about difficult topics, just with people who you are around, and how we can think of that as a negotiation, and so if we take one extreme, like here's the money I want, this is the sort of classic negotiation. What does… Can you give an example of sort of those just difficult conversations as negotiation? What would that mean to think of that as a negotiation?

Kwame Christian:
I think with the more transactional side it's clear what the outcome can be. Now, with the more difficult conversations, I think a lot of times people go into these conversations just saying, "I'm going to share my truth." And that's kind of what they want to do, but what they end up doing is they have this conversation where they say, "I want you to accept my truth as your truth." And there's this assumption that the reason why people think differently from us is simply because they

are not as enlightened and educated as us, and so we say, "Oh, I have this information, and this is why I believe what I believe. The reason you don't believe what I believe is because you don't have that information. Let me educate you through this process."

And so, they have a very limited perspective on what persuasion is, and so then when they run into resistance and they say, "I shared that information with you. You don't believe what I believe. Oh my gosh! This is horrible. You're horrible." And that's where things start to break down really, really quickly.

Andy Luttrell:
That's funny. It reminds me of the early days of persuasion research in psychology. So, like back in the '40s there was this idea that when psychology was about learning, the idea was, "Oh, persuasion is just about learning the information, and as long as my message conveys the information, I should expect the audience to be persuaded." And it became pretty clear, pretty quickly, that no, audiences are not just passive recipients of information, right? They bring their own goals. They bring their own motivations to the table. They're critically thinking about the things that the speaker is saying.

And so, it's interesting to hear this, that that's a pretty natural extension of that early debate, right, is this lay conception of what negotiation means. You go, "Well, if I explain myself, isn't that enough?" And so, why isn't enough? What other steps would a person need to take based on what you've seen and how you talk to people, like to have that conversation?

Kwame Christian:
Empathy. I think that's what it comes down to. And so, a lot of times people don't have a great understanding of what empathy really is, and when you think about empathy, it's just getting an understanding of how the person sees, thinks, and feels about the situation. We're not feeling what they feel. That's more sympathy than empathy. We are just getting an understanding. It's being able to understand their perspective. That's it.

And if we don't understand their perspective, then we don't understand what is really driving them, and I think what people end up doing is using what I call egocentric persuasion. This is what persuaded me on this topic, therefore it is what should persuade you. Like this piece of information that I'm gonna give you should be dispositive as you're making a decision, but it's not. And so, people are very, very different in what really formulates their position. There's going to be bias involved. There's going to be their own history involved. There's going to be their personal incentives and self-interest that's involved in it. It's a lot.

And then if you take it a step further and you think about the psychology of personality, everybody's different, right? Just the most basic approach, if we think about the big five personality traits, openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, if I'm trying to persuade somebody who is an extroverted person who is very agreeable and low in neuroticism, that approach is going to be very different from somebody who is high in neuroticism, more introverted, and low in openness to experience, right? That's a completely different person.

But if I tried to persuade just based on who I am, then we're going to run into predictable barriers during these conversations.

Andy Luttrell:
I'm curious about how we can get people to break or to accurately empathize, I guess maybe is the way to put it. Because it reminds me of this cool work recently of the difficulties of political conversations across the aisle, where these studies show that liberal, relatively liberal and relatively conservative folks have different value priorities, right? That's sort of what it means to be liberal and conservative. It's just a difference in value priorities. But when you ask people to make your case to someone of a different political persuasion, even though we know they would be more effective if they framed their position through the values of the person they're talking to, people can't do it, right? Like you said, the egocentric thing.

They go, "Well, I know what would convince me and it seems so obvious that this would be the way to make the case, so I'm gonna make the case through my set of values." And that doesn't go through. And even if you are very clear, like you're talking to someone who has a different perspective than you, people have such a hard time breaking out of that way that they see the world. So, what can you do to encourage people to accurately get in the head of the person that they're trying to work collaboratively with?

Kwame Christian:
Yes. Oh, this is great. So, this has been a recent fascination for me, so book references, we have The Political Mind. We also have The Political Brain. They cover the same things, not surprisingly. And we have The Righteous Mind. I think that's my favorite one, by Jonathan Haidt, talking about the moral foundations theory. Six moral foundations to why people believe what they believe. And it's really interesting.

