

A man in a dark suit and glasses is shown in profile, shaking hands with another person whose arm is visible on the right. They are standing in an office environment with large windows in the background. The lighting is bright and natural, creating a professional and positive atmosphere.

*Moshe Cohen, president and founder
of The Negotiating Table, Inc.,
provides negotiations
strategy advice that can
be used in all aspects of life.*

NEGOTIATION TIPS AND STRATEGIES

BY MOSHE COHEN



People negotiate all day every day — even people who don't think of themselves as negotiators negotiate all the time. This is because negotiations occur any time you and another person need to make a decision and you don't start off in the same place. Thus, some negotiations are formal, but most are informal; some are about money, but most are about the routine decisions of work and life; and some are external with clients and vendors, but most are internal with coworkers, acquaintances, and family members.

Despite this, negotiations are often difficult for people and make them anxious. All negotiations involve conflict, at least in the sense of disagreement, and many people don't like conflict. All negotiations also involve risk. If you push too hard, you might damage relationships or end up with nothing; but, if you don't push hard enough, you might give up too much value. Negotiations take time, require preparation, and involve dealing with other people, and all of these aspects make them challenging. To address these challenges and increase your chances of success, there are a few things you can do.

Prepare For Your Negotiations

Many negotiations fail before they begin because people enter into them insufficiently prepared. Before you negotiate, you want to know as much as you can about the subject matter of the negotiation and the context in which it takes place. Research the relevant facts and data pertaining to the negotiation and bring your preparation with you to the table. Find out as much as you can about the decision-makers on both sides, as well as other stakeholders who influence the decision-makers or are impacted by the consequences of the negotiation. Before you approach the other party, get a sense for the way negotiations are conducted in the setting that awaits you, understand the process and its norms, and study precedents from similar negotiations.

Define Your Success

Once you have completed your research, you need to define your objectives for the negotiation. Very often people define their success in negotiations based on very concrete, positional goals. You decide you want a seven percent raise, or to be promoted to a senior analyst by July. The problem with these goals is that they don't actually mean anything. Why seven percent? Why July? Instead of focusing on these very specific positions, try to understand why you want them — what motivations, needs, and fears you are trying to satisfy through the negotiation? What does the promotion or the raise mean to you? Are you looking to satisfy a financial need, to be rewarded for your hard work, to feel like you're moving forward in your career, to do more interesting work, or to achieve some other objective? By focusing on your underlying interests rather than on particular positions, you are more likely to negotiate satisfactory outcomes for yourself.

Understand Your No-Agreement Alternatives

An important part of your preparation involves understanding what you will do if you can't come to an agreement with the other party. In every negotiation, there is always the possibility that you and the other party won't reach an agreement and, in that case, you will have to try to meet your interests through alternative means. In the workplace context, that might mean bidding your time, transferring to another position internally, or looking for another job. Regardless of the circumstance, you need to know the alternatives available to you, decide which alternative you are most likely to pursue if you don't reach an agreement, and understand the benefits and costs of going to it.

Then, at every point in the negotiation, you can compare any offers made to you by the other party with your alternatives away from the table, and decide what offers to accept and

which ones you need to walk away from. Keep in mind that the other party also has alternatives, and try to understand both what those are and how the other person views them. Some of the ways that you can gain leverage in a negotiation include improving your own alternatives, negatively impacting the other person's, or simply influencing how the other person thinks about your alternatives or their own.

matter at hand, the amount of time you have available, and the importance of the relationship. By understanding your own style and the characteristics of the situation you are negotiating, you can approach your negotiations more effectively.

Manage Your Emotions As You Negotiate

As you approach the other party and begin your negotiation, you will run into the fact that negotiation is

up, or you might become speechless. If you notice that your emotions have gotten the better of you, slow down the negotiation by breathing, asking questions, or taking a break so as to avoid being reactive. You don't want to make any concessions, commitments, or important decisions in your negotiations under conditions of emotional pressure.

Ask for a lot - don't self-limit

In order to maximize the value you attain from your negotiations, you also need to be able to ask for a lot. Many people self-limit in their negotiations because they are afraid of offending the other party and damaging the relationship. They worry that the other party will shut down and simply get up and walk away. They don't want to be perceived as unreasonable, greedy, or cheap.

