



# The Art of Give and Take

Practical negotiating skills are critical to business success.

By Jim Camp

One of the most valuable business skills you can master is the art of negotiating. It is not about outsmarting or manipulating an opponent into giving you what you want such as a promotion, a big sale, or a new contract. Negotiating is about understanding human behavior—yours and your opponent's—so you can navigate through emotions, clarify misunderstandings, articulate challenges, and help your opponent build a vision of her problem for which you can offer the most optimal solution.

Employers and managers who learn how to put smart negotiating skills into practice gain respect from their opponents and earn a reputation for being honest and direct. Moreover, you will feel calm and confident once you see that you can consistently negotiate the best deal for yourself by following the same method every time. Negotiating is the one tool that, when mastered, can help you excel in any type of business setting or situation.

The once popular “getting to yes,” win-win, and collective bargaining approaches—all of which are based on feel-good strategies aimed at trying to be friends—have hindered many discussions. The desire to be liked, a typical human trait, hands the advantage over to the other side every time. By using a few simple techniques, you can stop trying to control your opponent's emotions and worrying whether you will be friends for life. What you will gain from using this method is respect.

### Why ‘no’ is the best word in English

When learning how to negotiate, it's essential that you overcome your fear of the word “no.” Children are not afraid of “no.” In fact, children understand that it's not the end of a conversation, but the beginning of a negotiation. When children say or hear “no,” they know instinctively that a back-and-forth will ensue.

The same is true in any business negotiation. Start by inviting your opponent to say “no.” Tell him that you

will not take it as a personal rejection, but as an honest decision that can be discussed with the goal of reaching a compromise. A shrewd adversary will view you with more respect; a naïve adversary will feel safer.

Resist the urge to say “yes.” A quick “yes” is generated by out-of-control emotions or fear of losing the deal. Once you say “yes,” the negotiation is over. A “maybe” isn't a decision at all. It is the worst response one can hear in any negotiation. It leads to nothing more than frustration and a waste of time.

A negotiation, by definition, gives each party the right to say “no.” When you do, you are not closing the book on further negotiation because every “no” is reversible. When you say “no,” you must do it in a nonthreatening manner. Use a nurturing statement to mitigate any perceptions of harshness. For example: “I can't do that, but I do see where you are coming from. I see the problem and would like to help. What other possible solutions do you see?”

## Why emotions kill your advantage

Another founding principle of an effective negotiating strategy is controlling your emotions. Emotions bog you down, cloud your ability to make clear decisions based on fact, and almost instantly give the advantage to the other side.

Predators, such as lions or polar bears, are always on the lookout for signs of weakness in their prey. In a negotiation, your opponent—whether it's a customer trying to lowball your prices or a team member undermining your new proposal—is likewise looking for signs of weakness so she can go for the kill. Your job at the negotiating table is to become a blank slate. You have no needs. You don't need this raise, this sale, or this deal. Once you are clear about the difference between wants and needs, it will set you free.

Other emotions to avoid are excitement about closing the deal, fear of losing or seeming weak, judgment of your opponent's style, and anger at his behavior. The easiest way to eliminate emotions is to return to the no-need principle. Don't be needy, and you'll be able to stay calm.

Nimble negotiating is all about behavior. You can't control what the other person does or says, but you can control what you do and say. Think behaviors, forget results.

## How to negotiate in their world

The foundation of successful negotiation is to get your opponent to see that granting you your wish—for example, promoting you, buying your product, choosing you over another client, or adopting your new initiative—will benefit him by solving problems, fulfilling needs, and accomplishing critical business objectives.

Therefore, before you go into the negotiation, have a valid mission that is set in your opponent's world. Without it, failure is almost always the result. Let's say your company makes the very best electronic components for your prospective client's product. Your mission and purpose should not be to sell 100,000 of these components, or to increase your sales to \$1 million, or any other result that is based in your world. In this case, your mission may be to provide the very best components in

an efficient manner and enhance the reliability and profitability of the end product, and thus assuring the success of your client in the marketplace.

Start by helping your opponent build a vision of what he needs. You do this by asking interrogative questions—who, what, why, how, where, when—to get the other party to reveal his wants, needs, problems, issues, and challenges. As his vision becomes more detailed and real, his decision-making process becomes easier.

Ask your questions one at a time and keep them short. Put your opponent at ease by listening carefully to his answers and take notes. Adopt a non-threatening, nurturing attitude in body and mind. Sit back, relax, and slow your delivery, lower your voice, and avoid sudden moves.

If your opponent asks questions, answer them with a question in return. This tactic is called a "reverse," and it should be preceded with a nurturing statement. For example, if your opponent asks you, "What will this option do for me?" you might answer, "That's an excellent question. But before we get to that, what's the biggest challenge you're facing in this area?"

By asking rather than answering, you won't make the common mistake of making assumptions, having an opinion, second-guessing, or delivering a presentation. All of these behaviors on your part give your opponent the opportunity to reject or judge what you're offering or what you want. Instead, stay in control of the conversation and get her to articulate business goals and challenges that you can help her meet.

## Practice makes perfect

Naturally, preparation is key to asking the right questions. Before you go into any situation where a transaction will take place, even if it's an email exchange or a phone call, learn everything about your opponent and your own position. Read and research everything you can that's relevant; it helps you to stay calm and composed.

Smart negotiating is about approaching a problem with emotional neutrality, and then controlling your behavior every step of the way. Base your

## Five More Practical Negotiating Tips

**Start with "no."** Resist the urge to compromise. Instead, start by inviting your respected opponent to say "no."  
**Never think about closing.** Do not think about, hope for, or plan for the outcome of the deal. Focus instead on what you can control: your behavior and activity during the negotiation.  
**Identify problems standing in your way.** Before the meeting, write down every problem you can think of that might come up so you can bring them out into the open. Always address the elephant in the negotiating room.  
**Do not overshadow your opponent.** Do not dress to impress, name drop, or get on a soap box. Let your opponent be completely at ease with you, and perhaps even feel a bit superior.  
**Do not try to be friends.** Your opponent is not your friend. You are not seeking loyalty or a long-term relationship. What you want, instead, is respect and a fair agreement that accomplishes your mission and purpose, and fulfills her vision.

decisions on facts and information that you have carefully gathered and pieced together from your opponent during the course of your dialogue. Staying calm, not being needy, focusing on your own behavior, and showing genuine curiosity and interest in your opponent's expectations are all practical strategies that will give you an edge in every negotiation.

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