

# The Negotiator Journey to Perfection

## What is negotiation?

Negotiation is a process that happens whenever at least one person is trying to get another to do or not do something for him or her. We negotiate to increase value for ourselves which we could not achieve alone. Value can be time, money, reduced risk, a decision, recognition, status or credibility. Therefore, negotiation is:

- **Everywhere:** every communication between individuals and not just in formal settings.
- A **process:** neither a skill nor a talent, but that to be successful can benefit from both.
- **Relationship-based,** short- or long-term, within which the process takes place.
- A **choice,** not a given. Negotiators choose how to adapt to different situations to increase their likelihood of success. Each choice has potential risks and rewards.

Perfect negotiators explore all the facets of a negotiation. They negotiate value, but also process and relationship. They know their choices impact their success and thus choose negotiation moves based on their potential risks and rewards. So when negotiating for more money, they will ensure the other parties also succeed. Doing so reduces their resistance, thus increasing efficiency and their appreciation towards better relationships.

## Win-lose

The journey to becoming a perfect negotiator for most starts with a win-lose choice. A win-lose choice means choosing to use power to win in a negotiation. Interestingly, negotiators often choose to behave win-lose fearing that the other will do the same. This preemptive strategy has risks and rewards.

The fear that the other may use power against them has negotiators acting

preemptively to defend themselves. To avoid every risk of losing, win-lose negotiators constantly assume and prepare for worst case scenarios. As a result, win-lose negotiators become paranoid, which helps them not be naïve.

Not being naïve reduces the risk of losing, but at a cost. A win-lose strategy attempts to win by using power to unilaterally extract value to one negotiator. However, for it to work, the other negotiator has to lose. Since most everyone sees losing as a negative, they will resist it. The negotiation then becomes a competition and consumes resources that could otherwise be invested in a better deal.

Consequently, win-lose negotiators are never naïve. They are negative towards others and value creation. Win-lose is an early phase of the journey in which negotiators behave negatively, not naïvely.

## Lose-win

Some negotiators, surely not all, get frustrated with the negativity of win-lose. Tired of the power/resistance dynamic, these negotiators try to continue with their journey and move on to something better.

They seek more positive negotiations where they can collaborate with others and create more value. Unfortunately, win-win intentions without proper training have many of them mistakenly going down the lose-win road instead.

Lose-win negotiators forget that being positive is a means to value creation. The intention to treat others well can evolve into a false sense of security. And then, positive becomes nice. Contrary to win-lose paranoia, lose-win negotiators are naïve. They give unilateral concessions on hopes of improved relationships and spontaneous reciprocation. Also known as soft bargainers, lose-win negotiators are positive, but naïve.

## Win-win, the value negotiator

The poet Ali ibn Abi Talib summarizes: "Do

not be too hard, lest you be broken; do not be too soft, lest you be squeezed." Both win-lose or lose-win are but diversions in our journey.

To walk the path towards perfection is to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to advance. Win-win is a phase when value negotiators behave positively, not naïvely in a never-ending search for improvement through three strategic principles:

**1. Negotiate the relationship and the substance separately** – What separates a lose-win from a win-win negotiator is the ability, not the naïve hope, to translate intention into outcome. The ability lies in being positive about the relationship without risking profits.

Value negotiators improve the relationship through trust building moves, not by throwing money at it. Perfect negotiators improve substance by understanding interests, generating value creating options and claiming value based on objective arguments.

**2. Promote the dialogue pattern** – Again Ali ibn Abi Talib guides us: "To make one good action succeed another, is the perfection of goodness." The win-lose negotiator takes without giving. The lose-win negotiator gives without asking. Neither makes one good action succeed another.

The dialogue pattern reminds Value negotiators to be ready to offer something when asking for something and vice-versa. Value negotiators positively promote value creation and claiming exercises for the balanced goodness of all.

**3. Proactively diagnose** – There is a difference between not being naïve in the win-lose and win-win choices. Win-lose acts on worst case scenario assumptions and risks creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Win-win learns the real probability of worst case reactions to minimize its risk and be positive safely. While win-lose choice risks being over positive, win-win has positive value moves as imperative and risk as the moderator. 🇺🇸

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