

Member's Quarterly

Fall 2023 Edition

Perspective

Let's Make a Deal!

Finding that 'sweet spot'



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When you think about it, there's not much that you don't have to negotiate at work these days. Long gone are the days of command and control in the office. Everyone has a voice today and wants to use it. That means you are likely in negotiations of some sort daily. That may include everything from contract discussions with suppliers, to discussing a vacation schedule with your team to trying to agree on a project deadline with your boss. These situations and others require good negotiation skills and strategy.

We have all learned how to navigate these difficult situations from necessity and practice. But what do expert negotiators have to say about negotiating in the workplace? Most of them claim that the rules are the same no matter what you are negotiating, from big decisions to the day-to-day. If you are clear on your position, you come to the table prepared, you seek a solution and you play fair, you will likely come out ahead.

Let's walk through some of those key elements.

Be clear on what you want

You have to know what you want before you ask the other person or the other side what they want. Get clear about what's important to you and the organization and make the case as strongly as you can regarding why you need it. How far can you compromise on those needs? That's the room you have to negotiate. If there are areas or sub-areas where you may have flexibility, let them be known up front. Otherwise, state your position and listen to what the other side has to say. If the gulf between the parties is too deep, you might even have to walk away. Be prepared for that as well.

Be prepared

Gather all the information you can find which you might need to have a successful negotiation process. If it involves all of the staff and a few are coming as representatives to discuss it with you, take the time to gauge the pulse of the organization. Is there a consensus position among the team members? Talk to other managers who may have faced similar situations and ask them how they dealt with it. All of this will point you towards what professional negotiators call the 'sweet spot'. That's the place where the best deal is to be had in any given negotiation. Find that and you're on your way to success.

Be solution-focused

Your objective is to get a deal--not to score points for or against anyone. If a deal won't be easily reached, you need to have a backup plan to get to a solution. Are there other alternatives to consider? If you can't get what you want, would you be open to a counter proposal? Even if you can't ultimately agree, at least listen. It will establish your credibility with the other people you're talking to. Before you shut down negotiations, maybe take a break and ask to come back tomorrow or next week if you can, to explore

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other ideas and find a path forward. Be prepared to take half a loaf for now if the full loaf is not easily available. This negotiation is not the end and there may be opportunities to get the rest of the loaf at a later date.

Everyone's a winner

That's the ideal outcome that you should be seeking. Even if you can't give the employees everything they want, they will still be your employees afterward. Look for ways that can be of benefit to both sides. Seek out a win-win solution. Even if it's hard work to get there and even if you have to compromise a little, this will be so much better in the long run. Win-win negotiations actually build support and employee loyalty because everyone feels that they are benefitting and will be prepared to support you and the organization with the rest of the teams.

Be fair

Along the same lines, being fair in negotiations enhances your reputation with whomever you are having discussions. Suppliers know that you will treat them as well as you can. Employees will appreciate it if you are honest and upfront in your negotiating dealings with them. Sometimes people try for the quick win by undercutting someone's price or position, but they pay for that in the long run. People have long memories. There's one more thing about playing fair. Don't get angry in negotiations--no matter what. It's not worth it and being a 'tough' negotiator will not get you anything more than extra bumps and bruises which you don't need. Stay cool and get a deal.

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