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Book Review: Negotiate Like the Pros

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NEGOTIATE LIKE THE PROS
Kenneth L. Shropshire
[New York: McGraw Hill, 2009]
208 Pages
ISBN: 978-0-07-154831-1

Every day presents another opportunity to engage in negotiations. Whether handling a multi-million dollar business negotiation or squabbling over the price of antique furniture at a flea market, everyone has engaged in some sort of negotiation. Kenneth Shropshire's book, *Negotiate Like the Pros*, provides a detailed plan to help make everyone a better negotiator. The book focuses on the sports business world, providing numerous stories involving sports negotiations, but the knowledge can be utilized in any field. Shropshire's explicit goal is to provide a book that everybody can use in their own line of work.¹ He addresses the commonly held misconceptions about negotiations and provides a step-by-step framework for understanding the negotiation process and improving personal negotiation skills. He does this by relating personal experiences and follows up with his own advice on the subject. This process provides a useful set of examples, allowing the reader to relate to each chapter's topic and drive home the most important points with relevant commentary and suggestions.

The author starts by informing the reader that great negotiators are made, not born. "I am convinced that anyone can be taught to be a better negotiator."² First, a person must identify his or her negotiation style then they must learn to understand and improve that style.³ Changing style is not beneficial; rather, a person must embrace style and focus on strengthening specific skills. As Shropshire says, "[t]he overall key to success is to first understand *you*."⁴

The first key to improving negotiation skills is preparation. According to Shropshire, this is the "most important element in any negotiation."⁵ To illustrate this point, the author provides examples from the experiences of people who prepared very well and people who prepared poorly. The most

1. KENNETH L. SHROPSHIRE, *NEGOTIATE LIKE THE PROS* 2 (2009).

2. *Id.* at 3.

3. *Id.*

4. *Id.* (emphasis in original).

5. *Id.*

prominent example revolves around Shropshire's involvement in organizing the 1984 Olympics and the lessons he learned from this experience.⁶ To illustrate this point the author shares a series of stories about the efforts of Peter Ueberroth, who was serving as the Olympic Organizer, to convince Fidel Castro to let the Cuban teams participate in the Olympics, instead of joining the Soviet boycott.⁷ These efforts required copious amounts of preparation, including obtaining information about every major person involved in the decision, his or her personal feelings about the situation, who or what may influence each person to make the desired decision, and personal information that would help the negotiators to create a relationship with each of them.

One of the keys to preparation is understanding the importance of relationships and having adequate background knowledge of the person across the table.⁸ Shropshire also discusses the importance of viewing the information a negotiator has gathered from all possible angles, including through the eyes of the person across the table.⁹ This means that negotiators need to be aware of any differences that may skew the importance of certain pieces of information, including racial, gender, and cultural differences.¹⁰ He also stresses the importance of preparation, and the need to focus on minor details, because these can be the deal breakers in a negotiation. In order to adequately prepare, it is important for a negotiator to develop a negotiation plan that will encompass all possible outcomes and gather information that will help to establish an appropriate relationship.

The chapter ends with a takeaway that provides an outline of a negotiation plan for readers to use as a template in their own negotiation preparation.¹¹ The outline is so complete that a reader could simply copy the template and use for personal preparations. As one of the most important and useful pieces of information in the book, this takeaway sets the tone for the rest of the book and allows the reader to get a glimpse at how an experienced negotiator prepares for a negotiation.

The second chapter encourages the reader to look inward and determine their personal negotiation style.¹² Shropshire considers knowledge of a person's negotiation style to be very important during preparation because it

6. *Id.* at 11-20.

7. *Id.* at 11.

8. *Id.* at 14.

9. *Id.* at 16-18.

10. *Id.*

11. *Id.* at 33-34.

12. *Id.* at 35.

determines how a person will react to certain negotiation situations.¹³ If a person is aware of his or her negotiation style, he or she will do a better job of understanding the person across the table and anticipate any negotiation maneuvers.

