

# “Dare to be....12 business tips from an FBI hostage negotiator”

*Find out how to get the deal you want in negotiations - without turning into Donald Trump.*

Picture in your mind a world-class negotiator. Someone who never gets duped, who doesn't take no for an answer, who always gets what they want - are you thinking of Donald Trump?

The President and author of the thrilling *Art of the Deal* is the archetype of the macho negotiator. It's a zero-sum approach – for me to win, you must lose – and its favoured technique is bombastic compromise: ask for more than you want, then 'negotiate' downwards.

Yet the very reason we tend to think of Trump-esque figures as good negotiators – that they keep telling us they are – is actually a sign that they aren't. After all, who wants to do business with someone who has a reputation for forcing great deals out of other people?

Besides, even if you do get them to the table and convince them against their better judgement to say yes to your demands, it may not help – people are less likely to implement deals they've made if they think they are bad for them.

*'Negotiation is moving from a skill in getting compliant behaviour to a skill in connecting with others to get co-operation.'*

So much for 'here's my offer, take it or leave it' then. But how do you actually get good deals without turning into The Donald?

## **1. This isn't chess**

'People think negotiation's chess, but in fact it's more like dating,' says Chris Voss, former FBI lead international hostage negotiator and author of *Never Split the Difference*.

The quality of the relationship is essential, especially if it's ongoing – with your boss, for instance, if you're asking for a raise or promotion. Strategy, on the other hand, is overrated.

'Your tactical moves are only around one fifth of what's actually happening,' says Walch. 'You can't possibly imagine every iterative move.'

## 2. Embrace the power of 'no'

The apparent objective in a negotiation is to get the other guy to say yes to you, and agree to your terms. This is misguided, says Voss.

'Yes is commitment, it makes people feel nervous. If I say to you "would you like to make more money", your gut instinct is that this is a trap.'

Instead, the focus should be on the word no.

'Saying no creates a powerful psychological reaction inside you. No is protection. Some people say it all the time, to protect themselves. But if you've just protected yourself by saying no, you're actually more open to listening.'

People will do things that aren't in their best interest, just to prove to you that they have autonomy. If you make it clear to them that it's okay to say "no", then you help them feel autonomous which makes them more collaborative. You call somebody up on the phone and say, "Have you got a few minutes to talk?" That will make anybody tighten up. Immediately they want to say "no" to that, because they know if they say "yes", they're going to get hooked in and be kept on the phone. The opposite is to say, "Is now a bad time to talk?"

Chris prefers to use phrasing such as, "Would it be a bad idea if...?" People don't feel locked in, and they'll often affirm what you're proposing by saying something like, "No, that's not a problem."

There's a very powerful way to implement this when you're trying to resolve a situation and you're being ignored. What does Chris say works magic? Just ask one simple question designed to trigger a "no."

**Have you given up on this project?**

More often than not the response is a fast, "No, we've just been really busy. Sorry about the delay..."

### **3. Stop trying to convince them**

'You can never get someone to see something the way you'd like them to see it,' says Voss. So stop trying.

Instead, try to get inside their head. Understand what's motivating them and turn it back on them.

'If I can articulate what's driving you that you're blind to and it sounds like it's against my interests, then I've just increased the chances that you're going to make a deal that favours me to a ridiculous degree.'

### **4. Know thyself**

The really successful negotiators invest time not only in understanding the other side, but also themselves.

'Think about who you are, what you want, why you want it, how you'll behave if you reach an impasse, and then do the same with the other side. You'll break the impasse every time,' says Walch.

Knowing yourself also helps you to attain 'buoyancy' – the ability to adapt quickly to the unexpected in negotiations.

### **5. Get Emotional**

Often the unexpected is a feeling rather than a fact. Many a negotiation was ruined by an inopportune flush of anger. But if you think you can eliminate emotions from the negotiating table altogether, think again.

'Rationality is a complete fiction,' says Voss. 'You make decisions based on what you care about. What is negotiation but the management of passions?'

The secret then is to use those passions to your advantage.

'Emotions are great information,' says Walch. 'If something makes you angry, you need to understand why. Maybe you feel excluded by something they said – that's important information because you are being excluded, so you need to speak up.'

## **6. Play on their sense of loss**

Another 'voodoo' technique Voss has picked up from his decades at the FBI involves playing on the other side's sense of loss. If they appear reluctant to give in, ask what will happen if you don't make a deal.

It's a useful technique when bringing up a subject you know will be unpopular.

'Most people want to use small talk, to try to put the other guy in a good mood first, but it happens so much we're sick of it,' says Voss.

'The smart move is to pre-empt those feelings. If I want a raise, I'll say "boss I've got something to talk to you about that you don't want to hear, you're going to be really angry". The boss will assume I'm going to quit and the over-reaction will benefit me.'

## **7. Get your radio voice on**

Your tone has a powerful impact on the other side's emotions. 'If you take a really calm, downward inflected tone of voice – I call it the late night FM DJ voice – it can be irresistible.'

Once you've hooked them with the voice, reel them in with the smile. 'It will lead you into an emotional stage where when I smile you want to agree. If what I'm proposing isn't agreeable to you, you'll start brainstorming and coming up with stuff you hope I'll agree to.'