And I think one of the things when you examine the psychology of these ideologies is that it's not just about their belief system, and we often make the mistake of thinking about these things as though they are rational. We don't come to these conclusions rationally. We come to these conclusions emotionally. And that's why these conversations about race, about politics, about religion, all of these things become so heated so quickly because it's really focusing in on these values, but then not just those values, but specifically what these values mean to these individuals. And what the values mean to these individuals is very simple. It is morality, number one, and identity, number two.

So, morality, what it means to be a good or bad person. Number two, identity, who am I as a person and what is it that a person like me should believe? And so, that's why getting somebody to change their perspective on these things creates such an existential crisis, because they believe, "Hey, if I change my belief on this, can I still be considered a good person? If I change my belief on this, am I still considered who I thought I was? Am I part of the team? Is this abandoning my cause?" And so, then on the flipside we say, "You are not part of my team because you believe these things," so that's the tribalism, and then we have the moralizing of these beliefs because you don't believe what I believe, so therefore you are a bad person because I believe this because I'm good.

And so, you can tell how these conversations are essentially doomed. And to your point, Andy, the reason why people cannot make that adjustment is because they almost feel as though framing the position differently is in itself a concession. Because if it's a situation where I am a liberal person and I'm building this on the moral foundation of fairness and the moral foundation of protecting the vulnerable, but I'm talking to somebody who's conservative and what they've found is that conservatives have a more diverse moral palette, whereas liberals will focus more on fairness and protecting the vulnerable. More conservative people will base their beliefs on all six foundations more or less equally.

And so, if you're talking to somebody who's more conservative, who is going to base their beliefs more on authority, which is another moral foundation, and fairness defined by proportionality versus fairness defined by equality or equity, it feels like a concession saying, "Actually, the authority that you subscribe to would say this." Because for the liberal in that situation, they are more skeptical of the authority that the conservative is subscribing to. So, it becomes really fascinating when you just sit down and watch these people have these conversations, because you can see the predictable breakdowns because people are unwilling to empathize, number one, and unwilling to adjust their approach.

Andy Luttrell:
It's interesting, so I was almost thinking of it as inability rather than an unwillingness, so sure, for sure there's part of it where it's like it makes sense that you'd go, "I couldn't. I can't allow myself to use this argument because it feels weird, or wrong, or off to me." But I also wonder how much of it is that people go, "I don't realize that that's what you actually care the most about." Right? And so, I'm just doing what I think makes sense by trying to appeal to what my partner in this negotiation… I expect them to want. But we don't always know.

And it reminds me a little bit, I was watching your TED Talk on compassionate curiosity and I wonder if that's a little bit of a way to break through. So, could you maybe explain a little bit about what that is and how you came to that notion, and how it might be used in a situation like this?

Kwame Christian:
Yes. Absolutely. So, the compassionate curiosity framework, it's a three-part framework that is designed for simplicity. Because not surprisingly, if your body is filled with cortisol, that's stress hormone, and your amygdala is firing, you're not thinking that clearly, so I'm not gonna give you complicated. So, the framework is simple for that reason, so it's number one, acknowledge and validate emotions. Number two, get curious with compassion. And number three, joint problem solving.

And Andy, through all of my negotiations, whether it's with opposing counsel in a really, really tough situation, or with my five-year-old, or with my wife, this is the foundation. It's that simple and that widely applicable. And so, if you see the specter of any type of difficult emotion, what you do is you acknowledge it and validate it by labeling the emotion. So, for your psychology-conscious audience, this is affect labeling from clinical psychology. And so, you label the emotion because the reason why it works is because the part of the brain that has to accept or reject the labels is called the ventral medial prefrontal cortex, located in the frontal lobe, so by labeling that

emotion it's causing them to think using their frontal lobe, which has a calming effect, which leads them to then decompress and vent a little bit.

So, we might be having a conversation and it's about a heated political issue, and so I might stop and say, "Andy, correct me if I'm wrong, but it sounds like to you, you want to make sure that people are compensated fairly for the work that they do. Is that correct?" And then you say, "Yes, that's all I'm saying," right? And so, that calms the person down and makes it less likely for them to have that visceral emotional response. So, once that emotional response is handled, then you transition into the next point, which is getting curious with compassion. And so, this is asking open-ended questions with a compassionate tone.

