**BATNA Strategy: Should You Reveal Your BATNA?**

**Six ways to manage your BATNA strategy and get what you really want.**

In their best-selling book *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton (Penguin, 1991) introduced the concept of having a *BATNA strategy (best alternative to a negotiated agreement)* as “the standard against which any proposed agreement should be measured.” When you know what you’ll do if you don’t reach a deal, you can compare that possibility to whatever deal is on the table.

The better your [BATNA](https://www.pon.harvard.edu/daily/batna/translate-your-batna-to-the-current-deal/), the greater your bargaining power, note Fisher, Ury, and Patton. If you’re already excited about one strong job offer, you can bargain hard in negotiations for another job without worrying about what will happen if the employer won’t meet your needs. Awareness of your BATNA will keep you from accepting a worse outcome than you could get elsewhere—and, conversely, from rejecting an agreement that’s better than your BATNA.

Negotiators often wonder whether they should reveal their BATNA to their counterpart and, if so, when. The following six do’s and don’ts will help you manage information about your BATNA with confidence.

**1. Don’t reveal a weak BATNA.**

It’s Negotiation 101: Never share your BATNA with the other party if it is hopelessly weak. A bad BATNA is also known as a [WATNA](https://www.pon.harvard.edu/glossary/watna/), or *worst alternative to a negotiated agreement*. Telling a supplier, for example, that you dumped your last partner and are desperate to do a new deal is a surefire way to ensure the supplier will highball you on price and resist compromising. You will also want to be careful to avoid appearing to be in a hurry, seeming stressed, or revealing that you have a wide-open schedule—all potential “tells” that you don’t have much else going on and may be ready to close a deal on your counterpart’s terms.

**2. Don’t bluff about your BATNA.**

What if the other side asks you about your BATNA directly? Explain (truthfully) that you are working on various possibilities but want to concentrate on the deal on the table for the time being. Resist the urge to embellish or fabricate a BATNA to try to boost your bargaining power. You’ll sacrifice not only your ethics but perhaps also your reputation if you’re caught in an exaggeration, misrepresentation of facts, or lie.

What if you feel you need to reveal your BATNA to keep outside parties informed, or for some other reason? In such cases, frame your BATNA as positively as you honestly can and avoid getting into the details, but be prepared for it to face scrutiny.

**3. Don’t reveal your BATNA too early.**

When you open up about a great BATNA to your counterpart early in the game, the information could come across as a threat: “If you can’t give me an even better deal than the one I just outlined, I’m out of here.” [Threats in negotiation](https://www.pon.harvard.edu/daily/negotiation-skills-daily/how-to-make-wise-threats/) foster a competitive atmosphere and hinder your ability to explore tradeoffs that could create value.

Moreover, if the other party doesn’t think your BATNA is as strong as you do, she might drive a harder bargain than she would if she didn’t know about your best alternative. The other party might even try to worsen your BATNA. For example, if you tell a potential employer about a great offer you have that’s due to expire in 24 hours, the employer might try to drag out talks to allow the deadline to pass.

Even if you’re certain your BATNA strategy is rock solid, hold off on revealing it. It could prove to be a useful bargaining chip during the final stages of a negotiation after you’ve exhausted all other strategies.

**4. Do work to actively improve your BATNA.**

It’s not enough to simply talk about your BATNA. Rather, you need to do everything you can to try to improve it. For a job seeker, that might mean continuing to seek leads in your network or thinking about other paths, such as going back to school.

**5. Don’t let them talk you out of your BATNA.**

Suppose you’re thrilled with your BATNA strategy and are eager to play it up: “I’ve got a great deal waiting for me at the Subaru dealership down the street, but I wanted to see what Honda had to offer first.” Don’t be surprised if your counterpart starts telling you about the unreliable Subaru he had 10 years ago and how he’d never buy one again.

When a counterpart disparages your BATNA, he is obviously hoping to taint it in your eyes. Don’t fall for this tired, old ploy. Of course, it’s smart to investigate any potentially legitimate claims the person makes about your BATNA, but recognize that he has very real incentives to convince you that your outside options are not as good as you’d like to believe.

**6. Do encourage them to share their BATNA.**

Negotiators are sometimes reluctant to ask counterparts about their BATNA for fear of discovering that it’s impossible to compete with. In fact, this would be knowledge to seek out rather than to shy away from. If there’s no way you can give your counterpart what they can get from someone else, you would save everyone’s valuable time by revealing this fact and ending the negotiation. On the flip side, your queries about your counterpart’s BATNA could reveal that they have a terrible one—valuable information that will immediately put you in a stronger [bargaining position](https://www.pon.harvard.edu/freemium/batna-basics-boost-your-power-at-the-bargaining-table/).