

# Negotiating Skills 101

## What is negotiation?

Negotiation is a discussion to settle disputes and reach agreements between two or more sides. Negotiation is a “give and take” process resulting in a compromise where each side makes a concession for the benefit of everyone involved.

There are many situations where you may need to be a negotiator. You might be involved in negotiating a job offer, asking for a raise, rallying for a budget increase, buying or selling property or closing a sale with a customer. They all call for negotiating skills if you want to be successful.

### 1. Communication

Essential communication skills include identifying nonverbal cues and verbal skills to express yourself engagingly. Skilled negotiators can change their communication styles to meet the listener’s needs. By establishing clear communication, you can avoid misunderstandings that could prevent you from reaching a compromise.

### 2. Active listening

Active listening skills are also crucial for understanding another person’s opinion in negotiation. Unlike passive listening, which is hearing a speaker without retaining their message, active listening ensures you engage and later recall specific details without needing information repeated.

### 3. Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is the ability to control your emotions and recognize others’ feelings. Being conscious of the emotional dynamics during negotiation can help you stay calm and focused on the core issues. If you’re unsatisfied with the current negotiation, ask for a break so you and the other party can return with refreshed perspectives.

### 4. Expectation management

Just as you should enter a negotiation with a clear goal, the other side also likely has its own defined expectations. If you believe you might not be able to agree to each other’s terms, you could try adjusting your expectations. Skilled expectation management involves maintaining a balance between being a firm negotiator and a collaborative one.

### 5. Patience

Some negotiations can take a long time to complete, occasionally involving renegotiation and counteroffers. Rather than seeking a quick conclusion, negotiators often practice patience to properly assess a situation and reach the best decision for their clients.

### 6. Adaptability

Adaptability is vital for successful negotiation. Each negotiation is unique, and the situation may change from one day to the next. For example, an involved party may change their demands abruptly. While it’s challenging to plan for every possible situation, a good negotiator can adapt quickly and determine a new plan if needed.

## **7. Persuasion**

The ability to influence others is an important negotiation skill. It can help you define why your proposed solution benefits all parties and encourage others to support your point of view. In addition to being persuasive, negotiators should be assertive when necessary. Assertiveness allows you to express your opinions while respecting the other side's perspectives.

## **8. Planning**

Negotiation requires planning to help you determine what you want and how the terms will be fulfilled. You should consider the best possible outcome, your least acceptable offer and what you will do if an agreement isn't reached. Preparing, planning and thinking ahead is crucial to a successful negotiation. The best negotiators enter a discussion with at least one backup plan, but often more. Consider all possible outcomes, and be prepared for each of these scenarios. This is the "best alternative to a negotiated agreement" (BATNA) for negotiators.

## **9. Integrity**

Integrity, or having strong ethical and moral principles, is an essential skill for negotiations. Being thoughtful, respectful and honest allows the other side to trust what you say. As a negotiator, you should be able to follow through on commitments. To demonstrate trustworthiness, avoid over-promising.

## **10. Rapport building**

The ability to build rapport lets you establish relationships with others where both sides feel supported and understood. Building a rapport requires communicating your goals and understanding the other side's wants and needs. Rapport helps ease tensions, promotes collaboration and increases the likelihood of reaching an agreement. To build rapport, showing respect and using active listening skills are critical.

## **11. Problem-solving**

Negotiation requires problem-solving to see the problem and find a solution. If a price is too high, how can it be lowered? If a resource is in short supply, what can be done to increase it? Finding unique solutions to problems may be the determining factor in compromise.

## **12. Decision-making**

Good negotiators can act decisively during a negotiation. It may be necessary to agree to a compromise during a bargaining arrangement. You need to be able to react decisively. Keep in mind that your decisions may have lasting effects on yourself or your company. It is important to think through your options carefully without overthinking your decision. Going back and forth between your options without a clear answer might bring unnecessary stress.

## ***Tips For Successful Negotiations***

Consider these tips to help you prepare for negotiation talks:

### **1. Do your research**

Before entering into negotiation talks, evaluate all sides and consider their goals. It can also be helpful to research the person you are negotiating with. Understand the limitations of the negotiator. Do they have the ability to give you what you want? Understanding these limitations can help you strategize.

### **2. Know your priorities**

Negotiations often require each side to compromise. Determine what is most important and what you are willing to settle for in its place. Setting your priorities ahead of time can help you evaluate what you refuse to give up and where you're willing to budge. If you are the negotiator, be clear about what both sides offer and what they need from each other.

### **3. Consider the opposition**

Consider the potential opposition to your negotiations. Do you think your manager will object to a pay increase because of declining sales? Will you be denied a higher starting salary for a position because your requested rate is above the average range? Write down all the potential oppositions and then gather the information you can use to argue your case.

### **4. Keep communications open**

Be consistent about presenting your goals, objectives and expectations to reduce the risk of confusion. Use effective communication skills, including verbal responses and nonverbal cues. Strive for mutually beneficial solutions, but be prepared to compromise.

If you are the negotiator, ensure there are guidelines for the discussion and that both sides stick to them. Get agreements in writing.

### **5. Know when to walk away**

One of the hardest parts of negotiation is knowing when to walk away. It is important to enter all negotiations recognizing that you may not be able to agree. Once you realize no further compromises can be made and terms can't be reached, it's probably time to discontinue talks.

### **6. Keep your timeline in mind**

A timeline can significantly impact your position of power in the negotiation. If one or both sides are rushing to reach a decision, one may give up too much and regret their actions. For example, if you're trying to get a new job quickly, you may take a position with lower pay or compromise too much on benefits. In this case, you may find yourself unsatisfied with your decision long-term.