So, we want to give them the opportunity to share, and give, and share why they believe what they believe, and what is creating that foundation for their belief. And so, in that situation we want to use questions that start with who, what, where, when, and how, avoiding questions that start with why, because questions that start with why can trigger defensiveness, because it sounds like an accusation or a judgment. And so, if we're thinking about this from a conversation about a sensitive issue like race, religion, politics, those type of things, you have to remember this really simple truth. You can't convince anybody of anything. They have to convince themselves.

And so, the right approach to addressing that foundation if your goal is to get them to think differently is using epistemology, which is the science or the philosophy behind how you know what you know. And so, you have to use the compassionate curiosity framework in order to get an idea of what they know and why they believe that thing. And then you ask strategic and targeted questions that help them to recognize the potential gaps in their understanding.

And then with joint problem solving, this is if there was a specific resolution, you're trying to get the person to do. So, like in a negotiation, this is where we're trying to resolve the issue at hand. This is when we're talking about the deal or whatever. Or in an interpersonal interaction, this is where we talk about what the relationship looks like going forward. But in these political conversations, it's not always clear what the end goal is, because maybe the end goal is just getting them to think clearly. Maybe we don't hit joint problem solving because there's really no specific resolution. Or if your goal is to flip votes, first of all, good luck. Second of all, then you try to figure out where they stand and whether they're willing to adjust their position.

Andy Luttrell:
I almost wonder if it's worth pulling back to get a sense of your own background on these things, because part of what I'm interested in is not only what is negotiation, how can we do it better, but also how do we know about what makes for good negotiating, like what's… What can we do to better understand negotiation scientifically from my perspective, or through experience, or through training, and those sorts of things, and you've really found this niche of negotiation training and giving a platform to people who study these sorts of things. So, I'm curious, could you walk us through a little bit how you got here? So, I know that you were a psych major. Did you know at the time that you were gonna be like the negotiation guy? Or did that just sort of… Was that just sort of a happenstance of how things go?

Kwame Christian:
It really was more of a happenstance because when I was in psychology, I wanted to be a therapist. And then I became really interested in politics because, you know how undergrads are, they just say, "I want to help people." Okay, fantastic. Well, how? And so, I said, "Well, if I'm a therapist, I can help one person at a time, but if I'm a politician, I could help people through policy." And so, I did that shift where I went and did the dual degree at OSU. All three of my degrees are from the Ohio State University. And so, it was a law degree and a Master of Public Policy, finished those two in three years, but the thing is I learned very quickly, Andy, that it was not a life I wanted for myself or for my family.

The more I learned, the less I liked it, and so I stumbled across a negotiation course, and it was the first time I saw psychology mobilized for a legal or business purpose. And so, I said, "I don't know how, but this is it. This is really cool." And so, the early parts of my career were spent trying to figure out how best to mobilize negotiation and persuasion to make the world a better place.

Andy Luttrell:
Can you think about like the early, like once you finished your degree and you were starting, because you've worked as an attorney, right? Professionally? Are there any experiences you could point to, to go like, "Oh, like I saw why it's important for negotiation to go well?" Anything that sort of rung a bell of like, "Oh, this is actually more at the heart of things than I had realized before?"

Kwame Christian:
I think I came to that conclusion pretty early, actually, in my life. Not even the career. And so, this helps to explain why our motto at the American Negotiation Institute is, "The best things in life are on the other side of difficult conversations." Because I'm a recovering people pleaser. And so, I remember with growing up in Tiffin, Ohio, being the only Black kid in the school, and being even weirder because my family's from the Caribbean, so I had a really strong accent. Right now, now I know how to code switch really well, so this is my business American accent, but at the time I wasn't that good at it.

