



11 Negotiation Mistakes You Love to Make

by Alexander Hiam

1. Talking

Why is talking a mistake? Because people do too much of it. Don't be the first to put your offer on the table. Don't give away unnecessary information. Don't make threats or give ultimatums and talk yourself into a corner. Don't let your mouth give your game away. *Do* follow the advice in the following "Don'ts" to find out what to do.

2. Not Listening

Listening is the key to good negotiation. It starts with listening to the tone of voice, body language, and other nonverbal signals that clue you into the other party's willingness or hesitation, honesty or deceitfulness, and so forth. Next, it involves passive listening: Simply attending with care to what the other party says to try to understand them more fully than most people do, and, perhaps, than they understand themselves. Finally, it involves active listening, in which we ask questions to find out what is behind their thoughts and positions and try to draw them into helping us by making mistake #1.

3. Rushing

The opening is like a courtship. Don't rush it. Often, it's inappropriate to even open the negotiation right away. Let them wait, while you make small talk, think about it, or talk with someone else. Don't feel hurried, and

definitely don't give the impression of feeling hurried. Everyone knows instinctively that the person in the greatest hurry has the most time pressure and therefore is in the weakest negotiation position. Don't rush!

4. Failing to Plan Your Outcome

What do you really need to have out of this deal? Knowing your range and walk-away point is important. Know your plan and stick to it. Don't get caught up in the process and move farther than you (or those you represent) really meant to move. You need a plan, and you need to remember it. It's amazing how few people bother to write themselves even the shortest note before they start negotiating. Write your plan down and stick it in your pocket, and if you get lost, go to the bathroom and reread it.

5. Letting Your Pride Talk

The best negotiators put their ego aside. It doesn't matter what the other party says or whether you like them or not. Let them label you, insult you, boast about themselves, accuse you of double-dealing, or tell others that they are getting the better of you. None of that matters, only the deal does. How's is the deal going? If you are moving toward anything within your planned range, it's going well. Keep that ego in your pocket, and keep negotiating, quietly and without letting your pride get in the way.

6. Taking Anything Back

Concessions should be one-way only. If you make small, pre-planned concessions, slowly and thoughtfully, then you never give away more than you should and you never have to try to "put the Genie back in the bottle." It's important to be trustworthy. If the other party finds you predictable and reliable in the negotiations, they will be more comfortable closing a

deal with you, and that puts more in your pocket. Never take back a concession, even if they do.

7. Losing Your Cool

Tempers don't belong in negotiations because they cost. Every time you lose your cool, you lose negotiating power. Some negotiators are masters at playing our emotions and getting us too involved. Some people do it quite by accident, they are just naturally irritating. But it doesn't matter, either way, you won't rise to the bait. You're in control of the negotiation as long as you are in control over what you say and do.

8. Fabricating an Impasse

Many negotiators are tempted to play brinksmanship when things aren't going their way. This is a mistake because it is a hard-to-control tactic that usually backfires. If you call off the negotiations and send the signal that you're so unhappy you don't want to negotiate right now, the other party is going to think hard about getting out of it too. Better to keep reaching out with polite efforts to find a solution, than to declare an impasse and engage in theatrics. Theatrics usually cause more trouble by becoming the subject of the negotiation instead of helping to move the negotiation forward on more substantive lines.

9. Refusing to Change Your View

Sometimes you are just plain wrong. Admit it! New information or a new idea or proposal can change the circumstances. Be open minded and willing to change your plan if there's good reason to.

10. Refusing Help

Sometimes the other party reaches out with a sincere effort to understand your needs and help you meet them. A collaborative approach can produce creative “win-win” outcomes, but only if you are courageous enough to give the process a try and open up enough to problem-solve with the other party. If it looks like the other party is sincerely interested in collaborating and wants to come around and sit on the same side of the table as you, then give them a seat and listen to their ideas and concerns. However, please start by asking about and working on *their* problem (not yours). If it’s just a ploy, then they won’t want to share any substantive information with you or answer your questions honestly, and you can send them back to the other side of the table again. But if they do open up, you can then reciprocate and accept their help as well.

11. Failing to Explain Your Position

People like to feel that others are being reasonable. Why do you take the position you do? You don’t have to tell them everything, but do prepare a reasonable-sounding explanation for why you can’t do something. Refer to restrictions binding you from above or other external sources. Present your position as if the other party has a right to know. They certainly feel they do. And they may need to explain your position to those they represent, so a reasonable argument or compelling fact will help them bring others in line. However, as you decide how to explain your position, remember not to give away any information that they can use against you. Your explanation should strengthen your position, not weaken it. So, for example, don’t mention that you have a deadline and it will cost you substantially if you miss it, since they may then threaten to delay unless you make further concessions. Presenting a strong argument for your position is different from spilling the beans. Be persuasive, not naïve, as you decide to tell them.

These eleven mistakes and their cures apply to all negotiations, but remember that negotiating is not *always* the best response to a conflict of interests. Sometimes it's better to avoid the conflict, especially if you think it could be destructive or unproductive at the moment. Other times, it may be better to accommodate and help them out by setting your own interests aside. Think about it before you start to negotiate, and make sure negotiating is not a mistake in and of itself.