



Negotiating Women, Inc.

Being Your Own Advocate

Negotiation is the currency of business. Business people negotiate all the time, and for no group, perhaps, are the stakes higher and the margin for error slimmer than they are for the self-employed and for entrepreneurs. Still, most of this negotiation is no longer characterized by what Intel's Andy Grove called "a battle to the death," but by an appreciation of the importance of relationships in business. The simplistic scorecard notion of winning has, by and large, been discarded in favor of a collaborative problem-solving approach.

Collaborative problem solving is based on a single premise: The best outcomes happen when negotiations are approached not as adversarial win/lose situations, but as opportunities to develop an exchange that makes mutual gains possible.

Many different issues and interests coalesce in any given "single" problem. And those differences constitute the raw materials from which "package deals" can be fashioned. You have only to look for differences in needs and interests and propose solutions that play on those differences. No one party leaves the table with everything, but no one goes away empty-handed either.

But mutual gains negotiations do not take place in a vacuum. Nor are their results always the product of the merits of one solution over another, where the participants actively cooperate in reaching the "best" alternative given the interests in play.

Unspoken wants and expectations intrude that interfere with getting to yes. Negotiators have concerns that have nothing to do with the problem, but affect its resolution. Good ideas, good trades, are not enough. In other words, how negotiators resolve their issues hangs on the actions they take in the shadow negotiation.

Working the "shadow" part of the negotiation process requires that you position yourself in the conversation so that you can effectively *advocate* for yourself. This effort is especially critical for independent contractors and entrepreneurs because they usually don't have an organization backing them up.

Mounting an effective advocacy involves three distinct stages:

- homework
- strategizing
- developing an action plan

Homework

A lot of homework goes into being an effective advocate. The task requires recognition of the value one brings to the table. It means, in essence, making one's case to oneself. It is all too easy to *read* weakness into a situation and an effective advocate must take steps to block these tendencies.

- **take stock**
Why is the other side willing to negotiate with you in the first place? What do you offer that he or she wants? What other resources do you have that you can bring to bear? Can they help counterbalance areas where your case might be weak?
- **learn as much as you can**
Gather all the facts and informal information you can. Poor information leads to bad results. You don't know whether demands are excessive, reasonable, or ridiculously low.
- **assess the alternatives**
Ask yourself what you'll do if the deal falls through or if your minimum requirements are not met. If you don't like the answer, try to develop other alternatives—another client, another supplier, etc. Think about the other side's alternatives? What will he or she do if you can't come to agreement? How important or critical is coming to an agreement?

Strategizing

Effective advocacy requires you to be clear going into the negotiation on what you want in terms of results. It also requires that the other party be interested in negotiating with you.

Mutual gains outcomes are *only* possible when *both* parties are motivated to deal seriously with each other. They have to realize that it is in their best interests to negotiate. They will be better off if they do and worse off if they don't. Without that realization, negotiations are likely to be one sided or stall completely.

Key steps to putting together an effective strategy include:

- **defining your goals**
In any negotiation you will probably have more than one goal. You should be certain in your mind about your priorities. Think about the whole range of needs and rank them. You want a higher fee, but you want to keep the client. Where does the balance fall?
- **figuring out ways to stress the benefits you offer and making that value visible**
You cannot convince the other party to deal with you fairly if you have no idea of the incentives you can offer or the pressure you might bring to bear. Go into the negotiation prepared to back up your case and prove why it is to the other party's advantage to meet you at least halfway.
- **developing multiple proposals to meet your goals**
Given only one option, the other party has a single choice: yes or no. Increase those options and you increase the chances of reaching agreement. A client might balk at a single increase in fees, but be perfectly willing to entertain a staged, but slightly higher increase over time.

Developing an Action Plan

Finally, however much the other party believes that negotiation is in her best interests, she still wants to conduct the negotiation on her terms. This chain of action and reaction characterizes all negotiations. It is the way bargainers communicate with each other--primarily in the shadow negotiation. The strategic responses the other party makes can be probing tests to discover points of weakness or real threats meant to fluster or provoke. More often than not, these tactical *moves* put you on the defensive. They challenge experience, cast doubt on judgment, or question competence.

Moves like these change the dynamic of the shadow negotiation. On the defensive, one reacts defensively, governed more by the other person's actions than personal needs. Once a negotiator is on the defensive in the shadow negotiation, it is difficult to reclaim the initiative when talking about the issues at hand.

- ***anticipate the reactions the other party might have***

You can be sure that the other person will have reactions to your proposals. Consider what they might be. "That fee is ridiculous" or "We haven't been doing business long enough to plan that far ahead" or "I'm being squeezed here. You're going to have to reduce your fees."

- ***plan your response***

Moves that put you on the defensive require a response. Otherwise the shadow negotiation gets out of whack and stays there. It is when the shadow negotiation is at parity that collaborative problem solving is possible.

The strategic moves and turns of effective advocacy establish balance in the shadow negotiation and lay the groundwork for dialogue on the issues.

Building an effective advocacy pays handsome dividends—particularly for busy home based business owners. Not only does it help you add new customers; it aids in retaining the ones you've got.

¹ This article draws on Kolb and Williams' *The Shadow Negotiation: How Women Can Master the Hidden Agendas That Determine Bargaining Success* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), named one of the top ten business books of 2000 by *Harvard Business Review*.