

## 13 Ways to Negotiate With a Difficult Person

Avoid getting frustrated and emotional when dealing with a difficult person, or you won't make any progress. You may not like the person or their behavior, but you still have to get through the negotiation.

**T**HERE'S A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TOUGH NEGOTIATION and a counterpart who is deliberately adversarial. Remember the following to help diffuse the situation.

\* **1. Don't take their behavior personally.** It is usually never about you. Their bad behavior has to do with them; you just happen to be in the way at the moment.

**2. Don't fight back or try to win.** In the end, difficult people need to save face. Their self-identity is tied into winning.

**3. You can't appease them.** Takers will always take.

**4. Exercise the greatest power you have as a negotiator:** the power to change the game. You can't change them. The only person you are in control of is you. Change your attitude and your response to their behavior.

**5. Let them vent.** Don't vent back. Let them explain themselves without jumping in. Use the power of acknowledgment. Nod your head (nodding does not mean you agree, it just means you have heard what they said). Use positive gestures. Disarm and deflect the other side with kindness. Use silence to your advantage: It makes the other side wonder what you are thinking. Remain steadfast and assertive in expressing your goals and interests. Once the other side sees you are listening and understand their plight, they may be more willing to work with you.

**6. Neutralize threats, lies, and insults.** Say, "I feel as though you are bulldozing me into a corner;" or "You seem upset," or "I feel that you are playing good cop/bad cop." Use "I" messages, not accusations.

**7. Reframe what they say into neutral language.** They say, "If you don't like the room rental, find another location." You rephrase: "I understand the hotel needs a certain amount of revenue

to make this meeting fit into your goals; let's come up with another way to satisfy both our needs." (Offer a shorter setup time and indicate that they can sell space to another group for a meal function.)

**8. If you are being given the silent treatment,** get them to answer questions that do not include a "yes" or "no" response. "I feel that we need more conversation to resolve the issues, please let me know ... (your thoughts, feelings)." Draw them out into a safe environment and listen.

**9. Be prepared,** remain professional, and use industry resources, such as *Professional Meeting Management, Fifth Edition (PMMS)*, to back up your points. It is hard to argue the same facts from several sources.

**10. Create a safe environment;** be up-front about your interests; do not make surprise attacks or deadlines; be trustworthy; go at their pace.

**11. Create specific and measurable goals** as you reach each phase of the negotiation. Focus on shared viewpoints as a way of building common ground.

**12. Strengthen interpersonal relationships.** Non-intrusive small talk may lead to common outside interests. Try to find a real person under the "bad behavior."

**13. If the negotiation is really awful** and nothing seems to work, see if you can change the venue for your discussions. If that does not work, as a last resort, try to get another person to replace the bad apple. Take a non-confrontational approach, such as, "It seems we are getting stuck a lot on the issues. Maybe we can get another perspective." ■

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