

Tips for Effective Negotiating

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Negotiation is a valuable skill in every part of your life. When carried out effectively negotiation can produce an outcome that is mutually beneficial for both parties. Negotiation is most enjoyable when both parties think they have gained something and when both parties have developed a positive working relationship. Since many of your negotiations at work and at home involve people you will be in close contact with for a long time, the long-term benefits of building a mutually respectful relationship are as important as the short-term gains that might result from any given negotiation.

Successful and skillful negotiation requires empathy, good listening skills, and compromise. Although you will not always get what you want just by asking, it is highly unlikely that you will get what you want if you do not ask at all. Good negotiation skills will not only allow you to get what you want, but also allow you to enhance your professional and personal life. While the examples here concentrate on the workplace, keep in mind that negotiation skills are transferable and everything in life is negotiable.

PREPARING TO NEGOTIATE. Like a presentation, any given negotiation can be outlined, practiced, and prepared for in advance. The better prepared you are, the more willing and able you will be to negotiate effectively.

1. Specify your goals and targets. Clarify what really matters to you. What do you most want to get out of the negotiation? Which items are least important to you? What are you prepared to exchange in order to achieve your main goal? Make a written list of the things you want and the trades you are willing to make. For example, in order to teach a course in your specialty, you might be willing to teach at a time that most faculty find undesirable. Or you might suggest doing some other task that the department would value and that you would not mind doing. Keep your list of goals and tradeoffs in mind throughout the negotiation process.
2. Use your list of goals and tradeoffs to create an agenda for yourself. Detail the order in which you want to discuss your goals, and use your acceptable tradeoffs to generate potential counteroffers in case you need to compromise. Although usually restricted to formal negotiation settings, an agenda can be a useful preparation tool. It can serve as an outline to help you organize your ideas and prepare what you want to say. Even if you never share your agenda with the person you are negotiating with, a written agenda can help you present your goals clearly and explicitly as well as help you feel confident to carry through the negotiation.

3. Consider what is likely to matter to the person you are negotiating with. If possible, ask others about the success of their recent negotiations with this person, or reflect on your own recent experiences with him or her. Try to understand his or her position and possible concerns. For example, before a negotiation with a department chair, keep in mind that the chair is concerned about benefiting the department, about maintaining an impression of fairness, and about being respected. Review what you know of recent issues of concern to the department. As you prepare to present your goals and targets, also prepare justifications for your requests that will take the other person's likely concerns into account.
4. Practice negotiating with someone else. Tell the other person what objections you are anticipating and practice various responses to these objections. Do the role-play in reverse if you are practicing with someone who is a good negotiator. For example, you can take on the role of the department chair and the other person can take on your role. Like any skill, negotiation can be learned and improved. Practicing will not only help you to prepare, but also help you to advance your negotiation skills.

CONDUCTING THE NEGOTIATION. Once you have determined your goals and prepared for the negotiation, you need to ask for what you want. Asking for what you want can be the most challenging part of the negotiation. Being well prepared will help you overcome any discomfort you may feel and help you feel confidence to carry through the negotiation.

1. Build trust and goodwill from the beginning of the negotiation. Avoid beginning with defensive or adversarial tones and postures. They can invoke anger and block productive communication. Start the negotiation with a positive emotion; greet the person you are negotiating with warmly and thank her or him for agreeing to consider your request. This will put everyone at ease and set a positive and cooperative tone for the entire negotiation.
2. Make an effort to consider the concerns of the person you are negotiating with, but avoid over-empathizing with her or his position. Ask for exactly what you want. Most people are fully capable of protecting their own interests. If the other person cannot provide what you ask for, she or he will likely say so. Be understanding of the other person's position, but do not deviate from your goals. Complicated or difficult issues can be worked out in compromise.
3. Be prepared to compromise, but do not make concessions too quickly or too willingly. Holding your ground, while still being reasonable and cooperative will show the person you are negotiating with that you are serious about getting your way. It may also increase his or her respect for you and your negotiation skills, as well as make him or her more willing to compromise.