Identify Your Negotiating Style

One of the things that you bring into every negotiation is yourself, and you need to understand your negotiating style. You might be very competitive in your approach to negotiations, defining your success by the outcomes you achieve in this particular negotiation with little regard for longer term or the relationship with the other party. Alternatively, you might be so focused on preserving relationships that you are willing to sacrifice some of your own interests for the sake of those relationships. You might try to optimize your negotiations and create value for you and the other party, satisfying both relationships and outcomes, or you might be simply focused on closure – getting the deal done efficiently and quickly, with less concern about the value you create in the process. Finally, you might just not like to negotiate at all and try to avoid your negotiations by any means possible.

Whatever your approach, the important thing is that you recognize what you are doing and make deliberate choices. Different negotiations call for different approaches based on the importance of the

inherently an emotional process. Any situation you walk into, anything anyone says or does, impacts you first on the emotional level. You are going into your boss's office to discuss your promotion and, as you walk in, find not only your boss, but also the senior vice president for your group, and you might have an emotional reaction to the surprise of having her there. It is important to manage your emotions as you negotiate so that you can respond to situations and avoid being reactive.

To manage your emotions, try to identify ahead of time the kind of situations that trigger strong reactions in you. For some people it might be authority figures, for others it's time pressure. Some people might get triggered by certain behaviors or personalities while others might get rattled when unable to answer a question. By knowing your triggers, you make them less triggering. You also need to catch yourself when you do become emotionally overwhelmed. Different people experience emotional overload differently - your muscles might tense, your heart rate might go

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You want to ask your supplier for a discount, but also don't want to offend, so while you want 15 percent off, you only ask for ten. Unbeknownst to you, the supplier routinely gives large customers 20 percent discounts on order of this size. Making bold asks is terrifying for a lot of people and, the more personal the situation, the more difficult. You might have an easier time asking for a ten percent raise for

one of your direct reports than you might for your own raise. The only way to get over this is to practice – to put yourself in situations where you force yourself to ask and endure the stress of possible rejection. By doing so, you can learn to ask for more and obtain more favorable outcomes in your negotiations.

Listen

As you negotiate, try to spend most of your time asking questions and listening to the other party. Just as you are trying to satisfy certain interests through the negotiation process, so is the other person. By identifying the other person's interests, you can often find solutions that meet both of your interests while giving you the greatest amount of benefit and costing you as little as possible. Ask the other person open-ended questions to uncover their interests, stay silent as long as it takes for them to start talking, listen carefully, trying to uncover the meaning behind their words, and confirm your understanding by reflecting back what you heard.

Success in negotiations comes from understanding the other person's interests and then finding creative ways to meet those interests. Once you have uncovered what each of you is trying to achieve through the negotiation process, you can begin to construct resolutions that achieve those objectives. Prepare a few ideas for resolution in advance of the negotiation, listen to their ideas whether you like those ideas or not, think out of the box in coming up with new options for resolution, and move slowly toward the other party. It is often a mistake to rush toward agreement because of time pressure, anxiety, or impatience.

Come To Wise Agreements, But Be Prepared To Walk Away

As you approach the end of your negotiations, make sure that you make decisions as to what offers to accept based on objective rather than subjective criteria. Use the facts and

data that you collected prior to the negotiation to validate your decisions. Make sure you and the other party understand your agreement the same way, and that your agreements are detailed enough to survive implementation. Finally, nothing gives you more power in a negotiation than the ability and willingness to walk away, so always keep your alternatives in mind and don't be afraid to go to them if the other party's offers don't meet your interests. **TSL**

Moshe Cohen is the president and founder of The Negotiating Table, Inc., a training, mediation, and consulting firm in Boston, Massachusetts. Since 1995, Moshe has been teaching, mediating, coaching, writing, and speaking on the topics of negotiation, leadership, change management, influence, conflict resolution, mediation, facilitation, and communication.

Cohen is also a senior lecturer at Boston University's Questrom School of Business, where he teaches Negotiation and Leadership in the MBA and MSMS programs. He has also previously taught at Bentley College and Cambridge College, and is frequently asked to present at business functions and conferences.

Cohen has conducted negotiation, leadership, and other training programs for numerous corporations, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and individuals. He has worked with salespeople, buyers, attorneys, consultants, purchasing professionals, line managers, and executives at all levels within organizations and in industries including technology, health care, financial services, consulting, legal services, biotechnology, insurance, consumer goods, retail, and others. He specializes in providing experiential, relevant, engaging programs that people can apply immediately in their work.

Cohen also writes extensively, having written numerous role-plays, cases, and articles, and is currently working on his

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Cohen's undergraduate degree was in physics from Cornell University, followed by a master degree in electrical engineering from McGill University, specializing in robotics. After working in robotics for over a dozen years, he earned an MBA from Boston University and then founded The Negotiating Table, Inc.

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