

Negotiating Past an Impasse

You consider yourself a reasonable negotiator — except when you really need something the other side has and they are not giving in. How do you continue negotiating when your counterpart is stonewalling you?

IN EVERY NEGOTIATION, YOUR BEST TOOL IS KNOWLEDGE: about the facts, issues, the other side's interests, and what your options are if you encounter problems. You also need to keep uppermost in mind that you and your "opponent"

have the same interests: to have a great meeting, generate revenue, create repeat business opportunities, and make the entire process enjoyable and easy for everyone. With common interests and two willing partners, most problems can be overcome.

However, if you do get to the point in negotiations where the other side is stonewalling you — say you have been negotiating 10 items and have a sticking point on two of them — you still have several options:

1. Table these points until later when you have had time to recollect your thoughts and move past your feelings of being pushed.

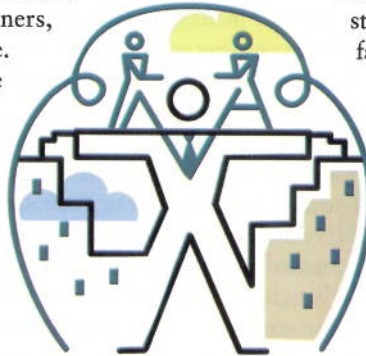
2. Point out that you have both agreed and compromised on the other eight items to make it work. Convince the other side to agree not to let the negotiation peter out with these last two items, thereby converting your opponent into a partner.

3. Do not point out that you have done all the compromising on the other eight items, as that does not let them save face nor does it make a compelling argument for them to concede on the last two issues. However, you can gently indicate where you had prior obstacles and were able to make it work.

4. Break the issues into smaller, more manageable parts. Sometimes there are several issues in one problem. If you can break it down and get to the small "yeses," you may make headway.

5. Listen. Ask thoughtful questions as to why there is an issue; then actually listen to the answer. Explore if there are commonalities. Ask the other side to brainstorm. Bring in other experts if you think it won't insult your counterpart.

6. Remember to "separate the people from the problem." Keep the focus on the problem and do not get into a blame game. If your negotiating partner is starting to get personal, steer him/her back to the issues and facts of the problem.



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There's a difference between dealing with someone who is being difficult on an issue and dealing with someone who is a difficult individual. If you find that your negotiating partner is just being obstinate, you have a greater challenge to overcome — one that requires that you first make a mental shift.

You need to stay within your position of power mentally and be flexible. Detach yourself from the outcome and be aware of your hot buttons before you sit at the table. You never want to be in the position of making important decisions while you are in the middle of a bad negotiation.

In next month's column, we will discuss more than a dozen ways to successfully negotiate with a difficult person. ■

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