

During the first year of the talks in Belfast, when the IRA was still actively attacking security forces and military installations, the governments persevered in keeping the parties at the table. I was later to discover that during the whole period of the negotiations prior to the 1998 Agreement, all eight of Meyer's lessons turned out to have applied to the Northern Ireland experience.

One aside about jaw jaw, perhaps worth mentioning, was my experience chairing the Business Committee. The Committee's work was procedural, dealing with schedules and timings, and in addition to myself it included one representative from each party and from the governments. While the Plenary Committee Sessions were held in a large room, around a hollow square of tables some thirty feet apart, and where each of the eight parties had three members seated as well as the governments and the chairmen, the Business Committee was confined to a small room with one table about three feet wide where members were seated across from each other, eye-ball to eyeball. What was noticeable during the Plenary Committee sessions was the frequent lack of politeness between some of the participants, with accusations and insults leveled across the wide gap between the tables.

None of that happened in the Business Committee where the proceedings were polite, to the point and fruitful. While acknowledging that the Plenary dealt with difficult political issues and the Business Committee dealt only with procedural ones, I was nonetheless surprised and impressed by the difference in conduct and the atmosphere of the two scenarios. It became clear to me that rudeness is emboldened by the factor of distance. The closer you are to the potential subject of your displeasure, the less likely you are to do or say something egregiously unpleasant. I mentioned that to Mitchell who then held some of the Plenary Committee's meetings with a reduced attendance in a smaller room around a narrow table. They turned out to be more productive.

That the Agreement passed on Good Friday 1998 was notable for a number of reasons. Trimble agreed to it even though decommissioning had still not happened, a decision which cost him some of his members. Both Britain and Ireland modified their constitutions – Britain repealing the 1920 Government of Ireland Act that laid claim to Northern Ireland, and Ireland repealing Articles Two and Three of its Constitution which did likewise. The Agreement called for referendums to be held on it in both north and south where, in the republic, 94% approved it and in the north 71% did so. But some of the Agreement's wording had of necessity