And so, I became a people pleaser to gain acceptance, and so I realized that it wasn't a life that I wanted to live because I wasn't having the impact that I wanted to have, and I was letting people, friends, acquaintances, walk all over me. And so, I recognized through my time at OSU learning how to negotiate the fact that this was a skill, not a talent. Because before, I thought I was doomed to live my life this way, and so when I stumbled upon negotiation, I took the course, we did a negotiation competition. My partner and I, we won the competition at the Ohio State University, which allowed us to represent the school at regionals, and we won that competition in Canada, and then we made it to the finals, the semi-finals of the American Bar Association national competition in New Orleans.

And so, I was like, "I used to suck at this. This was bad. How did I get to this point? Oh, it's a skill I could improve." And so, when you take that skillset and blend it with a background in psychology, I recognized that there is a way to blend the two. Because I realized there are people all over the world who struggle with this, and so, with the American Negotiation Institute, yes, it's fantastic to be able to do these trainings and help people to get better deals in their negotiations,

but what I really like is when people have that aha moment and they realize, "I can overcome this and I can change, and it doesn't just improve my career, it improves my life." And so, that's really what I enjoy doing. Empowering people by helping them build their confidence using that foundation of psychology, but then blending that with the skillset that they need in order to get what they want out of life.

Andy Luttrell:
So, one of the things that I'm curious about is thinking of it as a skill, you think of it as you practice and you develop a skill like that. How much of this would you say is a skill that's just practice and learning for yourself versus something you can study the theory of it and apply? Does that make sense?

Kwame Christian:
I would say it is about… If I had to come up with an arbitrary distribution, I would probably say 70/30, where 30% is the theory. Because I know… I love theories. As you can tell, I like studying this stuff. But it's safe to stay in that world. And so, people can have a theoretical understanding, but it doesn't mean that they can put it into practice. That's the thing. And so, that's why the book is called Finding Confidence in Conflict, because to me it doesn't make sense to give recipes to people who are afraid to get in the kitchen. I can teach you how to negotiate. I can teach you the theories and you can have a very, very clear understanding of it. But if you don't have the confidence to then execute, then what is the point?

And so, that's why I would lean more heavily on the practical side, the actual practice of it, and then, I love this podcast because I get to get nerdy. When you think about it from a perspective of neuroplasticity, we're changing our brain with every interaction. And so, especially if you're that person who's unwilling to engage, you're creating that new habit of engagement, where it's not just these learnings being stored in the hippocampus, where you can recite it. It's actually getting deeper as part of you. Your brain is changing. It's being more stored in the basal ganglia, where you are now at a point where you're more reacting. You know, it's more natural. It's more a part of you.

And so, I think that's why we have to focus so heavily on action and practice more so than just theory, because when it comes down to it, the theory doesn't matter if we don't put it into practice.

Andy Luttrell:
I'm not super familiar with the research directly on negotiation. Is there much? So, there's plenty of research in psychology that's relevant to negotiation, but are there studies directly looking at here is how negotiations can go better, right? Like we're observing negotiations and manipulating variables to determine what is effective.

Kwame Christian:
I'd say yes, but it's pretty limited. You know, I think what is helpful is to get a wide variety of schools of thought on persuasion and seeing how it can apply. So, for instance, we can talk about Robert Cialdini, right? When you think about that, a lot of marketers are using that persuasively, but then you can take some of that and use it persuasively in your negotiations, as well. The things that come to mind for me are things about the psychology of anchoring. And so, when you think

about anchoring, really what that is, in negotiation we call it anchoring, but in psychology we'd call it priming. And so, with anchoring, what you're doing is you're starting off the negotiation with the most aggressive request that you can reasonably justify. And then you recognize that through priming, by stating that number, you're changing the reference point for the negotiation, so going forward every offer into the future is going to be compared to that initial offer. And because of the psychology of priming, it makes it more likely that you are going to get closer to that number.

So, when you think about it in terms of a more concrete example, the reason they call it anchoring is because with an anchor, you drop it off the boat and then the change is a certain length. You know the boat isn't going to go but so far from that anchor. Same theory applies when it comes to negotiation too. So, I think the most interesting research on negotiation comes from anchoring. Something else that I think is more… I wouldn't say more practical, but very practical, is just the psychology behind the impact of preparation. And so, there was one study done by Karen Walsh where they had over 200 mock negotiations, and what they did was they said, "Okay, with this group we're just going to," the control group, they're just going to read the prompt in this negotiation and negotiate. With the other group, the experimental group, we're going to have them prepare thoroughly and then negotiate.

