

Building trust

Disciplined approach can reap rewards

Question:

Is it possible to build trust when negotiating?

Response:

Not only is it possible to build trust, it is essential to do so. Trust is the basis for creating open communications and developing mutually agreeable outcomes.

Trust is built not by doing any one thing right, but by doing a number of things purposely and deliberately. The first and most important is to show respect both to the other party as well as to yourself. To compromise either jeopardizes your bargaining power. Let me explain.

When you interrupt the other party, don't follow through with your commitments or blatantly stack the deck in your favor, you break trust. You fuel the other party's suspicions that you are only out for yourself. As a result, everything you say and do thereafter is processed through skeptical mental filters.

Likewise, when you apologize for something you didn't do, concede to excessive demands without counter-offering, or become emotionally unglued, you discredit yourself. The other party interprets these actions as a lack of preparation (demonstrating a lack of commitment to the relationship), a lack of emotional discipline, or insecurity (possibly stemming from inexperience or having something to hide).

To eliminate making these mistakes, use these time-tested strategies for building trust:

Be professional

Follow through with your commitments. If you cannot meet a deadline, renegotiate it. Forgetting to call at a specified time or showing up unprepared for a meeting breaks trust. During a negotiation, people are natu-

rally skeptical and cautious. You want to give them every reason to trust you.

Demonstrate flexibility

When encountering a roadblock, be creative and work with the other party to explore new options for structuring the deal. When challenged, resist the temptation to 'dig in your heels.' You might have certain points that may be non-negotiable, but that doesn't mean you can't repackage the deal so you both get everything you need and some of what you want.

Never make a concession without asking for something in return.

In doing so, you invalidate not only your original position, but your credibility as well.

The other party may perceive you to be 'testing the waters' to see what you can get away with, rather than attempting to create the basis for a mutually respectful relationship.

Too often, companies use this strategy to get their "foot in the door." Unwittingly they reduce their price, sometimes below cost, just to have an opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities. However, when the test is over, the customer will use that "rock bottom, fire sale" price as the starting point for negotiating the terms knowing it will reduce their expectations of what is really feasible.

While I never recommend this approach, some companies insist on using it. If you are one of them, always negotiate the "after test" price at the same time you negotiate the terms for the "test" product. In other words, both you and the customer know up front what the terms will be for additional purchases after the test period ends.

Demonstrate emotional discipline

Remain calm, especially when talk gets tough or emotions run high. When the other party attempts to intimidate you, they know that the advantage shifts to their court when you lose your cool. Refuse to play into their

hands. Maintain emotional discipline. Take long pauses to reflect on what they said so you can think before speaking. Often, the other party will continue giving you more fodder to work with.

Work through the consequences of different strategies and responses before communicating. One false move can shift the advantage in their favor and you will regret your premature response. You want to be deliberate and if you find yourself flustered or unable to respond in a respectful manner, simply say, "I'm not prepared to respond to you at this time. I will get back to you (on Thursday) after I've had a chance to research this subject more." They lose their momentum when you don't feed into their tactics.

The bargaining table is fertile ground for triggering the best and worse in each of us. The unknowns are many. As such, it's difficult to predict what you will encounter when you walk into a negotiation or what outcomes will result when you walk out. Natural anxiety can erupt into friction if not managed appropriately.

The most successful negotiators I know dedicate time to prepare for each negotiation. They block time, without interruption, to research the situation, the players, strategies and counter-moves, and different options. They know that this upfront effort will minimize the risk of being caught off-guard during the negotiation.

Likewise, by being thoughtful, purposeful and deliberate in their communications, both verbal and non-verbal, they create the framework for building trust and developing mutually agreeable solutions.



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