

Assessing Stakeholder Motives: The Three Main Reasons for Making Demands

Copyright © 1998 by Peter M. Sandman

1. Greed "I want more for me."

Greedy stakeholders want something from you: money, a buyout, a new park, a victory that can be converted into members and contributions. Don't be contemptuous of greed (it may help to call it "self-interest" or "the profit motive"). In fact, the goal of risk communication is to minimize the other motives so you can bargain with the greed.

2. Outrage "I want to see you punished."

Be careful not to misdiagnose outrage for greed; toxic tort plaintiffs, for example, sue because they're outraged more than because they're greedy (their lawyers are greedy). Greed wants to win (a win-win is okay), and sees an offer as a sign of progress. Outrage, on the other hand, wants you to lose (a lose-lose is okay), and sees an offer as a bribe. Outrage preempts greed, so you can't bargain effectively until the outrage is under control.

3. Self-Esteem "I want to feel better about myself."

When people feel embarrassed, ashamed, or guilty, they have little room for greed. They project their damaged self-esteem into what looks (and feels) like outrage -- but it's much more internal; their need to be vindicated, supported, comforted, or reassured takes precedence over any need to see you punished. The most extreme version is oppression. Communities that feel oppressed may act outraged, but their real preoccupation is their sense of themselves as always on the losing end of every encounter.

For more about my take on this issue, see:

- The Stupidity Defense (Jan 2001) -- www.psandman.com/col/stupid.htm
- Saying You're Sorry (May 2001) -- www.psandman.com/col/sorry.htm
- Guilt and ego as drivers in environmental risk controversies (Oct 2001) -- www.psandman.com/gst2001.htm#tissen
- When People Are "Over-Reacting" to Risk -- www.psandman.com/col/over-re.htm

Peter M. Sandman, Ph.D.

59 Ridgeview Road
Princeton NJ 08540-7601

Email: peter@psandman.com
Web: www.psandman.com

Phone: 1-609-683-4073
Fax: 1-609-683-0566

Consulting, Training, and Research in Risk Communication