The skillsets were approximately the same. You know, nobody was trained more than the other. And what they found is that the teams that did the preparation on average, they were able to create 11% more value for themselves in the negotiation, while at the same time creating 7% more value for the people on the other side of the negotiation, too. So, they were more successful, and more creative, and more collaborative through preparation too.

So, those are the things that I think are most interesting when we looked at the studies applied for negotiation, but the reality is negotiation is a complex dance with a lot of different variables, and it's tough to really get too many clear answers through the studies.

Andy Luttrell:
Yeah. I was trying to think if I were to design a negotiation study, like what would it look like, and where I get hung up is what the outcome of interest is, right? Like what is the marker of a successful negotiation? In persuasion, it's very clear, right? If I want to convince you of something, I look to whether you're convinced. But negotiation, it's two parties that want different things and both want something that's not the same thing, and we talked a little bit before about judging these negotiation competitions, like what are you looking for? What is the thing that says that was a success? How would you… Is there a way to quantify or operationalize a successful negotiation?

Kwame Christian:
Well, I think you've done a great job of demonstrating how complicated it can be because it's going to be complicated because there are a lot of different variables, and subjective, because different people want different things. We value things differently. And so, what I like to think about is this: I think about negotiating having essentially three pillars or goals. So, number one, I want to think offensively. How can I get more of what I want, whatever it happens to be in this interaction? Number two, thinking defensively, how can I avoid things that I don't want in this

interaction? And number three, how can I build the relationship throughout the interaction? Because the relationship itself has value.

And so, again, everybody has to come to essentially have that internal negotiation to determine what it is that's important to them, but until they do, they might be negotiating for the wrong thing. They might win. Using air quotes here. They might "win" by getting a ton of money, but if they damage the relationship irreparably in the process, then it's ultimately a loss. So, I think each person has to do a little bit of introspection beforehand to determine what a win is for them and then create their strategies accordingly.

Andy Luttrell:
So, can we talk a little bit about the… You've talked about the American Negotiation Institute. How long ago did that start and what is sort of the hope for it and what do you use it… Not what do you use it for, but what value does it bring to people who seek it out?

Kwame Christian:
Yeah, so we started ANI five years ago. Five years ago. And the goal is to have as much of a positive impact as we can. And so, I think more so than other negotiation consultancies, we give away a lot of free content, so our podcast, we have the most popular negotiation podcast in the world. I think we're over three million downloads now. I need to double check. And listeners in 180 countries and five episodes a week, so we're producing a lot of content. I'm a contributor for Forbes, so a lot of free articles coming out, and we also have a podcast called Ask With Confidence, all about gender dynamics and negotiation, too.

And so, with all of this content we're putting out, it's clear that our end goal is a little bit different. Because again, like I said, we're guided by this principle that the best things in life are on the other side of difficult conversations. So, we want to make difficult conversations easier so people can improve the quality of their lives, their community, and their relationships. And so, that's why we focus really heavily on free content. And then when it comes to the bread and butter behind our revenue, it comes from number one, trainings, and a little bit of coaching, but mainly the trainings. And so, we hired six new trainers for ANI, so it's not just me anymore. And so, for conflict management, leadership, traditional negotiation, more transactional negotiations, those type of things, that's where we're really focusing on. And we've started to dip our toe into diversity, equity, and inclusion, by focusing our content on how to have difficult conversations about race and politics that creep into the workplace.

And people are realizing it's becoming an issue of inclusivity and team cohesion, because people can't have these conversations in an appropriate way. And so, what we do is we overlay the negotiation and conflict resolution fundamentals as applied to these difficult conversations about these sensitive issues in order to bring teams back together. And so, it's been really fun to see that business side grow, not just in terms of our product offering, but in terms of expertise, as well. Because each of the new trainers brings a new skillset to the table, so we're really excited about the direction that things are going and I… The goal is to have that impact and just continue to grow.

Andy Luttrell:
When you do this consulting and training, is there anything that you find is the most difficult thing people struggle with? What is the thing that people have the hardest time quite mastering in this negotiation dynamic?

