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A sharp edge may cut you

Why being a tough guy won't benefit you in the long run

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Question:

When is it appropriate to be the "tough guy" when negotiating? By "tough guy", I mean being demanding and not making compromises.

Answer:

It depends upon your definition of effective negotiating. If your negotiating philosophy is strictly win-lose, meaning winner takes all, then being a tough guy is consistent with the intention of playing that game.

However, if you subscribe to the philosophy that when you negotiate you have the opportunity to build relationships that lead to even more deals in the future, then being a tough guy is not a productive strategy.

Keep in mind there is a difference between being a tough negotiator and being tough to negotiate with. Being a tough negotiator implies that you seek win-win, that you are strategic, and that you are willing to be patient to secure what you feel you deserve.

On the contrary, being tough to negotiate with means you seek win-lose. You will go to extreme lengths to get what you want

without regard to the other party. Hollywood has embellished these approaches in the movies, where the winner takes all, makes 'em beg for mercy, and goes in for the kill. While it makes for good entertainment and box office revenue, I have never found a situation where win-lose was the best strategy.

Being civil and respectful, even when the other party is not, will help you achieve more of your goals, and build longer-term relationships with even greater returns than being a tough guy.

When you are fortunate to get more of what you want and the other party gets some of what they want, then it's win-win; big win for you, little win for them. If the other party gets more of what they want and you get some of what you want, then it's win-win; little win for you, big win for them.

There is a lot of talk about win-win negotiations, when both parties win to the same degree and walk away happy and satisfied. Unfortunately, this is more wishful thinking than reality. It's unusual for two parties to have such a combination of needs and wants that win-win is possible. In actuality, one party usually achieves more of what they want, and as such, they let the other party achieve some of what they want so the deal can be closed.

For example, a landlord is asking \$550 a month for rent for a one-bedroom apartment. A renter offers to pay the landlord \$500. After much deliberation, the landlord agrees to a two-year contract \$500 first year and \$525 the second year. The apart-

ment has been vacant for four months, reflecting a \$2,200 loss, plus the cost to advertise. It's a two-year lease so the landlord will be out another \$900. That is less than two months' rent. The renter is pleased because she is able to pay her bills without having to get a second job. Is it win-win? Not exactly. The landlord didn't get what she wanted — \$550 per month. The renter didn't get what she wanted — \$500 per month in rent. But they did find a position that was agreeable to both parties.

Everyone who comes to the negotiating table is there for one simple reason: they want something the other side has. Being a tough guy creates adversity and conflict, triggering the opposing parties' defense mechanisms. When that happens, rational thinking is abandoned and trust is diminished.

I've seen co-workers, neighbors, and family members act more like enemies than fellow human beings. Attempts at win-win revert to win-lose, and negotiation discussions transition from an attempt to reach mutual goals to an attempt to defeat the enemy.

In "I win-you lose" negotiations, individual circumstances, needs, and wants of the other party are discarded. It becomes a take-it-or-leave-it offer.

I recently read an article about a company that rotated purchasing responsibilities every six months and prohibited its buyers from dining with suppliers. The company's fear was that its buyers might develop some level of personal relationship with their sup-

pliers that would inhibit them from working in the company's best interest. I believe the firm's logic is flawed.

Business is about relationships. It also means knowing where to draw the line. This company would reap more rewards if it taught its purchasing specialists two things: 1) what good judgment means and how to use it to draw boundaries, and 2) how to strategize business opportunities by asking the right questions, allowing them to gain critical information that will enhance its supplier relationship. My guess is that the firm is leaving a lot on the table and doesn't even know it.

Win-lose negotiators make the mistake of thinking that they will never have to negotiate with the other party again, that it's a one-time, one-shot deal. Negotiating is never a one-time, one-shot deal. You always leave an impression and people always talk about their experiences.

I know a shrewd businessman named Dave who subscribes to the philosophy to never respond to nasty antics, comments or underhanded tactics for 24 hours. He says it gives him the thinking time to process his emotions and rationally determine how to proceed. He told me that in most cases he usually finds a way to take the high road. At the same time, he also says he never forgets. When the right opportu-

nity presents itself, sometimes five, seven or even 15 years later, he will get even.

When you intentionally compromise or expense another human being, you attack their ego: humiliation has a long memory. Dave had numerous stories about how he sought revenge many years later, sometimes even working through a third party, so the original party didn't even know what had happened.

Being a "tough guy" gives you a false sense of power. While you may get an adrenaline rush, remember the benefits are very short-term. Taking the high road even when you're angry is more effective than allowing your emotions to drive your communications. You just never know when a "Dave" will show up in your life again.



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