



Negotiation Skills

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Have you ever experienced any of the following?

- A father and daughter argue over the use of the family car.
- Two brothers disagree about whose job it is to take out the trash and demand that a parent settle their argument.
- A couple strongly disagrees over how to balance a checking account.
- A wife and husband are increasingly at odds over how to share housework and child care.
- A parent's job is threatened because he or she regularly misses work due to a preschooler's frequent illnesses.
- Employees resent their employer, who has set an inflexible work schedule to follow.

Disagreements are bound to happen because parents and children, employees and employers, and couples inevitably have differences in their opinions, values and goals. Many common situations can become sources of disagreements and conflict in personal relationships.

To find solutions to these disagreements, negotiation skills are needed every day at home, at work and in the community. Negotiation means developing an ability to resolve disputes and conflicts. Effective negotiation requires a willingness to work with other people

to reach solutions that everyone can live with.

Your personal relationships are often shaped by how well you are able to manage and settle conflicts. If conflict is managed effectively, then a relationship can be maintained. But if conflict is handled poorly, the outcomes may weaken your relations with family, friends and work acquaintances over time.

Ineffective approaches to conflict

The following examples illustrate some common situations that can lead to conflict. After a discussion of how to develop successful negotiating skills, this publication concludes with suggestions for resolving the conflicts in these examples.

Example 1: Parent-child conflict

It's Friday, and José and his mother are arguing once again about the teenager's weekend curfew. Mrs. Santiago has grown increasingly distressed by her son's continuing resistance to the 11 p.m. curfew she has set. José insists that this is unfair. Both become so angry and frustrated that they storm off to separate areas of the house to avoid each other and further conflict.

Example 2: Workplace conflict

Lamont has been late for work several times in recent weeks. He has failed to turn in several important project outlines on time without explanation or apology, annoying his employer. Until recently, Lamont's attendance and performance at work had been consistent, motivated, and highly productive. Lamont's recent behavior has been so uncharacteristic that his employer decides to confront him, demanding a meeting the next day.

Example 3: Marital conflict

Diana and James have the "perfect" marriage, two children and a lovely home. Both work in professions that provide personal satisfaction as well as a comfortably secure income. They have "made it." And they are miserable. Work and family roles have left them with little time to spend together and have increased their areas of disagreement. Diana and James have become focused on meeting their own needs with little regard for the needs of the other. Resentment, dissatisfaction and conflict are all they seem to share any longer.

The goal of negotiation: everyone wins

People resolve disagreements in many ways. Some tend to deal with potential conflict by denying it or trying to avoid it altogether. Instead of confronting and resolving problems, people may let their anger and resentment build while they remain silent. This approach can result in constant personal stress, which can lead to illness or poor general health. If disagreements are not resolved, the possibility for more intense conflicts at some later date is increased. Problems seldom improve on their own.

Conflict can involve issues of power and authority. Adults may resort to threats and punishments to solve problems with children. Labor unions may strike and management may respond by laying off workers. These are examples of using power to control, intimidate and force solutions on other people. These forced outcomes only add to the grounds for future conflict.

Conflict can also be motivated by ego. Solutions are selfishly sought with little regard for the other person. The conflict becomes a win/lose situation in which one person wins at someone else's expense. The one-sidedness of this solution increases the odds of more conflict. "Losers" will defy, test, resist and retaliate against the "winners."

Effective negotiation is a two-way process that encourages both sides to actively participate in making decisions. It also provides a way for people to learn to understand each other better and to grow in their relationships. Negotiation helps to create a healthy balance between giving and getting. Everyone becomes a winner through negotiation.

How can everyone win?

The key to effective negotiation is clear communication. Communication involves three important skills: speaking, listening and understanding. You can't have one skill work without the others — for example, you can't have good understanding without good listening and speaking. Negotiation is most effective when people are able to clearly identify and discuss their sources of disagreement and misunderstanding.

