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Developing Negotiation Skills

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Whether we like it or not, we often find ourselves in positions where there is something or someone in the way of our getting what we want. Whether in business or personal situations, it is crucial to have a vision of the goal and then apply sound negotiating skills to achieve success. No one is a mind reader. That's why effective negotiating skills begin with open and direct communication, where both parties engage in a respectful exchange of information to seek clarity, eliminate misunderstandings, and arrive at workable compromises.



The five negotiating skills

Mastering the following five skills will help you achieve success in communicating and resolving issues. They are:

1. Listening

Poor listening is the part of communicating that causes the most failures in productive negotiations. Listening can provide understanding, even though there may not be agreement. If we do not listen attentively and dispassionately, we will only 'hear' our own opinion without learning where there might be an opportunity to find common ground. Common ground leads to solutions that allow both sides a chance to achieve satisfaction.

2. Clarifying

Clarifying the other person's stand is achieved through good listening. Recapping what is said for accuracy of understanding provides a good starting point. At the same time, it is necessary to define your position and to reconsider how important it really is to "win" the argument. For instance, determine what the possible outcomes are, but also where you absolutely will not go. Where is your line in the sand? Furthermore, do you have a 'Plan B' to offer or propose? Knowing your fallback position may help you reach an accord. Also, clarification is necessary because sometimes winning the battle results in losing the war.

3. Practicing

What skills can you ever improve without practicing? Whether playing an instrument or learning a sport, the only way to advance is through repetition. When it comes to negotiations, practice using the skills you've learned. In business, it is wise to work with your team regularly to hone their communication skills. Some organizations even hire negotiation coaches to train their employees in these critical skills. Then together, the company and the coach encourage practicing and role-playing in front of an audience to get third-party feedback. A video recording of practice negotiations will also show body language and “tells,” like in a poker game when someone is bluffing. Are you giving yourself away? Your voice—is it confident, or is it meek? Are you holding something back?

Besides individual coaches, there are also classes in negotiating and books to read on the subject. Much of effective negotiation is learning the strategy of it. For example, tennis pro, Roger Federer's career is not based on athleticism alone, but also how he thinks about the game and assesses his competitors. Winning at negotiation may require knowing a variety of approaches and being willing and able to adapt and change if one or the other strategy isn't working.

4. Winning

Win well. Be gracious, and use the win to your advantage. If you have flexed your muscles and won, know that the other side has lost. Say you were successful at negotiating a truce (in a war, or even at home over who empties the trash). Follow up by enforcing the truce and thanking the other side for carrying on the business at hand. A successful 'ceasefire' can allow any entity (personal relationship, corporation, or country) to start reparations that creates a liaison that blossoms. Your next negotiation will be stronger for it. Your reputation as a fair-minded negotiator will help you when the next disagreement arises because there will always be another one.

5. Losing

Lose well, too. Sometimes, losing a negotiation is a blow to your ego, but you can learn from it. Younger people, women, and even aging workers may see themselves at a disadvantage in a negotiation. Without giving into these stereotypes, we still need to know when it's worth flexing our muscles, or when it's time to “fold the cards,” and sometimes to walk away. However, don't consider it a failure. One door closes, and another one opens. Also, losing teaches humility, which may be handy in your next negotiation. No one likes people who are too cocky.

Negotiations are part of life

Negotiation is a part of life because disagreement and differences of opinion will always be with us. The best solutions are those that result in a “win-win.” However, sometimes, we have to lose to win. While it is not recommended that you give in too quickly, it is essential that everyone of all ages and genders—whether they are workers, managers, politicians, or spouses—know that “giving in” is not losing. Instead, it can be a sign of strength and character.

Negotiating involves listening, clarifying, practicing, winning, and losing. Using these skills successfully moves the world toward peace, companies toward commerce, and families and friends toward harmony and goodwill.

About Erica Miller

Dr. Erica Miller is a multi-faceted, dynamic speaker and international best-selling author with a long history of “telling it like it is.” A Holocaust survivor, entrepreneur, mental health professional, and world traveler, she captivates audiences with her colorful stories and authentic conversations of guts, grit, and gusto. Her three books are: [Chronologically Gifted: Aging with Gusto](#), [Don’t Tell Me I Can’t Do It: Living Audaciously in the Here and Now](#), and [The Dr. Erica Miller Story: From Trauma to Triumph](#). For more information, please visit <http://drecamiller.com/>

