



Negotiation Strategies

# 5 Reasons Good Deals Get Rejected

Offering something reasonable isn't enough. **by Deepak Malhotra**

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**It's one thing to lose a deal** because you were playing hardball. It's an entirely different — and more frustrating — situation when the other side is rejecting even your reasonable offers. When genuine attempts at negotiating in good faith are failing, you need a new approach — but it doesn't mean you have to get aggressive. The key to success is understanding *why* people will sometimes reject even fair or generous offers.

## **You didn't justify it**

It's not enough that you tell them *what* you want; you have to explain to them *why* it is a legitimate request. No matter how reasonable your proposal may seem to you, if you fail to justify it, there is a good chance it will be ignored or rejected. I always remind my students and clients: Don't let your offer speak for itself; tell the story that goes with it. If you want an exclusive negotiating period, why is that appropriate in this case? If you need more time to consider an offer, why should they agree to change the deadline?

## **You didn't help them sell it internally**

The person on the other side of the table might agree that your offer is reasonable, but they will still reject it if they can't sell it to others in their organization. You might deserve a higher salary, but how will they explain this exception to others who are not getting one? Your job is not simply to convince the person you're negotiating with, but to help them be an effective ambassador for you when they are speaking to their boss,

their board, their partners, or others who have a say in what happens. Keep an eye on all of the people who can influence the negotiation on their side, and help craft a narrative that will allow them to get the buy-in they need.

### **You didn't respect their constraints**

They agree that your demands are reasonable. They can convince everyone on their side that you deserve it. But the answer is still no. Why? Sometimes the problem is that their hands are truly tied on key issues. They would be willing to give you more time to make a decision, but they are facing their own hard deadline. They would be willing to give you more money up front to seal the deal, but they have budget constraints. The key is flexibility: If you give the other side more than one way of improving the offer, it is possible that they will be able to find a way to do it. This is why I remind my students and clients: the more currencies you allow someone to pay you in, the more likely you are to get paid.

### **You didn't help them save face**

People will often reject even fair and generous offers if accepting them will make them look bad. If the other side has promised their audience (e.g., a boss, the media, their constituents) that they will be able to get a great outcome, and now the best they can deliver is considerably less, they might walk away from the deal even though doing so is costly. The key is to never force people to choose between making smart decisions and saving face. For example, even a symbolic concession on your part that gives them something they would not have otherwise expected can help them declare victory to their side — or at least help them show that all sides had to give in.

### **You didn't offer closure**

Why should they agree to one of your requests if this will just embolden you to make more? Why improve their offer if you will just shop it around to get other competitive offers? One concern people can have is

that even agreeing to your demands will not seal the deal — and this can make them unwilling to expend the time and political capital to make the changes or improvements you are proposing. If it is genuinely the case, it can help you to let them know that “this gets the deal done.” Or, if you still need time, you might be able to at least assuage some concerns by letting them know that “we would accept that as your final offer.” The thing to remember is that you don’t always need to make a substantive concession in exchange for the concession you are asking. If they are worried that you are still shopping around, or that you will continue to pick apart the deal, even an assurance of closure can be traded for substantive concessions.

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