Speaking

Negotiation begins with a clear, concise explanation of the problem as each person sees it. Facts and feelings are presented in a rational manner from the individual's perspective, using "I" statements. Communication between people will go more smoothly when statements such as "I become very upset when you " are used rather than more aggressive statements such as "You make me mad when you," which blames the other person and puts him or her in a defensive position. Shared concerns rather than individual issues remain the focus of discussion throughout negotiation.

The negotiation process will be most effective when people take time to think through what they will say. When possible, plan ahead to meet at a time and place convenient to everyone. A quiet, neutral spot where there are few distractions or interruptions is perfect for open discussion.

Listening

Listening is an active process of concentrating all of one's attention on the other person. Encouraging the other person to share thoughts and feelings, giving feedback on what has been heard, and maintaining eye contact are skills that show you are inter-

Negotiation is most successful when both sides:

- ✓ Recognize the value of a relationship and have a mutual desire to continue it.
- ✓ Participate actively in the process.
- ✓ Show consideration and acceptance of each other's perspectives, values, beliefs and goals.
- ✓ Separate personality from the issue involved.
- ✓ Work together to develop a solution everyone can

ested in understanding what he or she has to say. It is always helpful to simply ask, "I understood you to say Am I correct in this?" or "I hear you saying that you are Is that how you feel?" Active listening assures the other person that he or she is heard, accepted and respected. The ability to listen actively supports open, ongoing negotiation.

Thinking ahead or anticipating the course of the discussion are distractions that interfere with listening. Poor attention and listening can lead to misunderstandings, inappropriate solutions and continuing conflict.

Understanding

Before two sides can look for solutions, a common understanding must be reached. If two people do not understand each other's problems and concerns, then the process of negotiation will either be broken off or will end with solutions that do not work.

Active listening encourages understanding. It is important to pay close attention to what someone says as well as to how he or she behaves. Body

language, including facial expressions, hand gestures and degree of eye contact, can provide clues about the other person's thoughts and feelings. Observations, however, are shaped as much by the observer as by the person being observed. It is good practice never to assume to understand the other person without first asking, "Did I hear you correctly?" or "I have noticed that you appear " or "I sense you are under strain. Do you want to talk about this?" and "I'd like to hear from you about how you are feeling" are all good examples of statements that encourage communication and better understanding between people.

Guidelines for successful negotiation

Show respect.

Success rests in accepting the other person despite differences in values, beliefs, educational experiences, ethnic backgrounds or perspectives. Negotiation permits you to examine a problem from all sides, and to promote understanding and interest in the other person without necessarily agreeing to her or his viewpoint. Taking time to listen and to ask questions makes it easier to learn more about someone's perspectives. Considering different perspectives will increase the range and variety of possible solutions. Genuine interest in other people and in their contribution to finding solutions builds trust. Trust provides a foundation for continuing a relationship. A foundation of trust also eases future efforts to solve problems.

Recognize and define the problem.

Each person begins with a clearly identified statement of what he or she wants and/or needs. Negotiation should identify not only individual concerns,

but mutual concerns, perceptions and interests. From this process, a common ground for agreement between the individuals is sought. Selfish issues and goals are eliminated in favor of mutually acceptable goals. Problems are examined apart from the personalities involved. Blaming the other person is inappropriate and destroys the cooperative nature of negotiation.

Seek a variety of solutions.

More information about the problem may be needed before a solution can be decided upon. It may be helpful to examine other sources of information such as books, magazine articles and people who may be familiar with the issue. Outside assistance may help you to overcome your own biases. Mediators can provide impartial assistance with the negotiation process.

Brainstorming is one way to gather many creative ideas rapidly. This process allows everyone to openly make suggestions without fear of criticism. At this stage, every suggestion has value and is accepted. After all suggestions have been shared, they are reviewed to determine whether they might coincide or overlap with each other. Negotiation then becomes a matter of choosing a solution to which no one has an objection. Remember, personal goals should not take priority over shared goals.

Collaborate.