## **8. Let them 'win'**

Closing negotiations can be tricky if the other side doesn't want to say yes. So swallow your pride and get ready to lose.

'I want them to feel like they've won. I want to get them to get me to say yes. So I'll spend a little extra time to make you come up the deal. It really is the art of letting the other side have your way.'

The main advantage of letting the other side 'win' is that they're less likely to back out later. 'Anything that comes out of your mouth, you're more likely to stick to.'

## **9. Let Them Feel In Control**

Many negotiation books use fighting metaphors and emphasize dominance. Bad idea, says Chris. Cool your inner Rambo.

You want a collaborative atmosphere. And if you're both jockeying for control, forget about it. When some people don't feel in control they totally lose it, especially in heated situations. So let them feel in control.

You're not giving them everything they want or letting yourself get pushed around, but the other side has to feel they have control in order to relax. Here's Chris:

Say, "Okay, you want to set the agenda? Set the agenda." Ask them open-ended questions. People love to be asked open-ended questions that start with "what" or "how", because it lets them feel like they're educating you and it gives them a feeling of being in control. It works on two levels. One, it tends to create a more collaborative environment, which means you're going to make a better deal. And, two, if the other side is trying to gain control to cheat you, it lets them drop their guard, so that you can get the upper hand.

Playing dumb is an effective strategy. Keep asking those "how" or "what" questions.

So you let them feel in control and you're asking a lot of open-ended questions. But how do you know if all this is working? Listen for two magic words...

## **10. The Two Magic Words They Need To Say**

"That's right." When they say that, you know they feel you understand them. That's rapport. Now emotions are on your side. Now you're collaborators trying to solve a problem, not warring tribes. Here's Chris:

That's a really powerful connection to be able to establish. They're telling you they feel connected to you, and they feel a great rapport with you. If there's anything that's going to move them in your direction swiftly it's when they say, "That's right."

What conversational move is most likely to trigger a "That's right"? A summary. Paraphrase back to them what they've been saying. Now they know you're listening and understanding. You don't have to agree, you're just giving a summary.

And what words should make you worried? If they say, "You're right." Think about it. When do you say that? When you want to politely tell people to shut up and go away.

### **11. Listen For Levers**

Sometimes you feel you have no leverage. But Chris believes there is always leverage. You just have to find it. And you do that by listening and asking questions — which nicely builds rapport and makes your counterpart feel in control at the same time.

Negotiation is not a fight. It's a process of discovery. When you know their real needs, the real reasons they are resisting you, then you're able to address those directly and problem-solve. Here's Chris:

The other side has got something to tell you that would change everything. You've gotta get that piece of information out of them. Give them a chance to talk, and they're going to tell you something really important... Let's say their boss told them two days before that if they don't close the next deal, their job is on the line. Maybe there's a company that appears to have all the leverage in the world, but there's a personal pressure on the executive that you don't know about, like they need to close this before they leave on vacation. You're really looking for two things. The stuff they're intentionally holding back, and then the stuff that they just don't know is important and they're not going to mention if you don't keep them talking.

I saw a good example of this first hand in an MIT negotiation class. Two groups of students have to decide how to split a bunch of oranges. Both sides have detailed information about their needs that the other group can't see.

The aggressive students rush in and say, "You have to give us all the oranges." These students get an F. (They probably also go on to get divorced.)

The collaborative students say, "We'll split the oranges 50/50 with you." Better, but far far far from optimal.

What do the smart students do? They ask questions. And what they find out is that the other group only needs the orange peels. And their group only needs the fruit. Both sides can get everything they want. But they never find out if they don't ask.

There's always leverage. But you have to listen.

## **12. "How Am I Supposed To Do That?"**

Playing dumb works. In fact, being helpless works too. Asking "How am I supposed to do that?" is deceptively powerful. It gets them to solve your problems for you and in a way they deem acceptable.

Calibrated "How" questions are a surefire way to keep negotiations going. They put pressure on your counterpart to come up with answers, and to contemplate your problems when making their demands...

The trick to "How" questions is that, correctly used, they are gentle and graceful ways to say "No" and guide your counterpart to develop a better solution — your solution.

By getting the other side to think about your situation it very often gets them to grant concessions. And they're concessions that they're okay with and will likely stick to because it was their idea to offer them. Here's Chris:

You want to make the other side take an honest look at your situation. It's the first way of saying "no" where you're doing a lot of things simultaneously. You're making the other side take a look at you. You make them feel in control, because it's a good "how" question. You don't want to say it as an accusation. You want to say it deferentially, because there's great power in deference. You want to find out if they're going to collaborate with you. 9 times out of 10, you get a response that's really very good.

Keep asking it. In hostage negotiations Chris would ask it over and over: "How do we know the hostage is safe?" "We don't have that kind of money. How are we supposed to get it?" "But how do we deliver the ransom to you?"

Now I know what some of you are thinking... Eventually they're going to say, "You're just going to have to figure it out." And that's fine. That's the signal you haven't "left any money on the table." Here's Chris:

Of course the one time out of 10 they'll say to you, "Well, you're just going to have to figure it out." But even in that case "How am I supposed to do that?" helps you confirm that you have in fact pulled as much value or gotten as many options as you possibly can out of the other side. You found a solid barrier. Your decision now is, "Okay, do I like this? Do I move in another direction?"