How to Negotiate to Achieve Your Goals in the Real World

These tips are from the book Getting More, by Stuart Diamond, an award-winning professor of the famed negotiation course at Wharton Business School.

1. **Goals are Paramount** – Goals are what you want at the end of the negotiation that you don’t have at the beginning. Negotiate to meet your goals. Many, if not most, people take actions contrary to their goals because they are focused on something else. They get mad in a store or relationship. They attack the wrong people. In a negotiation, you should not pursue relationships, interests, win-win, or anything else just because you think it’s an effective tool. Anything you do in a negotiation should explicitly bring you closer to your goals for that particular negotiation. Otherwise, it is irrelevant or damaging to you.

2. **It’s About Them** – You can’t persuade people of anything unless you know the pictures in their heads: their perceptions, sensibilities, needs, how they make commitments, whether they are trustworthy. Find out what third parties they respect and who can help you. How do they form relationships? Without this information, you won’t even know where to start. Think of yourself as the least important person in the negotiation. You must do role reversal, putting yourself fin their shoes and trying to put them in yours. Using power or leverage can ultimately destroy relationships and cause retaliation. To be ultimately more effective (and persuasive), you have to get people to want to do things.

3. **Make Emotional Payments** – The world is irrational. And the more important a negotiation is to an individual, the more irrational he or she often becomes: whether in world peace or a billion-dollar deal, or when your child wants an ice-cream cone. When people are irrational, they are emotional. When they are emotional, they can’t listen. When they can’t listen, they can’t be persuaded. So your words are useless, especially those arguments intended for rational or reasonable people, like “win-win.” You need to tap into the other person’s emotional psyche with empathy, apologies if necessary, by valuing them or offering them other things that get them to think more clearly.

4. **Every Situation Is Different** – In a negotiation, there is no one-size-fits-all. Even having the same people on different days in the same negotiation can be a different situation. You must analyze every situation on its own. Averages, trends, statistics, or past problems don’t matter much if you want to get more today and tomorrow with the people in front of you. Blanket rules on how to negotiate with the Japanese or Muslims, or that state you should never make the first offer are simply wrong. There are too many differences among people and situations to be so rigid in your thinking. The right answer to the statement “I hate you” is “Tell me more.” You learn what they are thinking or feeling, so that you can better persuade them.

5. **Incremental Is Best** – People often fail because they ask for too much all at once. They take steps that are too big. This scares people, makes the negotiation seem riskier, and magnifies differences. Take small steps, whether you are trying for raises or treaties. Lead people from the pictures in their heads to your goals, from the familiar to the unfamiliar, a step at a time. If there is little trust, it’s even more important to be incremental. Test each step. If there are big differences between parties, move slowly toward each other, narrowing the gap incrementally.

6. **Trade Things You Value Unequally** – All people value things unequally. First find out what each party cares and doesn’t care about, big and small, tangible and intangible, in the deal or outside the deal, rational and emotional. Then trade off items that one party values but the other party doesn’t. Trade holiday work for more vacation, TV time for more homework, a lower price for more referrals. This strategy is much broader than “interests” or “needs,” in that it uses all the experiences and synapses of people’s lives. And it greatly expands the pie, creating more opportunities, at home as well as the office. It is rarely done the way it should be.
7. **Find Their Standards** – What are their policies, exceptions to policies, precedents, past statements, ways they make decisions? Use these to get more. Name their bad behavior when they are not consistent with their policies. Did they ever allow late hotel checkout? Will they agree that no one should interrupt anyone else? Should innocent people be harmed? Isn’t high customer service part of their promise? This is especially effective in dealing with hard bargainers.

8. **Be Transparent and Constructive, Not Manipulative** – This is one of the biggest differences between *Getting More* and the conventional wisdom. Don’t deceive people. They will find out and the long-term payoff is poor. Be yourself. Stop trying to be tougher, nicer, or something you’re not. People can detect fakers. Being real is highly creditable, and credibility is your biggest asset. If you’re in a bad mood or too aggressive, or don’t know something, say so. It will help take the issue away. Your approach and your attitude are critical. This does not mean being a patsy or disclosing everything up front. It does mean being honest, being real.

9. **Always Communicate, State the Obvious, Frame the Vision** – Most failed negotiations are caused by bad communication or none at all. Don’t walk away from a negotiation unless all parties agree to take a break – or unless you want to end the negotiation. Not communicating means not getting information. Threatening or blaming the other party just results in their responding in kind: valuing them gets more. The best negotiators state the obvious. They will say, “We don’t seem to be getting along.” Package what’s going on in a few words to give them a vision of where you want them to go: “Is it your goal to make your customers happy?”

10. **Find the Real Problem and Make It an Opportunity** – Few people find or fix the real, underlying problem in negotiations. Ask, “What is really preventing me from meeting my goals?” To find the real problem, you have to find out why the other party is acting the way they are. It may not be obvious at first. You have to probe until you find it. You have to get into their shoes. A dispute over a child’s curfew or a business valuation may really be a problem of trust and an opportunity for a better relationship. And problems are only the start of the analysis. They usually can be turned into negotiation opportunities. View problems as such.

11. **Embrace Differences** – Most people think different is worse, risky, annoying or uncomfortable. But different is actually demonstrably better: more profitable, more creative. It leads to more perceptions, more ideas, more options, better negotiations and better results. Asking a few more questions about differences will produce more trust and better agreements. Companies, countries, and civilizations have sown repeatedly by their actions how they hate differences, despite their public relations statements. Great negotiators love differences.

12. **Prepare – Make a List and Practice with It** – These strategies are the start of a List, which is the entire collection of negotiation strategies, tools, and models. The List is like a pantry, from which you choose items for every meal. From the List, you would choose specific items to help you in an individual negotiation based on the specific situation. One is a tool: that is, a specific action to implement a strategy. Apologies and concessions are tools to help you implement the emotional payments strategy. If you don’t have a List, you aren’t prepared. If you aren’t prepared, you won’t do as well. Even spending a few minutes with the List produces better results. Keep pursuing the List – be persistent – until you meet your goals. That means you need to practice with these strategies and tools and review them after each negotiation.