

Key Negotiation Principles

Negotiation is an ongoing process, not an event. The more complex the situation, the higher the stakes; and the more your core values are involved, the longer it will take.

Win-win solutions are to be sought but are often very difficult to attain.

They require much self-knowledge plus a very high degree of understanding of your partner's values, concerns and desires.

Add value to your offers. Find ways to make it easier for your partner to say yes.

One very common negotiation mistake is to focus on your own goals and issues. When your focus is on analyzing your desires and getting what you want, you won't be very open to suggestions that don't fit in to your parameters. You really need to understand your partner's concerns and help them meet them.

The second common mistake is being a poor advocate for your own interests. You simply cave in too quickly to avoid the tension involved in difficult negotiation.

Do your best to separate interests and concerns from values. You can negotiate your interests but not your core values or integrity. You can't really say in negotiation, "I'll give up my spiritual beliefs for you."

Make a proposal that takes into account your major concerns and also takes into account your partner's major concerns. Tell your partner why your proposal could (not should) work for them.

Recurring obstacles that interfere with effective negotiation are the lack of preparation (not reflecting on the above items), not making the effort to thoroughly understand your partner's perspective or not being an effective advocate for yourself.

Respect (self and other), openness, and persistence are the keys to successful negotiation.

Collaborative Negotiation for Couples

In negotiating a complex situation, do not expect to “win” the first time. Your first job is to get yourself and your partner thinking about the many different aspects of the problem. Begin by writing out or thinking through your responses to the following steps 1-4. Writing out the responses will significantly help to clarify your thinking.

1. Define

First, get a verbal and mutually agreeable definition of the problem to be negotiated. Each person writes the definition of the problem/situation at the top of their page. Then write out steps 2 and 3.

2. Explore

- a) What do you want and why is it important to you?
- b) How important is it to you on a scale of 1–10? (with 10 being the most important)
- c) What do you believe your partner wants, and why is it important to them?
- d) How important is it to them on the 1-10 scale?

3. Speculate

- a) If you get most of what you want, what is the possible positive and negative impact on your partner?
- b) What can you do to increase the positives and decrease the negative influence on your partner?

4. Exchange ideas

Now is the time to verbally describe and clarify what you wrote in steps 1 and 2. Get details and as many specifics as you can about your partner’s concerns – about what they want and why it’s important. Be sure to recap as you hear your partner’s responses.

This step sets the stage for the grand finale.

5. Propose

Now that you have heard each other’s concerns, write out at least two different possible solutions that take into consideration the following questions:

- a) What is important to you?
- b) What is important to your partner?

If several concerns become apparent, then you may need to think in terms of several solutions to meet the different concerns. Share with each other what you wrote in this step.

6. Act

If actions are appropriate, decide who will do what by when. Make the action period brief so that neither of you will feel you’re being locked into something that will be long and unpleasant.

7. Evaluate

After the action phase (6), come back and evaluate the progress.

This point is crucial: If things haven’t gone as well as you hoped for, please start with what you could have done differently before mentioning what you believe your partner could have done differently.

Renegotiate and experiment with another solution.

Negotiation often requires doing the Initiator-Inquirer to understand each others' concerns, interests and goals about the problem.

Three Strategies for Making Decisions

Unilateral Decisions

One partner decides – little input needed or desired

One partner carries the authority and responsibility

When agreed upon, reduces conflict

Without consent, increases conflict

Equilateral Decisions

Both partners decide nothing is implemented until both agree

Takes more time to decide

More opportunity for conflict initially

Both buy into the decision

Less likely to have lingering conflict

51-49% Decision

One partner makes final decision

This partner has authority and responsibility

Decision made taking strongly into account what the other partner desires

Reduces potential conflict substantially and takes less time

Requires significant trust