

BY HAL LANCASTER

You Have to Negotiate For Everything in Life, So Get Good at It

LIFE IS a negotiation. "We pretty much negotiate all day every day," says Frank L. Acuff, who trains people in negotiating tactics and who wrote the book "How to Negotiate Anything with Anyone, Anywhere Around the Globe."

"It's asking the boss for a raise, getting six people to help us on this project from the information systems group," he says.

For Susan Pravda, "negotiations start in the morning when I have to get my five-year-old to brush her teeth," says the co-managing partner of the Boston law office of Epstein, Becker & Green, and a negotiator of mergers and financings.

Moreover, it isn't just professional negotiators who negotiate. The 24 participants at a negotiation seminar led by Mr. Acuff in Toronto last week included managers from sales, materials, information systems and human resources. Negotiating skills have become especially critical with the growth of teams, where there is no clear authority. "You have to influence and negotiate," he says.

So, it would seem, everyone could benefit from sprucing up their negotiating skills. But, experts say, that doesn't mean a quick course in staring down implacable foes, daring bluffs or advanced table pounding. It does mean meticulous preparation, understanding both sides' needs and an ability to build rapport and trust.

What kind of negotiation is it, asks Peter J. Pestillo, executive vice president of corporate relations for Ford Motor and one of the auto industry's leading labor negotiators. If it's a one-time-only event, you can concentrate on the result, he says. But if there's an ongoing relationship involved, "victory is making both sides feel satisfied," he says. "Take only what you need and don't try to make anybody look bad."

MS. PRAVDA stresses putting the other side at ease. While some experts say you should make the other side come to your home ground, Ms. Pravda prefers going to theirs, "because they're more comfortable and I learn a lot more about them," she says. "If you want something from someone, it's easier when they're comfortable."

She tries to find out everything she can about the other side. In merger talks, for example, she focuses on the owner, asking why he is selling and whether there are children or a spouse pushing him. Then she studies his advisers and how influential they are.

Schmoozing is an important part of preparation, she says. "Don't walk in and start going through your list," she says. "If they have a baby picture on the desk, it doesn't hurt to say, 'Oh, is that a new grandchild?' People like to talk about themselves. It can segue into what you're trying to achieve."

Mr. Pestillo, known for his golf dates with union negotiators, is a master of schmoozing. "If you know someone, you know some things that might be more important to him than to you," he says.

The toughest part of negotiating, Ms. Pravda says, is listening—really listening—to the other side. "Most people who negotiate like to talk," she explains, but if you understand their problem, you can craft a creative solution. "It doesn't hurt to say, 'I hear your problem; I don't know yet how to get there, but let me think about it,'" she says. "You become part of their team trying to solve their problem."

In career-related negotiations, she suggests anticipating concerns and lining up allies before making



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your pitch. In one case, she relates, an inexperienced associate seeking a new assignment lined up a senior associate to supervise him before making the request. "So he'd already taken care of my concerns," she says. In job-related negotiations, also, you must explain not only why the request is good for you, but for the company, she says.

MR. ACUFF recommends the tried and true technique of asking for more than what you want, but to always keep it reasonable. "We want to shape the perception of the other side," he says. "The only rule associated with having high aspirations is that it has to be logical, it has to make sense."

Lewis Kravitz, an Atlanta executive coach and former outplacement counselor, counsels patience and knowing when not to speak. He tells of a young man he coached who had just been sacked and said he was willing to take a \$2,000 pay cut to \$28,000 on his next job. But Mr. Kravitz coached him to let the prospective employer make the first move. In this case, the interviewer offered \$32,000, stunning the overjoyed job-seeker into momentary silence, which the interviewer interpreted as dissatisfaction. So he upped the offer to \$34,000. "In negotiating, he who speaks first generally comes out on the short end of the stick," he says.

Victoria Ruttenberg, a Washington, D.C., lawyer and mediator who now advises professionals and executives on career issues, recommends playing the other side's role in practice sessions. "Not just what position they're going to come up with, but why," she says. "And not just the business reason why, but what else is driving them."

Ms. Ruttenberg also suggests frequently restating the opposite side's positions during talks. "If they understand you're hearing what they're saying, it reduces stress levels," she says.

Also, Mr. Kravitz advises, hang on to those items you've decided you can give up until critical junctures of the talks. If you surrender something important too early, he says, it makes you look like a patsy and makes the other side greedy.