

KEY STAGES IN EFFECTIVE NEGOTIATION WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

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GO TO THE BALCONY – Difficult people often try to force you to give in to their position through their anger, tricks, power plays, etc. Rather than empower their opponent by reacting in turn, effective negotiators detach and “buy time” to regain their balance, objectively assess the situation and figure out their best, strategic response. Effective negotiators “go to the balcony” by saying nothing, taking a time out or repeating back the previous discussion. They recognize that no one can “make” them angry, anxious, etc. except themselves and therefore focus on changing their responses rather than their opponents.

DISARM OPPONENT – Effective negotiators disarm their opponents by providing unpredictable responses, finding points of agreement or simply listening. When difficult people feel heard out and acknowledged, they often let down their guard and become more receptive to the point of view of others. The ability of effective negotiators to do the opposite of what their opponents expect helps them diffuse tension, win their opponents respect and control the negotiation process.

CHANGE THE GAME – Effective negotiators “change the game” by shifting their opponents from positional bargaining to problem-solving negotiation. For instance, they act “as if” their opponent is trying to find solutions which satisfy the interests of both parties by continually reframing the motives of their opponent and redirecting her/him back to the issues at hand. They also ask their opponent open ended questions such “what can we do get on the same side against the problem instead of battling each other?” or “how is your position fair?” Finally, they ask their opponent for advice to induce them to focus on solutions rather than positions.

MAKE IT EASY TO SAY YES – Effective negotiators provide their opponents with a “golden bridge” towards agreement by: 1) involving them in the problem-making process; 2) responding to any of their unmet interests; 3) allowing them to “save face” or; 4) moving slowly and deliberately. They have the patience and savvy to identify and help their opponents overcome any “hidden” resistance to an agreement.

MAKE IT HARD TO SAY NO – When all other strategies have failed, effective negotiators make it hard for their opponents to say no by: 1) discussing the potential consequences of not reaching an agreement; 2) walking away for the negotiating process (while leaving the door open for a possible return) or; 3) developing a strong BATNA (best alternative to a negotiated agreement). They focus on bringing their opponent to their senses rather than to their knees.

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