**5 Common Negotiation Mistakes and How You Can Avoid Them**

**We are all prone to making the same negotiation mistakes. Fortunately, through awareness, preparation, and practice, we can begin to overcome our negotiation mistakes and reach better deals.**

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Sometimes our negotiation mistakes are glaring: We accidentally reveal our bottom line, criticize the other party when patience was warranted, or get our numbers mixed up. More often, though, our negotiation mistakes are invisible: We get a perfectly good deal, but are unaware that we could have gotten a better one if we hadn’t succumbed to common errors and traps. By studying these 5 common negotiation mistakes and how you can avoid them, you can set yourself up for even better outcomes:

**1. We Fail to Thoroughly Prepare to Negotiate.**

The top negotiation mistake business negotiators make is to rush into negotiation without thoroughly preparing. You may think you’ve prepared thoroughly if you have strong opinions about what you want to get out of the deal, but that’s far from sufficient. Wise negotiators understand the importance of taking ample time to analyze several aspects of negotiation carefully. Start by thinking about your *best alternative to a negotiated agreement*, or BATNA, a term coined by Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton in their book *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*. Your BATNA is the best course of action available to you if you can’t reach agreement in your negotiation. It is also important to calculate your *reservation value*, or your walkaway point, and to try to estimate the other party’s BATNA. All of these calculations will help you make more rational decisions.

**2. We Focus On Competing Rather than Collaborating.**

Fearful of being taken advantage of, novice negotiators (and even some experienced ones) make ambitious, even unreasonable demands and resort to threats and other coercive tactics to try to get their way. For a more [effective negotiation](https://www.pon.harvard.edu/tag/effective-negotiation/), focus on creating *and* claiming value. When you take time to build rapport and trust, both sides will feel more comfortable sharing their underlying interests in the negotiation. This knowledge will allow you to identify potential tradeoffs: if there’s an issue you don’t feel strongly about, you might be willing to concede in exchange for a concession on an issue you value greatly. Smart negotiators recognize they’ll get more by looking for win-win solutions.

**3. We Fall Back on Cognitive Shortcuts.**

In negotiation, we all rely on cognitive shortcuts, particularly when we’re unprepared and short on time, psychologists have found. We tend to be overconfident of our odds of getting our way, for instance. And we pay more attention to vivid information (such as salary in a job negotiation) than to less flashy information (such as the length of our commute) that might have a bigger impact on our satisfaction. Deepak Malhotra and Max H. Bazerman’s book *Negotiation Genius: How to Overcome Obstacles and Achieve Brilliant Results at the Bargaining Table and Beyond* describes these common negotiation mistakes. We can improve our [negotiation skills](https://www.pon.harvard.edu/freemium/negotiation-skills-negotiation-strategies-and-negotiation-techniques-to-help-you-become-a-better-negotiator/) and reduce the pernicious effects of these biases by preparing thoroughly and taking ample time to negotiate.

**4. We Let Our Emotions Get the Best of Us.**

In addition to cognitive biases, negotiators are susceptible to emotional biases that can prevent them from doing their best. Of course, our emotions and those of our counterparts can provide us with valuable information about how the negotiation is going. But strong emotions can also keep us from making rational decisions—and lead to negotiation mistakes. Negotiators often don’t understand how emotions affect negotiations. Anger can lead us to make overly risky choices, for example. And sadness can lead us to overpay in [negotiation,](https://www.pon.harvard.edu/daily/win-win-daily/5-win-win-negotiation-strategies/) Harvard Kennedy School professor Jennifer Lerner has found. When negotiations get heated, try taking a break to let everyone cool down. When you regroup, talk about what happened, giving everyone time to air their concerns.

**5. We Take Ethical Shortcuts.**

We tend to assume that only truly ruthless people behave unethically in negotiation. In fact, research by Harvard Business School professor Francesca Gino and others shows that most people are willing to cheat now and then in negotiation and other realms when they have a financial incentive to do so and believe they won’t be caught. We find ways to justify such behavior, whether by telling ourselves that the other party won’t feel the loss or by denying that we’ve done anything wrong. It’s important for all of us to stay attuned to ethical pitfalls in negotiation and avoid letting ourselves off the hook for even seemingly minor infractions that go against our moral code.