Working together doesn't mean giving up or giving in to another person's demands or goals. Two or more individuals can agree that disagreement exists. However, they can also agree to put aside their anger, frustration, resentment and egos in favor of working together for a solution to a common problem. All negotiated work is completed by consensus. A negotiated solution is reached when everyone has

given up something to gain common benefits.

Be reliable.

It is important to follow through with negotiated agreements. The very work of negotiation implies a commitment toward whatever outcome has been decided. Developing a plan of action that spells out who is going to do what, where, when and how is helpful. This plan is followed for a specified period of time, then evaluated at the end of that time period. It may be necessary to change plans and goals along the way, depending on how well the first draft met the shared needs of the individuals involved. However, the success of any negotiated outcome depends on everyone's fullest cooperation and participation. Individuals become reliable and trustworthy partners as a result.

Preserve the relationship.

In general, people will try to preserve valued relationships. Negotiation is a non-adversarial approach to resolving conflict in those relationships. There are no "good guys," "bad guys" or "winners/losers." Negotiation is based on equality. No one wields more power or control than another. The individual's ideas, attitudes, values and objectives are recognized and respected as legitimate. Solutions are mutually agreed upon.

Successful negotiation outcomes

This section provides suggestions for resolving the conflicts discussed in the three examples at the beginning of this publication.

Example 1: Parent-child conflict

Effective approach: compromise.
Mrs. Santiago has retreated to her

room to calm down. It is time to discuss the issue of curfew with José directly. She is careful to listen to José and to give him time, attention and respect. He can express feelings without fear that his mother will ignore or reject them. José admits that he had grown frustrated by his mother's seeming lack of respect for him, causing his anger. Mrs. Santiago and José agree to an 11:30 p.m. curfew. José had asked for a midnight curfew, but settles for the additional half hour. Mother and son have found a middle-ground solution that both can live with.

Example 2: Workplace conflict

Effective approach: consensus. At the meeting, Lamont explains that he has been caring for his elderly father, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease. Attempting to maintain a schedule at home and at work has proven difficult. Lamont is concerned that he will lose his job. Lamont's employer reassures him that his job is not in jeopardy. However, alternative and more flexible scheduling must be considered to resolve family-work conflicts. A consensus is sought. The employer values Lamont's training and experience, and Lamont values his job and his employer's understanding. Both are willing to discuss options and to try out alternatives that best serve mutual needs.

Example 3: Marital conflict

Effective approach: mediation. Intimate relationships can become battlegrounds of unresolved issues,

complaints and unrealistic expectations. Diana and James' marriage is one that is stuck and in serious trouble. They are unable to step back and view their problems rationally. Both have acknowledged their inability to resolve any of the multiple problems facing them. Diana and James decide to seek the assistance of a family mediator.

Licensed family mediators are trained to provide impartial help in defining the problems and to assist in the problem-solving process. Mediators and counselors both provide additional information and resources to individuals in difficult relationships.

Mediation has proven successful in relationships that have repeated difficult-to-solve problems. Diana and James' marital problems are not unusual. For that reason, family mediation services are being used more often as an alternative to counseling and/or legal services. For further information concerning family mediation, see "Resources."

Summary

As life becomes more complex and the world more diverse, your ability to use negotiation skills becomes more important. Negotiation requires time and patience. By practicing the negotiation strategies and skills suggested in this publication, you can make conflict resolution a regular part of your approach to managing relationships at home, at work and in the community. Negotiation can serve not only to preserve relationships, but to continually strengthen and improve them.

Successful negotiation tips:

- ✓ Communicate clearly.
- ✓ Respect the other person.
- ✓ Recognize and clearly define the problem.
- ✓ Seek solutions from a variety of sources.
- ✓ Collaborate to reach a mutual solution.
- ✓ Be reliable.
- ✓ Preserve the relationship.

Resources

The Academy of Family Mediators.
P.O. Box 10501, Eugene, OR 97440.
(503) 345-1205.

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