

# Power of persuasion

How to develop your negotiation skills

**W**hether it's keeping a top salesperson in the fold, dealing with the expectations of customers or vendors, or working on a significant business transaction, executives negotiate every day.

Bringing people around to your way of thinking without alienating them is a good business practice and a vital skill to master, says Steven L. Kreuger, a partner with Secrest Wardle. He also emphasizes that successful negotiations are mutual affairs.

"If you feel you are going to 'win' a negotiation or bully or annoy the other party into accepting your position, you are not negotiating," Kreuger says. "Talking someone into something they do not need or want is not negotiation. In a negotiation, each party hopes to reach a desired goal."

*Smart Business* spoke with Kreuger about how you can improve your negotiation skills.



**Steven L. Kreuger**  
Partner  
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## What are the keys to successful negotiation?

First, know your objective and stay focused on it. In a negotiation, the goal is usually not a flashing neon line you hope to cross. Instead, it's more like an area you want to move into. You should establish bounds for that area, which should contain the various possible outcomes that achieve your goal.

Then, do your research. Have factual support for each possibility that would meet your goal. Analyze the pluses and minuses. During negotiations, spontaneously interjecting facts can move the momentum of the negotiation toward your goal. You don't want to stop negotiations at a key moment to gather information you should already know.

In addition, you should research and gather information that the other party will use to establish and support his or her goal. It is also important to analyze the other party's objectives. For an employee, an incremental pay raise may mean next to nothing, but a more secure position or more responsibility might be his goal.

Time management is also important. Before you begin negotiations, consider how time is going to affect each party. Regardless of how long the negotiations last, you have to understand and try to control the pace to keep moving toward your goal.

## What else can you do to help you succeed?

Do your homework. Think about how you are going to communicate your posi-

tion so that your goals become acceptable possibilities to the other party. Play the negotiation out in your head; play devil's advocate. To avoid falling in love with your own thoughts, run through your planned approach with someone who will give you feedback.

Also, good communicators are good listeners. Despite what might appear to be outward calm, the other party is likely stewing and fretting over some aspect of the situation. If you are talking all the time, trying to unilaterally establish the boundaries or drill home your positions, you will likely miss opportunities to gather information as to a motivation of the other party betrayed by emotion, body language, expressions and the words they use.

Above all, don't get angry. Communicating that you are passionate about your position does not require you to bang on the table. Stay calm. Stay focused. Clearly state your positions and the basis for your positions. If the other party gets angry, do your best to diffuse that situation. Also, don't inject personality disputes into the negotiations. Keep it businesslike, pleasant and moving toward your goal.

Finally, if you are dealing directly with a representative or a negotiator for the other party, remember you're not negotiating with the negotiator; you're negotiating with the client. Assume the negotiator will do his

or her job and report back to the client. You want the other party and the negotiator to come to the conclusion virtually simultaneously that they are going to accept one of your predetermined, acceptable goals.

## How can executives develop their negotiation skills?

There are numerous episodes every day when we negotiate without any thought about the process. Use those situations to attempt to persuade someone with a fact-based, rational approach to reach a reasonable conclusion.

In social settings, discussions will inevitably flow toward politics, religion or which professional athlete is overrated — moot, argumentative discussion no one can 'win.' As an exercise, force yourself to participate in the discussion with manners.

Listen, and don't interrupt. When your chance comes, point out that you didn't interrupt and you would like to be heard, give credence to the other views expressed, pick a point of view and advance it with facts and a well-reasoned rationale.

Even though your friends might expect it, don't use words like 'ridiculous,' 'idiot' or refer to someone in any demeaning or derogatory way. Try to persuade with a calm, well-reasoned approach supported by facts and rational thinking.

Your goal is to have someone think or even say, 'I enjoy his or her input, and he or she makes a good point worth considering.'

In negotiations, it is always a mistake to confuse a pleasant demeanor, manners and calm with softness. By the same token, yelling, fist pounding and crude comparisons do nothing to convince another party of the correctness of your position.

## How can becoming a better negotiator help a business leader succeed?

Successful negotiation techniques can hopefully achieve a singular, major breakthrough for your business, but developing a calm, mannered, informed and well-reasoned approach to settle differences of opinion will affect all aspects of your business and life. Over the long term, this approach will make your business more enjoyable, less stressful and, hopefully, more successful. <<

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