Shropshire urges readers to take the Bargaining Styles Assessment Tool (BSAT) that is found in the appendix.¹⁴ The BSAT consists of thirty multiple choice questions that the reader answers, then tallies up the scores, helping to inform the reader of negotiation tendencies they should embrace.¹⁵ This information provides readers with guidance for determining which type of the five negotiation styles they fit into best. The strengths of each style are then fully explained.¹⁶ Then advice is given on how to fully embrace your individual style, prepare with it, utilize it, and win with it. This information is critical to any negotiator so he or she can prepare effectively and negotiate to the best of his or her ability.

The third chapter discusses the important task of setting goals. Shropshire again uses the example of Peter Ueberroth and the 1984 Olympic Games to illustrate the importance of having a clear set of goals in mind prior to entering a negotiation.¹⁷ He discusses making opening offers while keeping the ultimate goal in mind, setting targets for the negotiation, and knowing when to walk away.¹⁸ While preparing goals, it is important to establish reference points for your impending negotiation.¹⁹ Knowledge of reference points guide the negotiation and allow the negotiator to feel out the strength of his own position and the position of his or her counterpart. Finally, Shropshire stresses the value of realistic goals.²⁰ Again, a negotiator must be aware of the market they are negotiating in and set goals properly to ensure a successful negotiation and outcome.

Next, Shropshire discusses the issue of leverage. He goes into great detail in an attempt to show the reader how to legitimately obtain leverage and avoid tactics such as lying. To illustrate his point, he discusses the story of Don King's organization of the 1974 Ali-Foreman boxing match that took place in Kinshasa, Zaire.²¹ King created leverage where there was none and he did it

13. *Id.* at 40.

14. *Id.* The BSAT can be found on page 175.

15. *Id.* at 41.

16. *Id.* at 41-46.

17. *Id.* at 57.

18. *Id.* at 62-64.

19. *Id.* at 64-68.

20. *Id.* at 71-73.

21. *Id.* at 75.

in a legitimate manner, by thinking creatively, appealing to the pride of both boxers, and leveraging his own skills as a promoter.²² The example of King is useful for beginners because it emphasizes how hard work and preparation can eventually create leverage for a negotiator.²³ Shropshire also discusses the usefulness of creating allies who may help you to build leverage, stressing the importance of culling new personal relationships and maintaining existing ones.²⁴ He also takes time to dispel the notion that lying in negotiations is a useful tactic²⁵ and focuses on the negative long-term effects that lying will have upon the reputation of a negotiator.²⁶

Once leverage is gained, it must be efficiently utilized in order to maximize its effect on the end result. The author devotes time to discussing how to appropriately exercise leverage in a variety of ways, stressing the importance of using it to your advantage while it lasts.²⁷ He also discusses how to create leverage with timing of offers, counteroffers, and information divulgence and how it is necessary for a negotiator to fully understand the timing circumstances surrounding his negotiation in order to get the best deal for his client.²⁸ Finally, the author discusses how a negotiator's consistency can effect negotiations.²⁹ Treating people alike and with proper respect can enhance a negotiator's reputation and also provide leverage to make or break a deal.³⁰

In the fifth chapter, Shropshire discusses the role of relationships in the negotiation process. A wide variety of relationships can effect a negotiation, the relationship between the negotiators, the relationship between negotiator and client, the relationship between involved parties and specific third parties, and the relationship with the public in general. Any of these relationships can impact a negotiation in a meaningful way. The example of Drew Rosenhaus and Terrell Owens' personal relationship illustrates how the relationship between negotiator and client can directly impact negotiations.³¹ Shropshire then discusses the value of creating and maintaining those relationships through negotiation and the importance of projecting the appearance that both

22. *Id.* at 77.

23. *Id.* at 78.

24. *Id.* at 81-85.

25. *Id.* at 85-87.

