Negotiation Workshop, Presented by Dr. Jayne Thorson

Dr. Jayne Thorson, former Assistant Dean of Faculty Affairs in the UM Medical School, held a workshop on NEGOTIATION for members of CEW's Junior Women Faculty Network and the Women of Color in the Academy Project. After selecting Fisher & Ury's definition of negotiation as the "basic means of getting what you want from others," Dr. Thorson made the following points: POWER, TIME, and INFORMATION are the three aspects of negotiation that will determine who wins and why.

POWER: Dr. Thorson distinguished between "power" and "authority," saying that everyone has some power in a negotiation, and the key is to find where your power lies. Putting something in writing appears to give it power, but smart negotiators are not dissuaded by what is written down. The simple phrase "because I said so" has importance and power. Many times, said Dr. Thorson, women are apt to explain too much. She warned them not to try to over-explain their positions in order to make their demands.

TIME: Knowing all the timelines involved in a negotiation is also very important. Know your own and the others' deadlines. In addition, understanding the impact time has on negotiation outcomes is important: If you are able to get the other person to invest considerable time in the negotiation process, then you are more likely to prevail.

INFORMATION: This is the most important aspect of negotiations and the one you have the most ability to control. "Know more about the persons you're meeting than they know about you," said Dr. Thorson. Know who they are; what they want; why they want it (often the most difficult to determine); and when they want it. If it is a job negotiation, know the history of the job search, the reason the previous person left, the salaries of comparable employees, and all other relevant information you can determine.*

Dr. Thorson gave the following checklist for negotiating:

Ask yourself -- 1. "Is this issue negotiable?" and "Is negotiation necessary?"
According to Dr. Thorson, women are more likely than men to negotiate issues that they might better assume are permissible without asking.

2. "Who has the authority or power to grant the negotiation request?" Make sure those people are the ones with whom you are negotiating.

3. "Why are these people at the table? What outcomes are they seeking? What motives do they have?"

4. "What is included at the table?" Make sure you know which items are your ABSOLUTES; which are VARIABLES that you might be willing to concede; and which are FLUFF that don't really matter very much to you. Knowing what issues are variables and fluff allows you to make concessions and appear magnanimous and willing to compromise without having to budge on the absolutes.
Among the other suggestions Dr. Thorson gave were these:

1. Objectify the problems and place them outside the personal. For example, don't make it a matter of "You have to give me the money I want." Instead, identify the situation as "What can we do about the salary issue?"

2. State a reasonable outcome and say, "We'll do it this way unless I hear otherwise from you."

3. Once you've reached a negotiated settlement, "double check your boundaries" before you agree to it, just to be sure that you're comfortable with the provisions.

4. Close the deal by putting it in writing. (E-mail is very convenient for this step.)

* These books are especially helpful for learning about the negotiation process:


- *Hardball for women: Winning at the game of business.* NY: Plume