Kwame Christian:
Emotions. That's it. It's the emotional component. It's about number one, managing their own emotions while under duress, and number two, managing the emotions of the people on the other side that are unpredictable to them. And then again, this is where the psychology comes in, because again, most people, most other training programs think tactically. This is what you do, this is what you say, this is how you say it, those type of things. We think about it from the ground up. This is where the psychology comes into play. Because once you get a better understanding of human psychology, then you can start to predict these problematic behaviors that will come over, come in during these conversations. You're not surprised anymore. You're saying, "Oh, this is the amygdala. They're probably responding to an ambiguous situation. I wasn't clear with my intentions. Let me acknowledge this emotion because of this reason." Right?

People understand what to do. And so, I think it gives them a deeper understanding and it demystifies that emotional component, so it seems less scary, number one, and number two, you stop taking things personally. Because if you're seeing an emotional response, it's easy to take that personally. What is it about me that you don't trust? You don't trust me? You don't think I'm competent? You think I have malicious intent? How dare you?

But then if you stop back and think about it psychologically, you say, "Hm. This is a predictable response. I know what to do. I have the tools."

Andy Luttrell:
Is a lot of that like simulated negotiation? How do you, like nuts and bolts, how do you take someone who goes, "I don't know how to do this," to, "I feel comfortable doing this?"

Kwame Christian:
Yeah. It has to be practiced. That's the thing. I think when… You know, different clients have different time restrictions, and if I'm only given 90 minutes to do a training, it's tough to put in a simulation. But if you give me a half a day, full day, things like that, now we can actually practice these things. Because what we're doing is we're developing a system of unnatural responses to these natural situations. Because if somebody's responding emotionally to me and treating me with hostility, my natural human response isn't to sit back and acknowledge and validate emotions respectfully with a compassionate tone. That's not normal. That's not one of our fear responses, right?

And so, these habitual responses need to be practiced in safe environments, so then when you actually see that behavior out in the wild, you know what to do. And so, again it goes back to what we were talking about, the theory versus the practicality. We have to focus on the practice.

Andy Luttrell:
I have to imagine too, so I'm also interested in the diversity, equity, inclusion work that you do, because that strikes me as another one where people aren't having the conversations because they're petrified of how they're gonna go, and there's plenty of research on when you… these negativity biases about like you expect the worst, and so you never put one foot forward to try. You never realize that these conversations can actually go okay, right? That people are willing to have a nice conversation about these sorts of topics. And so, not only that, I'm gonna sort of smush a bunch of stuff I guess into one question for you.

Kwame Christian:
That's fine.

Andy Luttrell:
Because I'm a little curious about what you've done with the Kirwan Institute, because I know that just as an OSU person, I know that they do cool stuff, and that you've been involved with them. And when I was looking at the… What was it? Ask With Confidence? Is that the other confidence?

Kwame Christian:
Yeah.

Andy Luttrell:
You know, it raises the question that I often think about when it comes with advocacy in terms of who's doing the advocating and what challenges come with being sort of an advocate for a cause that might seem to an audience to be sort of self-serving, right? So, if marginalized groups are advocating for diversity, equity, and inclusion, that creates this challenge of audiences may go, "Oh, well, is that person…" If it's a dynamic where it's activism targeting majority group audiences, are those audiences going to go, "Oh, this person is just… They're just trying to get some special favor and try and do something unfairly." Whereas, when it's sort of an ally advocating for those same causes, the inferences can go differently.

So, there are just so many ways that that conversation can go awry. And so, I wonder how much you've thought about these identities that we all carry with us that have all sorts of baggage when we bring them into negotiations with another person who may have assumptions about what those identities mean?

Kwame Christian:
Yeah. Absolutely. And the thing about identities is that we carry them at all times and it's gonna be in these difficult conversations about race and politics, it's gonna be in these difficult conversations with spouses, loved ones, and people at work, right? And so, I have to recognize as the boss if I have a conversation with a friend, things are going to be taken very differently than when I'm having a conversation with an employee. There's a power dynamic at play here, right? And so, I have to recognize the identity that I have, my perspective, and how they are seeing me.