26. *Id.*

27. *Id.* at 88-95.

28. *Id.* at 91.

29. *Id.* at 93.

30. *Id.* at 94-95.

31. *Id.* at 97-100.

parties are winners.³²

When creating these relationships, it is important for a negotiator to make personal connections, because eventually those connections may be the difference between getting a deal done or walking away from the table.³³ The author also makes it a point to emphasize the cultural aspect of relationships and negotiations. He uses the examples of Yao Ming and Yi Jianlian and their movement from China to the NBA to show that it is important for negotiators to understand where their counterpart is coming from and how to best accommodate their position. This is a useful tool when dealing with any individual, not just someone from a different culture.

Shropshire also talks about recognizing the negotiable topics that may not deal directly with money. By looking beyond monetary issues, a negotiator may be able to facilitate a deal that makes both parties happy, even if the dollar figures are not exactly what one party initially had in mind.³⁴ Parties, specifically athletes, may be willing to sacrifice monetary gain if it means they can live somewhere that they are comfortable, win more games, work with people they enjoy, or receive other outside benefits, such as advertising or sponsorships. These issues, or others like them, need to be considered and addressed by both parties. This will help to create an agreement that meets the needs of each side. The chapter ends with the author reiterating earlier advice: place a high value on negotiation relationships, because it may not be the only negotiation with the other party. Having a good relationship with your counterpart will be very useful in the future, should you cross paths again.

The sixth chapter deals with the actual bargaining process and gives the reader insight into how to translate all the preparation and information gathering that has already occurred into a successful negotiation. Shropshire makes no excuses about the process; he admits that it is “nerve-wracking.”³⁵ However, he also stresses that the process can be practiced. A number of everyday examples are set out, such as attempting to negotiate taxi fares or asking cashiers to apply past or future sales prices to purchases.³⁶ From these examples, it is easy to imagine countless other negotiation opportunities that will give novices and experts a chance to practice whenever they please.³⁷

Shropshire then explores the details of a negotiation, setting out a variety

32. *Id.* at 101.

33. *Id.* at 102.

34. *Id.* at 109.

35. *Id.* at 122.

36. *Id.* at 122-23.

37. *Id.*

of ways to handle the initial move, the opening offer.³⁸ He discusses situations when it is useful to be proactive and make the initial offer and instances when it is better to wait for the opening offer.³⁹ He then provides information to deal with making a counteroffer and how to properly analyze the opening offer made by the other party.⁴⁰ The importance of patience is stressed throughout this chapter, urging the reader to maintain composure and avoid rushing the process.

Shropshire also emphasizes an underutilized art, the art of listening.⁴¹ Listening is often better than talking, and by actively listening, a negotiator can gain a significant advantage. Some of the best negotiators can use silence as a weapon, causing their counterpart to divulge valuable information that may later be used to help their clients. Shropshire again emphasizes the importance of creativity, urging the reader to think outside the box during a negotiation and create a successful deal.⁴² If creativity is properly applied, it can grease the wheels and allow a negotiation to move along at an appropriate pace.

Once an appropriate deal has been agreed upon, it is important to close the deal. Shropshire calls this "one of the most overlooked parts of the deal."⁴³ He points out that even after a settlement has been reached, there may be wiggle room to make it a better deal.⁴⁴ However, this is a tactic that must be carefully employed, in order to avoid breaking up a newly formed deal. The chapter closes by stressing the importance of preparation and trusting that preparation when it comes to closing the deal.⁴⁵

The seventh chapter discusses the negotiator as a third party participant. Shropshire discusses the various roles in which negotiators may find themselves acting as a third party advisor and not an active party to a negotiation. He emphasizes the importance of a negotiator knowing his place in a situational relationship and being able to effectively act as an advisor and negotiator. He uses a personal experience in politics that taught him the value of keeping distance from a situation that you are not personally involved in. As an attorney, agent, or negotiator it is important to have a clearly defined professional boundary, establish a compatible relationship, clearly define the

38. *Id.* at 125-26.