4. When you do give something up, do it gracefully and pleasantly. It will probably be necessary to make some concessions in order to reach an agreement in which both people get something they want. Keep your list of tradeoffs in mind as you begin negotiating. Knowing in advance what you are willing to exchange or give up will make it easier to compromise appropriately.
5. Listen carefully to what the person you are negotiating with has to say. She or he may have concerns that you have not anticipated. Listening carefully maximizes the chances that you can connect your ideas to the other person's and synthesize them into an agreement that meets both your needs. Try to understand her or his point of view; ask questions to make sure you appreciate not just the other person's position, but also what is at stake for her or him. This will illustrate your willingness to negotiate in good faith. It will also help you to determine whether the other person is negotiating in good faith.
6. Listen for ulterior motives, hidden agendas, and preconceived positions. Before negotiations begin, the person you are negotiating with may have already formed opinions about you. His or her view of you may determine how cooperative the other person is going to be. Furthermore, just as you will come prepared to make only certain concessions, so will the person you are negotiating with. Be prepared for challenges and objections. They may require you to be more attentive to his or her needs and concerns. But, they are not insurmountable roadblocks to reaching a mutually beneficial agreement. Paying close attention to what the other person has to say will facilitate communication and allow you identify and address unspoken agendas, interests, and misperceptions.
7. Respect the amount of power held by the person you are negotiating with, especially if she or he holds more power than you do. For example, in negotiating with a chair, respect the chair's position in the university hierarchy. Avoid unnecessarily going over her or his head. You are more likely to get what you want if you relate to your chair as a partner rather than as an adversary. If you believe that your chair is being insufficiently responsive, and if the issues you are bringing up are extremely important to you, let the chair know that you would like to speak to someone else in the college about these issues, such as the ombudsperson, the personnel and budget committee, or the dean.
8. Respect your own power. Consider ahead of time how much power and influence you have. They can help you to secure the outcome you want. Although you always want to be courteous and respectful, you also want to make sure you don't bargain anything away unnecessarily. Sometimes you will have more power than the person you are negotiating with. When you do, use it to achieve your goals.

9. Recognize that different relationships require somewhat different negotiation styles. For example, negotiations with deans and department chairs should be conducted differently from negotiations with fellow faculty members or students. Determine which aspects of your relationship with the person you are negotiating with are most relevant to the situation. Keep this in mind when determining the most appropriate way to handle the negotiation, and when deciding what to concede or when to hold your ground.
10. Do not be discouraged by disagreements. Small, but productive, disagreements are not necessarily detrimental to relationships. Getting what you want might involve raising some tension and overcoming some minor conflict. But, the process of negotiating and reaching a mutually beneficial outcome can ultimately lead to better communication and greater cooperation between you and the person you are negotiating with. Continue with the negotiation even if it seems that the other person will not change his or her position. You may discover that you have common interests that can lead to a compromise that is acceptable to you both.
11. Argue your interests not just your position. Where appropriate, remember to discuss why you are making a certain request or desire a particular outcome. By emphasizing your reasons and intentions, rather than just what you want, arguing your interests depersonalizes conflict and increases understanding. It can also make it easier to find compromises that meet both your needs and the needs of the person you are negotiating with.
12. Monitor the negotiation as it is going on. If you think that the negotiation is going badly, or at least not as well as you would like, ask for time to consider any offers that have been made and think about your options. You can tell the other person that you have a better understanding of his or her situation, would like to think about alternative solutions that would be advantageous to you both, and discuss your request again at a later time. You do not have to accept any counteroffer on the spot. You do not have to accept a refusal. The other person may be more willing to negotiate seriously if she or he realizes that you are not going to give up easily.

CONCLUDING THE NEGOTIATION. How you end the negotiation is as important as how you conduct it. Negotiating for something you want can help you establish new relationships as well as help strengthen your existing relationships. Since you will likely need to negotiate with the same individuals on multiple occasions it is important to maintain a positive working relationship by concluding the negotiation with a positive tone.

1. If you fail to negotiate successfully for what you want, end the negotiation politely. Avoid expressing unconstructive emotions like anger, frustration, or resentment. The person you are negotiating with will remember a negative reaction, and you do not want to harm a potentially important relationship by leaving a bad impression.

2. If your goal is critically important to you, let the other person know that you would like to discuss the situation with someone else. If it is not critically important, exit gracefully and avoid unnecessary tension. Thank the other person for her or his time and willingness to hear you out. Either approach will keep the lines of communication open and may benefit negotiations with this person in the future.

Although our examples here concentrate on the workplace, keep in mind that negotiation works everywhere. You will not always get what you want just by asking, but it is highly unlikely that you will get what you want if you do not ask at all. Remember that, like a presentation, negotiation requires preparation, and as with any skill it improves with practice.

To negotiate successfully you must decide what is most important to you, understand the other party's position, and be willing to compromise. Careful listening and attention to power relations are also important components of the negotiation process and enhance your ability to negotiate effectively. To secure an agreement you must be persistent despite disagreement, and be confident in following through with your request. A negotiation should always be concluded graciously, especially when you do not get what you want. Good negotiations should allow you to enhance your professional and your personal life, minimize conflict, and maintain valuable and productive relationships.

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