So, when you take that to advocacy versus allyship and it becomes really interesting, because you're right. It could be seen as self-serving. We need more minorities in leadership positions. Oh,

well, isn't that convenient? Right? It makes sense. In negotiation and conflict resolution, there's a term called reactive devaluation, and the way that I describe it is it's the just because you said it, I don't believe it bias. You know, so imagine a teenager, and you tell your teenager, "Hey, you should do this. You should apply for this school." "Okay, dad. Whatever." And then your best friend says, "Hey, buddy. You should apply for this school." "Oh, man. Thanks, Scott. Appreciate it." And then you just… You do it, right? I don't believe my dad. I'm skeptical of it.

And so, in these conversations we have to recognize that that shows the importance of allyship. Oh, well, maybe there is something to it. You're not a person of color, but you believe this is important. That's very interesting. That's intriguing. Tell me more. And I think that's why it's so important to have that connection and that kind of coordinated approach when it comes to these difficult conversations, because the more diverse the people who are advocating for a specific end, the more likely it is for that end to be realized. That's the first thing.

And then we also have to recognize that because of our various identities, because of our differing levels of privilege, and access, and whatnot, political capital is real. And so, there's just going to be some pull that other people have that other people don't. That's just the reality of the situation. So, in negotiation we talk about leverage, and I think here, we're talking about credibility, authority, and rapport that can be created by allies in some situations that people of color just cannot replicate. And so, all of these things have to be considered when you're thinking about advocating in a really powerful way. And I'm going to… My second book is going to come out next fall. It's on the topic of how to have difficult conversations about race. And really, what I'm going to try to bring to the discussion is the strategic persuasive lens, and simply saying we need to make this change because it's the right thing to do will not be as persuasive for the reasons that we described earlier in the podcast.

And so, if we can help people to think more strategically, I think we could really move forward and advance these causes for justice.

Andy Luttrell:
Very cool. Well, just as a way of wrapping up, if you want to give folks a heads up about the podcast, where to find it, what that's about, and other resources. You've mentioned a couple of them, but other things that you'd encourage people to check out?

Kwame Christian:
Yeah. Well, I think the most important thing is something I haven't said yet, and remember when I talked about the fact that preparation is the best way to improve your skills in a short period of time, get confidence and improve your outcomes. We have a set of free guides on our website. So, if you go to AmericanNegotiationInstitute.com/guide, G-U-I-D-E, you can get access to 15 free negotiation guides, just general business negotiation, salary negotiation, how to have difficult conversations about politics, difficult conversations about race, how to negotiate as an introvert, how to negotiate for your car, all of it is there as free resources and you can use that to prepare systematically.

You could listen to the Negotiate Anything Podcast and the Ask With Confidence Podcast anywhere where you are listening to this podcast. And of course, if you're interested in negotiation and conflict resolution trainings, check out our website, AmericanNegotiationInstitute.com.

Andy Luttrell:
Very cool. Well, thanks so much for being here. This was great to hear about negotiation in all the forms that it can take.

Kwame Christian:
My pleasure. Thanks for having me, Andy.

Andy Luttrell:
Sure thing.

All right, that'll do it for another episode of Opinion Science. Thank you to Kwame Christian for taking the time to talk. Check out his podcast, Negotiate Anything, and look for his TEDx Talk, Finding Confidence in Conflict. As always, check out the show notes for links to the things we talked about along with a full transcript. Subscribe to Opinion Science anywhere you get podcasts and follow the show on social media @OpinionSciPod. Check out OpinionSciencePodcast.com for everything else you could possibly want in the world. And hey, if you're enjoying the show, learning new things about persuasion and communication, and you're willing to spend a few seconds to help the show, leaving a nice review on your favorite podcast platform is not only nice for me to see, but also helps other people find us. I've gotten some very nice reviews recently, so thanks for those, whoever you are. One of the recent ones put it very poetically. "The podcast is like a plate with equal scoops of journalistic excellence and scholarly discussion of psychology, always thoughtfully developed and produced, and always entertaining."

That was very, very nice. Thank you. Okay, that's it for now. I'll see you in a couple weeks for more Opinion Science. Bye!