



# Leading a Sales Negotiating Team: Three Essential Steps to Success for Women

by

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As clunky as it can be, sometimes negotiation must be played as a team sport. And, for lots of complicated reasons<sup>1</sup>, when women lead the team they often find it more challenging to ensure the players follow the game plan.

If, for example, you are trying to close a complex sale, it probably won't be enough to merely assure your prospective client that your company will be able to seamlessly deliver on your proposal. You may need to hold a meeting where your client hears it directly from the horse's mouth necessitating involvement from non-sales colleagues. Or, you may need to bring along a more senior person to demonstrate to your customer just how much your company values their business. These situations (and many others) demand that you are skilled at leading a negotiation team.

The objective, of course, is to reach an agreement as a unified team. Not so easy!

Some advice:

## **1. Pick the negotiating team carefully.**

Your first impulse will be to enlist people with relevant subject matter/ technical expertise. Don't just go with that; it's necessary but not sufficient — your selection criteria must also take personality into account.

- **Filter Out the "Butt Kickers".**  
If you're concerned about achieving a "win-win" outcome, avoid win-lose people. They're the ones who fundamentally believe the only win for your team means exacting lots of concessions from the other party. Long term client relationships are unlikely to survive this kind of thinking.
- **Go Beyond the Usual Suspects.**  
Include people with diverse backgrounds — they'll add value by helping the team to see the issues from a variety of perspectives. They'll also enhance your team's ability to craft creative proposals.
- **Eliminate the "Wanna Be" Heroes.**  
Heroism can manifest itself in many ways in a negotiating team context—none of

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<sup>1</sup> For those interested in learning more about the "complicated reasons", see Deborah M. Kolb, Judith Williams & Carol Frohlinger, *Her Place At The Table: A Woman's Guide To Negotiating Five Key Challenges To Leadership Success*, Jossey-Bass/John Wiley (2010). The book's introduction describes "second generation gender issues" (SGGI). Unlike "first generation gender issues", resulting from intentional acts and actionable in court, SGGI are the powerful yet rarely examined barriers women face that arise from either cultural beliefs about gender (gender stereotypes) or embedded workplace structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently favor men. Because they are so subtle, established in a workplace time and setting built to accommodate white men, SGGI are difficult to address and remedy — they are "the way things are".

them good. People who are averse to asking about client needs, those who are incapable of listening for client needs or constitutionally unable to take direction will cause negotiating disasters. Don't let them.

Women should also be alert to the reality that some of their male colleagues (even those less senior) may be tempted to dominate the conversation by talking too much. Several new terms have recently been added<sup>2</sup> to the lexicon to describe these behaviors. They include:

- ✓ manterruption — interruption of a woman by a man, often mid-sentence
- ✓ bropropriation — taking credit for a woman's idea by a man
- ✓ mansplation — explaining by a man of what a woman meant to say. It is often coupled with manterruption.

Not only do these behaviors undermine your authority as a leader, since many women will be making (or participating in making) the decision from the client side, they can cause your team to lose the sale. Don't invite these individuals unless absolutely necessary and, if they are required, negotiate the rules of engagement.

## 2. Invest time to prepare.

As attractive as it may be given time constraints to meet briefly and then hope for the best, resist the temptation. All negotiations benefit from preparation but team negotiations inevitably fail without it.

- Get Clear About the Plan.  
Collaborate on a negotiating strategy. Be sure that everyone understands (and is on board with) the desired outcome as well as the implications if negotiations fail.
- Agree On Roles.  
Not everybody can play the lead. Decide who will orchestrate the negotiation and who'll be the supporting cast. Clarity regarding roles minimizes the chance that a well-intentioned team member will feel compelled to over-contribute — particularly as described above!
- Anticipate Pushback.  
Brainstorm a list of the things you expect the other party to question or object to and determine how the team will handle these. Will you as the lead negotiator answer these or will you defer to a team member with particular expertise? Adopting a reply process ensures the team that no one will go rogue by agreeing too quickly to something the other party proposes or, conversely, dismiss any ideas out of hand.

## 3. Pay attention to process.

- Put Out Place Cards.  
Not literally but do think about who should sit where. Be particularly careful that you sit in the "power seat" (usually at the head of the table or directly across from the lead client decision-maker) so that your leadership role is clear to everyone.
- Arrange a "Time Out" Signal.  
Rather than relying only on verbal requests for time to regroup, concur on an unobtrusive gesture that indicates a team member wants a sidebar.

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<sup>2</sup> Bennett, Jessica. "How Not to Be 'Manterrupted' in Meetings". *Time*. Jan. 14, 2015 <http://time.com/3666135/sheryl-sandberg-talking-while-female-manterruptions/>. Last accessed August 19, 2015.

- **Appoint a Scribe.**  
Documenting agreements is an important part of making negotiated solutions work and even more critical when multiple players are at the table. Have someone on your team own that task — of course circulating a draft within the team before it goes to the other party for sign-off. Although I am usually reluctant to say “never” because negotiation processes and tasks are so situational, I will advise that women should almost never take notes because of the stereotype associated with note-taking as “women’s work”.

And finally, use every negotiation as an opportunity to build your team's negotiating prowess. Take the time to debrief — discussing what worked well and why, as well as what the team will do the next time to be even more effective.

When negotiating, two heads can better than one and three better than two, but only if the heads nod in unison.

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