

Life's Just a Series of Trades, So Learn How to Negotiate

It's true. No matter what you do in life or at work, it all comes down to negotiation.

Every negotiation may not seem as apparent, except when you consider the driving force behind it. Every negotiation is a trade that requires an exchange that satisfies the needs of both parties. In short, someone has something to offer, and someone has a need for it.

The key, as Elaine Ré explains in her book *101 Secrets to Negotiation Success*, is that both sides must benefit from a trade, otherwise it will not work. That's the guiding force behind the give-and-take nature of negotiations. At times both sides need to give a little to get a little. You just have to make sure that what you lose is complemented by something the other party gives you in return.



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The importance of asking yourself "What's in it for me?" serves as the cornerstone for successful negotiation. This is your beacon for determining exactly what you want to get out the negotiation. However, try to be as open as possible to what you can gain. Being too narrow lessens the possibilities you can achieve, and on the flip side, it also allows you to develop and prioritize a wider range of issues, some of which can be conceded later on in your effort to gain what you really need.

Your focus, however, should not be solely on your own needs. You also have to anticipate and consider "What's in it for them?" As Ré notes, the ability to consider and understand the needs and wants of the other side gives you greater advantage in several ways. From the most basic standpoint, it tells you whether or not the negotiation is even worth conducting. After all, if there's nothing in it for them, then why waste everyone's time. But getting a handle on what the other side can gain from the negotiation, coupled with your particular needs, puts you more firmly in the driver's seat.

Take a typical home situation. Your teenager wants to borrow the car. On the surface, there seems to be only one issue: will you or will you not give them to your teenager. If you say yes, you'll probably get nothing more out of the deal than a quick "thanks" as he or she runs out the door.

But think about it. Isn't there something else you could get out of this deal? Smart negotiators always look beyond the most obvious needs for possible additional gains. You realize that the car needs washing, the car always returns with an empty gas tank, and the seat backs and radio stations are

never where they originally were. Now you have some additional issues you can enter into the negotiation. If you're teen really needs to use the car, you're in pretty good shape now to get them to agree to all or some of these concessions before you hand over the keys.

Avoiding conflict

Emotions always come into play during negotiations. We can't help it. We're only humans. But they can get out of control, particularly when negotiations focus on money and other important issues. And when emotions become uncontrollable, the resulting conflict can destroy any potential agreement.

Ré offers several tips that can help keep your emotions in check. She continually emphasizes in her training classes the need to plan. Consider everything we've talked about earlier – both your needs and the needs of the other party. Include all the issues you prioritized and rank them in order of importance, as well as the extent to which you are willing to live with or without them.

Now put all this planning in writing. This exercise not only helps you work out and firm up everything you need to discuss during the negotiation, it also can serve as a quick reference tool you can use while the negotiations are taking place. Having a handy reference like this puts information you need at your fingertips, which can be a calming factor during negotiations.

On the other hand, when emotions run high, sometimes it's best just to take a break. When you're in the office, for example, ask the party if he or she minds if you excuse yourself. Then use this time to take a short walk, grab some water, or just take a deep breath. Breaks have a way of releasing tension, which gives both sides a chance to calm down before regrouping.

Even when dealing with, say, home contractors, taking a break can work just as well. You can ask the person if he or she would be willing to continue the conversation at another time. But don't let this lead into stonewalling. If you need to take a break, be sure to set another time when the negotiations will restart before going into a cooling-off period.

Making conflict work for you

Actually, one of Ré's many secrets to success is the ability to make conflict a productive part of the negotiation process. She's not talking about the knock-down, screaming types of conflict. She's focusing on the eventual disagreements that arise.

The ability to integrate conflict can be one of your best negotiation tools, Ré adds. This requires one or both sides to go back and assure the other that although they value their ideas and point of view, they just disagree with it.

Disagreements can be resolved, and often its best to agree before you disagree. Let's look at it this way: You're driving along the road with your spouse. You think taking Route 78 West is the best, but your spouse thinks you should take Route 80 North.

Now you can argue back and forth on this, make your own decision, and then drive the rest of the way in stone-cold silence. But you'll probably find it more beneficial to first listen with care to what your spouse is saying, acknowledge that he or she has a point, and then disagree with it.

Using this approach, your best response could be: "So you think we should take Route 80 because it will be quicker. Hmmm, I agree that we need to take the quickest route. But do you think Route 80 will be quicker, even with this holiday traffic?"

Now you've made the conflict work to your advantage, and provided the additional benefit of having a more pleasant atmosphere for the rest of the trip.

About the author



Elaine Ré is president of Ré Associates, an internationally known consulting and training firm with offices in Albuquerque, New York and London. Negotiation skill building is part of her company's overall expertise in supporting change management efforts for companies and organizations.

Her book, *101 Secrets to Negotiation Success* – a practical, hands-on, easy-to-use reference that outlines everything you need to know about planning and conducting win-win negotiations – is available from Canyon Crest Publishing.



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