

# Vital Negotiation Skills

What is your image of a **skilled negotiator**? Someone with ice in her veins? The poker player, playing his cards close to his chest and never revealing to the other side what he is feeling or thinking? Inscrutable, stony-faced?



"Your cheque is on the Internet."

If that's your image of a **skilled negotiator** you may be surprised to hear that Bristol Business College's research into **what skilled negotiators actually do in face-to-face negotiations** shows the opposite! **Skilled negotiators** frequently reveal their feelings to the other side. In fact, the **skilled negotiators** that we studied disclosed their thoughts and feelings to the other side at least 55% more than average negotiators.

But why would they be doing that? There are at least two possible explanations.

Firstly, revealing feelings says to the other side, *"Look at me, I'm human too and I have feelings just like you"*.

Think of an iceberg. All you see is the tip, sticking out of the water, while the biggest part is out of sight, below the waterline. Now think of the tip as a person's behaviour. This is all we can observe but we all know that beneath the outward expression of behaviour lie feelings, attitudes, motives and beliefs - all the things that make up the personality of the person. Revealing inner thoughts and feelings presents some of this to the other side and invites them to do the same. And the more that is revealed, the more the relationship will develop and the more likely it is that the sides will start to see common ground.

Secondly, it is an alternative to agreeing and disagreeing. Typical phrases used by **skilled negotiators** are:

*"I'm concerned that we aren't making any progress on this issue."*

*"I'm very pleased with your proposal."*

Imagine you're playing in a tennis tournament and you're drawn to play a match against a total stranger. The first service comes zooming over the net in excess of 100 mph, pitches in and hits the back of the court before you can move a muscle. How do you feel? Intimidated, outclassed? Your expectations have probably changed. Winning the game is no longer an issue. You'll be glad to win a few points to save face.

The same thing can happen in **negotiations**. Skilled negotiators will reduce the expectations of the other side, tilting the power balance in their favour. They will do this in a number of ways.

Firstly, before they negotiate, they will sell. Selling means changing the perception of the other side by building value for their solution. The more the other side values the solution that I am offering, the more they will be willing to pay, and the better position I will be in to negotiate. Skilled negotiators will also use their persuasion skills in the negotiation itself to make sure that the other side is willing to accept proposals.

Secondly, the skilled negotiator will prepare and plan more effectively. This does not mean spending more time in getting ready to negotiate, just being more effective. For example, looking at their own and the other side's strengths and weaknesses and, if possible, taking action to correct any power imbalances before getting to the negotiating table. They will also look at what fallbacks they and the other side have. A fallback is the alternative that is available to either party if they fail to get a deal.

For example, the fallback for a buyer may be to use another supplier and take action to compensate for any shortcomings in the alternative supplier's product or service.

Thirdly, using the appropriate mix of **behaviours in the negotiation**. For example, skilled negotiators ask more questions and use them more effectively than average negotiators. In many cases the power balance has been shifted from one side to the other through skilled questioning.

Finally, skilled negotiators will trade one issue against another rather than conceding. Again, this will only be possible because the skilled negotiator has built value for the issues in the perception of the other side.

In the end though, power is all about perceptions. In the tennis example, that first serve could have been luck but, without adequate preparation, you won't know that and you won't be prepared to handle whatever your opponent throws at you and you will quickly lose confidence. At Bristol Business College we say "*Power is in the head*" but I'll leave the final word to negotiation author and commentator, Herb Cohen, who said, "*Power is a matter of perception. If you think you've got it then you've got it. If you think you don't have it, even if you've got it, then you haven't got it.*"

## ***Bristol Business College deliver a 1 day Training Workshop on 'Vital Negotiation Skills'***

For Further Information <http://www.bristolbusinesscollege.com/quickenforequest>

T: 0845 555 1030