39. *Id.*

40. *Id.* at 126-27.

41. *Id.* at 130.

42. *Id.* at 131-34.

43. *Id.* at 134.

44. *Id.*

45. *Id.* at 135.

roles in the relationship, align the interests of the parties, and appropriately handle any conflicts that may arise.⁴⁶ If the negotiator is unable to do this, then it will be best to reconsider the relationship.

The either chapter stresses the importance of knowing the intended and unintended audience of any negotiation.⁴⁷ To illustrate the point, Shropshire discusses the congressional testimony of baseball players on the issue of steroids, specifically, Mark McGwire.⁴⁸ He emphasizes the importance of the court of public opinion and the impact that the public can have on a client's public value. Shropshire uses the example of the public apology to show how quickly public opinion can be swayed and how the actions of a negotiator and client can be impacted by this public message. The Michael Vick and Kobe Bryant situations are compared in order to fully show how a public apology, or lack thereof, can impact the status of an individual.⁴⁹ Bryant quickly issued a public apology and his transgressions were forgotten, while Vick avoided a public apology and he still has not been fully forgiven.⁵⁰ This emphasizes the suggestion that an apology should be issued sooner rather than later.⁵¹ The quicker that the bad news gets aired out, the less likely you are to suffer an unexpected harm, like damage to the client's reputation.⁵² Shropshire also comments on the usefulness of crafting a positive message, regardless of the nature of the initial news.⁵³

Shropshire concludes this book by tying all of the previous chapters together while emphasizing what have by now become familiar key points. Success is defined by each individual meaning and each negotiation will be different. This means that two negotiations with the same set of facts can turn out differently based upon the parties. John Wooden and Pat Summit are again used to emphasize the importance of preparation.⁵⁴ It is the negotiator's job to cover all the aspects of a potential negotiation and be knowledgeable on any topic that may arise. If it is necessary to seek help or guidance from a more knowledgeable source, then that is what the negotiator must do. A negotiator must focus on the relationships in any negotiation and focus on

46. *Id.* at 138-49.

47. *Id.* at 151-53.

48. *Id.*

49. *Id.* at 157-58.

50. *Id.*

51. *Id.* at 161.

52. *Id.*

53. *Id.* at 162-63.

54. *Id.* at 166-67.

building those relationships beyond the negotiation.⁵⁵ The “Final Takeaways” sufficiently summarize how to “Negotiate Like a Pro.”⁵⁶ A negotiator must, “Prepare with passion; Stick with *your* style; Set goals and aim high; Seek out leverage, but don’t lie; Focus on the value of relationships; Embrace the bargaining process; Know your audience; Play smart.”⁵⁷

Shropshire uses examples from a variety of negotiators and situations to paint a picture that emphasizes the various details of a negotiation. This allows the reader to put the details together and fully understand the big picture, while maintaining focus on all of the important, minor aspects of a negotiation. The stories provide entertaining, enlightening examples that can serve as guideposts for negotiators of all skill levels. The “Takeaways” effectively summarize the main points of each chapter and allow the reader to break down and easily retain the important information. It is plausible that dedicated readers, attempting to improve their negotiation skills would copy these “Takeaways” into a notebook and go over them in preparation for any negotiation they might encounter.

Negotiate Like The Pros is an excellent resource for students and professionals. Negotiations happen on a daily basis in the sports world and these negotiations usually involve lawyers. Unfortunately, people often overestimate their negotiation skills and end up short-changing themselves in negotiation opportunities. This book will improve negotiation skills and allow the reader to avoid those situations where they walk away from the table feeling like they could have done better. It provides students and professionals with a number of helpful guidelines that will improve their skills in a manner that will surely help them to advance both their careers and their personal lives.

Lance C. Kearns

55. *Id.* at 172.

56. *Id.* at 173.

57. *Id.*