

Negotiation Skills: Win-Win Negotiation

Finding a fair compromise

Do you feel that someone is continually taking advantage of you? Do you seem to have to fight your corner aggressively, or ally with others, to win the resources you need? Or do you struggle to get what you want from people whose help you need? If so, you may need to brush up your win-win negotiation skills.

Effective negotiation helps you to resolve situations where what you want conflicts with what someone else wants. The aim of win-win negotiation is to find a solution that is acceptable to both parties, and leaves both parties feeling that they've won, in some way, after the event.

There are different styles of negotiation, depending on circumstances. For resolving disputes with people with whom you have an ongoing relationship: If one person plays hardball, then this disadvantages the other person – this may, quite fairly, lead to reprisal later. Similarly, using tricks and manipulation during a negotiation can undermine trust and damage teamwork. While a manipulative person may not get caught out if negotiation is infrequent, this is not the case when people work together routinely. Here, honesty and openness are almost always the best policies.

Preparing for a successful negotiation...

Depending on the scale of the disagreement, some preparation may be appropriate for conducting a successful negotiation. Before people can even begin the process of negotiation, they must first be committed to a fair process.

In preparation for being fair the parties must be ready to:

- Listen
- Reach a mutually satisfying resolution
- Hear things they disagree with or find painful without reacting abusively or defensively
- Accept that something with change

For small disagreements, excessive preparation can be counter-productive because it takes time that is better used elsewhere. It can also be seen as manipulative because, just as it strengthens your position, it can weaken the other person's. However, if you need to resolve a major disagreement, make sure you prepare thoroughly.

Think through the following points before you start negotiating:

Goals: What do you want to get out of the negotiation? What do you think the other person wants?

Trades: What do you and the other person have that you can trade? What do you each have that the other wants? What are you each comfortable giving away?

Alternatives: If you don't reach agreement with the other person, what alternatives do you have? Are these good or bad? How much does it matter if you do not reach agreement? Does failure to reach an agreement cut you out of future opportunities? And what alternatives might the other person have?

Relationships: What is the history of the relationship? Could or should this history impact the negotiation? Will there be any hidden issues that may influence the negotiation? How will you handle these?

Expected outcomes: What outcome will people be expecting from this negotiation? What has the outcome been in the past, and what precedents have been set?

The consequences: What are the consequences for you of winning or losing this negotiation? What are the consequences for the other person?

Power: Who has what power in the relationship? Who controls resources? Who stands to lose the most if agreement isn't reached? What power does the other person have to deliver what you hope for?

Possible solutions: Based on all of the considerations, what possible compromises might there be?

Setting some rules. Begin by reviewing these rules and adding any that you mutually decide are important:

- No yelling
- Don't bring up unrelated issues
- No threats or intimidation
- No mind games
- Is a time limit needed for this discussion?
- Is a third party needed to help with this discussion?

Defining the problem.

- What are we negotiating?
- Is this negotiable?
- How does each person experience and define the problem? (This will be different for each person)
- Who else is affected and how?

Identifying goals.

- Short – term: Name the things that need to be included in an immediate solution.
- Long – term: Name the things that need to be included in a final solution.

Finding solutions.

- What would each person propose as an immediate and long term solution that addresses the things each person has said needs to be considered?
- Is compromise necessary or can both parties be enhanced?
- If compromise is necessary, list several fair solutions.

Style is critical... For a negotiation to be 'win-win', both parties should feel positive about the negotiation once it's over. This helps people keep good working relationships afterwards. This governs the style of the negotiation – histrionics and displays of emotion are clearly inappropriate because they undermine the rational basis of the negotiation and because they bring a manipulative aspect to them.

Despite this, emotion can be an important subject of discussion because people's emotional needs must fairly be met. If emotion is not discussed where it needs to be, then the agreement reached can be unsatisfactory and temporary. Be as detached as possible when discussing your own emotions – perhaps discuss them as if they belong to someone else.

Negotiating successfully... The negotiation itself is a careful exploration of your position and the other person's position, with the goal of finding a mutually acceptable compromise that gives you both as much of what you want as possible. People's positions are rarely as fundamentally opposed as they may initially appear - the other person may have very different goals from the ones you expect!

In an ideal situation, you will find that the other person wants what you are prepared to trade, and that you are prepared to give what the other person wants. If this is not the case and one person must give way, then it is fair for this person to try to negotiate some form of compensation for doing so – the scale of this compensation will often depend on the many of the factors we discussed above. Ultimately, both sides should feel comfortable with the final solution if the agreement is to be considered win-win. Only consider win-lose negotiation if you don't need to have an ongoing relationship with the other party as, having lost, they are unlikely to want to work with you again. Equally, you should expect that if they need to fulfill some part of a deal in which you have "won," they may be uncooperative and legalistic about the way they do this.