



Managing Conflicts

Become a Better, Stronger, and More Confident Negotiator

by Michelle Gibbings

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Summary. Negotiating with someone more powerful than you — your boss, a recruiter, or even at times a parent — can feel intimidating, especially when you're just starting to think about what you want to do with your life. The reason it feels so is because of what's at... [more](#)



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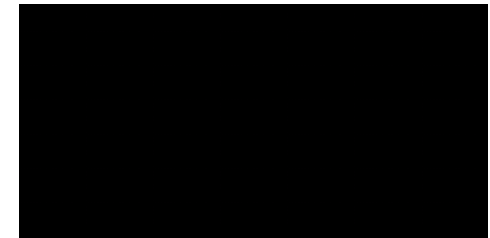
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You're already good at negotiating. You practice it every day, both at home and at school or work — whether it's figuring out with your teammate who will write that upcoming report or discussing with your roommates who is cooking dinner tonight. You even negotiate with yourself when you ask questions like, should I eat that bag of chips or grab a salad because it's healthier?

But the thought of negotiating with someone more powerful than you — your boss, a recruiter, or even at times a parent — can still feel intimidating, especially when you're just starting to figure out what you want to do with your life, or just beginning to make your way in the working world.

The difference between the smaller, day-to-day negotiations and the more serious ones you'll have with people in positions of power — such as a hiring manager when you're negotiating the salary for your first job — is what's at stake. The outcomes of the former tend to have fewer consequences, and also fewer rewards (sometimes to a significant degree).



All this to say, being strong, smart, and confident at negotiating is critical to reaching your goals in any field. Those who don't practice and hone this skill may find it harder than necessary to get things done — or worse, end up agreeing to do things they don't really want to do, such as saying yes to unrealistic deadlines or accepting underpaid job offers.

Like many things in life, the more you practice the better you'll become. To get better at negotiating, apply these five core principles.

Focus on the outcome you want.

Negotiating is mentally taxing. During these conversations, your mind will be pushed and pulled in many directions. When you're negotiating, not only are you focusing on what you want to say next (should I accentuate my point or pull back?), but you're also paying close attention to what the other party is saying so you can skillfully and calmly respond — no matter what comes your way. You can prepare for this by entering into the conversation with the right mindset.

Adam Galinsky, a professor at Columbia University, [found](#) that the way you mentally frame a negotiation can impact its outcome. Are you focused on what you stand to gain or lose? When people perceive the end goal of the negotiation as an opportunity to advance or achieve something, it helps them get more comfortable with the risks beforehand — what could go wrong or the things they may not achieve. The research found that negotiators who go in with this mindset often end up gaining more. They tend to put forward bolder offers at the start of the negotiation, ultimately leading them to achieve superior outcomes. In contrast, people who go in with a more negative mindset and perceive the negotiation as a risk, or an opportunity to lose, are much more conservative in their asks and end up with less advantageous outcomes.

Before you go into the negotiation think about the gains you can secure from the conversation. When you put your offer on the table don't be afraid to be specific and bold. Ask for more than what feels comfortable. You can always negotiate down from your starting position, but you can rarely — if ever — negotiate up from a low starting base.

Prepare and practice.

If this is your first real negotiation, it's natural to feel nervous and anxious ahead of time. Preparing ahead of time can help calm your nerves. As a best practice, do your homework beforehand. This means considering any roadblocks that may come up, and studying the subject matter in detail. You will need data to back up your points and make the best case for your ask.

Most importantly, know how your proposal — that is, what you want — could be of value to the other person. People will be more likely to agree to a solution that benefits them, as well as you.

As you prepare, consider:

- How do I think the negotiation process will unfold?
- What might the other person say?
- How might they react and respond when I ask for what I want?
- What may be the likely objections?
- How will I respond to those objections?

It helps to work these questions through in advance. Do do some dry runs with a friend or mentor to help you rehearse. Ask them to play devil's advocate to challenge and test your argument.

These conversations will help you figure out what you want to say in your actual negotiation. Write it down. When you are nervous you are more likely to forget what you want to say. So spend time memorizing the critical points you want to make ahead of time and you'll be ready to respond when (and if) conflicts arise.

Practicing in front of a mirror, and saying your points with courage and conviction, is another great way to build confidence. This may feel unnatural and overly rehearsed at first. However, it will begin to feel more natural with time, and will help you get comfortable with what you want to say.

Pick your timing.

Seizing the right moment to negotiate is critical to the outcome. Pick a time when your boss, or whomever you are negotiating with, will be the most open to hearing your case. You don't want to approach them when they are busy or have just come out of a stressful meeting. If you've just landed a big win at work, you've already got your boss' attention in a positive way, and that could be a great time to make the ask.

Remember also that if you're feeling anxious or tired, it's not the right time to negotiate. We know anxiety is a natural emotion during negotiations — particularly when the topic is salary — and it impacts your ability to be effective. In a simulated experiment, [researchers](#) found that people who were anxious made weaker first offers, responded more quickly (and less thoughtfully) to each move the counterpart made, and were more likely to exit negotiations early. They ultimately made deals that were 12% less financially advantageous.

If during the conversation, you still find your mind racing, focus on breathing, and breathing deeply. Pausing and breathing will provide

time for your heart rate to slow down, making it easier to reflect and respond calmly.

Approach it like a conversation.

When you have conversations with your friends, it's probably not just one person doing all the talking. You hear them out and try and understand their side of the story, too. Approach your negotiations in the same way. Once you've put forth what you're looking for, give the other person a chance to explain what they have in mind. Maybe they have a perspective you didn't think of but you stand to gain from it? The more you try to understand their side of the story, the more insights you'll have into how to successfully make your case and find common ground.

Don't go in with the perspective "I'm right. They're wrong." [Research](#) reveals that the more you can "get inside their head" and understand their perspective, the better placed you will be to meet in the middle.

Make the ask.

It's great to have your list of "wants," but you won't get very far if you don't ask for them.

A few months down the line, you don't want to be thinking, "What would it look like if I had the courage to ask for what I needed?" Don't let nerves stop you from putting your case forward, even if you're just starting out and have little experience. This is your opportunity, so embrace it.

When you make your ask, use the data you collected to back your points — whether it's the going salaries for people with your experience or

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details on how your proposal will improve the organization's profitability. Your aim is to back up your claim.

You need to be able to explain that what you are asking for is fair and reasonable, and how it is in the other person's interests too. If you're negotiating some time off with your manager, for instance, you could say, "Given all key projects have been handed over and there are no upcoming deadlines, I think this could be a good time to use up some of my accrued leave. I'll come back reenergized and ready to kick off the next project."

Negotiating is both a mixture of art and psychology. And it's not easy. Nailing it requires practice. Before your next one, take some time to prepare, and use these practices to help you stay calm and confident during the conversation. The importance of negotiating to get what you want — a good salary, a raise, a larger team, a new business tool — cannot be overestimated. Now's the time to step up and put your needs out there.

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Michelle Gibbings is bringing back the happy to workplace culture. The author of three books and a global keynote speaker, she's on a mission to help leaders, teams and organizations create successful workplaces where people thrive and progress is accelerated.



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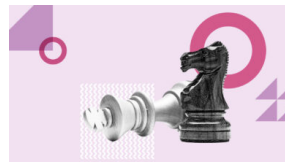
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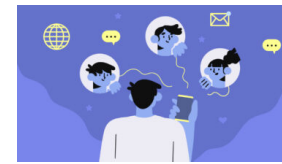
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