



Success at work happens one negotiation at a time

Here's a bold claim: Every conversation in the workplace that's not about the weather or sports is a negotiation. From simple process changes to the significant issues of strategy and structure, the dialog that promotes workplace progress is a form of soft negotiation.

Think about it.

How many times were you involved in situations recently where someone (maybe you) needed something to move forward? The something might be a bigger budget, access to resources, a change in procedure, or a minor or significant schedule adjustment. In the era when group lunches were an option, even those were negotiations of sorts.

While it's nice to think strategy work, project prioritization and other critical direction decisions occur in sessions where sage individuals debate and arrive at the organization's best conclusion, free from negotiation and compromise, don't kid yourself. Those settings are master classes in trade-offs and negotiations.

Organizations, leaders and teams march forward via a never-ending series of soft negotiations. And individuals succeed or fail based on their ability to master those negotiations and garner support from those who control the resources.

Reframing workplace negotiation

While your training might encourage you to strive to gain the bigger piece of the pie in every negotiation situation, that's a short-sighted approach in the workplace. I advocate finesse over force and prefer striving to enlarge the pie's size for everyone involved in my workplace negotiations.

It's about how you engage with others who have what you need

Much of cultivating influence and garnering support is about how you engage and communicate with others. Regardless of whether you are a leader or contributor, your ability to persuade others is one skill more valuable than many others.

An approach that emphasizes a form of positive persuasion -- never manipulation -- offers your best opportunity to garner support for the issues and initiatives that matter to you. The intent is to create value for all parties, not trick people into doing something that's not in their or the organization's best interests. However, it helps if you leverage human psychology a bit along the way.

For the individual aspiring to maximize their impact, it pays to have a few operating principles as tools to bring to workplace negotiations. Here are seven tools to help you in your daily pursuits.

7 principles of positive persuasion for the workplace

1. Reciprocity is the gold standard for gaining support

According to Robert Cialdini and others who research [influence and persuasion](#), the concept of reciprocity is present in every culture on the planet. Effectively, people recognize if they owe you and are typically anxious to clear that debt. Your work in the organization to help others before you need help will pave the way to gaining support when you need it. And, it never hurts when others view you as someone who helps them get things done.

2. Always uncover and emphasize shared interests

If you step back and look at the situations where you struggled to gain the support of a colleague for something new or different, chances are, you were arguing over positions. These "I want" discussions tend to grind down into disagreements. Instead, focus on identifying the bigger picture interests in play and then design approaches to meet those interests. It's a subtle but powerful change in strategy.

3. Resist arguing: It only strengthens resistance

As tempting as it is to argue with a colleague who fails to see your request or idea's importance and logic, it's counterproductive. Others perceive your confrontational approach as a threat and respond either by fighting back or shifting to defend mode. Nothing good happens in those moments. Instead of arguing, it's time to put the seven principles listed here to work.

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4. Recognize that data and logic don't sway -- emotions win the day

If someone is fearful of change, worried about risks or under the impression a failed approach will come back to bite them, even your airtight business case backed with unimpeachable data will fail to move them. Alternatively, if someone perceives a situation is particularly favorable for their security or success, they're apt to offer support.

Skilled internal negotiators do most of their selling ahead of meetings. Creating data-backed rationale is important, but understanding how others see the idea and then working to gain their help is where support is garnered.

5. Empathy is a superpower that helps break down resistance

The individuals you view as gatekeepers, blockers, resisters and barriers to progress often have one thing in common: They don't feel respected. Instead of attacking them as if they were adversaries, try seeing the world through their eyes.

Perhaps these individuals you perceive as throwing up roadblocks have been burned by change initiatives before. Or, maybe they're on the receiving end of frequent attempts to compromise the rules. And in many instances, their reluctance to support your grand idea might center on their concern it will impair their ability to do their job at a high-quality level.

Strive to understand their circumstances. Show respect for them, their team and the work. Use the tools here, and importantly, give them control over anything about your idea that impacts their domain.

6. Reframe situations to emphasize mutual gains

The culture in many organizations wires people to focus on the negatives when it comes to proposed changes or new initiatives. They reactively think: "What if it fails and I'm fired?" Instead, strive to reframe situations identifying what the world will be like when the initiative succeeds. Get them involved in imagining this future and then ask for their help to get there.

7. Giving away control is your most powerful tool for gaining support

I worked with a manager who was a master at ceding control to gain support for her initiatives. She understood the need individuals have to feel in control and made sure to let them decide how they absorbed change. When I asked about her approach, she admitted that many opted to do things differently than she might have, but she didn't care as long as they supported her initiatives.

Your focus on the bigger picture issue of your idea or proposal is important. Resist the urge to micromanage how others bring the idea to life, and learn to let them have the fun of creating and designing solutions for areas that impact their area of responsibility. Once they're invested in helping you, there's always an opportunity to smooth the rough edges together.

The bottom line for gaining support

Aside from owing you a significant reciprocity debt, few individuals are apt to move from hearing your idea for the first time to embracing and supporting it. People process the implications of the proposed approach, and they preoccupy with all of the risks, headaches, and inconveniences posed by doing something different.

Respect an individual's need to move closer to an agreement in stages. Your challenge is to apply the tools outlined above in the right combination for the situation. Once you establish a reputation for sowing success and creating value for individuals, teams, and the organization, you'll find the road to "yes" grows a bit easier to travel.

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