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Take It Or Leave It: The *Only* Guide to Negotiating You Will Ever Need

If you want to be a better negotiator, you can buy 24 books, take 12 courses, and attend 7 seminars -- or, you can *read this article*.

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On the 147th page of *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, at the start of the "In Conclusion" section, the following sentence appears: "There is probably nothing in this book which you did not already know at some level of your experience." This burst of candor may strike the reader as disarming or annoying, but either way, by the standards of the countless books that offer business or self-help advice, it's startling: The whole premise of such titles is that you know very little, and whatever you think you know is dead wrong. Otherwise, why would you buy the book (or its inevitable sequel)?

Volumes specifically devoted to negotiating form a growing subset of the sprawling advice category, with literally dozens of examples ranging from the memoirs of celebrated negotiators to academic explorations thick with charts and graphs. Self-styled gurus like Roger Dawson also sell audio and video primers, and there will almost certainly be a \$900 Karrass negotiation seminar held in your city any day now. Software programs offer computerized training, and business school negotiating courses abound. Highly specialized newsletters publish negotiating advice, and so does the *Harvard Business Review*. Nobody has a Gross Negotiation Product figure that totals up the aggregate costs of all this instruction and tip-giving, but as John Baker, editor of *The Negotiator Magazine*, observes, "There are a lot of people who are making their living that way."

Getting to Yes is not exactly the founding text of negotiation studies, but it was largely responsible for converting the field from rarified specialty to fodder for a pop audience. In 1981, when it was first published, books about negotiating were rare. *You Can Negotiate Anything*, a chatty and amusing book by consultant and "world's best negotiator" Herb Cohen, had been published just months earlier, becoming a bestseller. *The Art Science of Negotiation*, a scholarly work by Harvard Business School professor Howard Raiffa that applied game- and decision-theory ideas to business, came out the following year. *Getting to Yes* has sold around 3.5 million copies, and to this day sells about 3,500 copies a week. The current edition is substantially the same book that was published 22 years ago, and the explosion of titles is not evidence of an avalanche of new developments in negotiation theory. It is evidence, as *Getting to Yes* co-author Bruce Patton puts it, that "people smelled a market."

The sheer number of offerings suggests a remarkable variety of approaches to the subject: Can there really be that much to say about negotiating? Well, no. Even the most ferocious and the most laid-back authors actually share a good deal more common ground than either would care to admit. But each is useful in its way, and you'll find many of the handiest insights below.

Like most every other source of negotiation advice, *Getting to Yes* begins by saying that however much you think

negotiation is part of your life, you're underestimating. "Everyone negotiates something every day," according to the introduction. "All of us negotiate many times a day," G. Richard Shell ups the ante in the opening to *Bargaining for Advantage*. Many of the authors suggest that you negotiate with your children or your spouse all the time. "Your real world is a giant negotiating table," Cohen writes in his book. Patton and *Getting to Yes's* principal authors, Roger Fisher and William Ury, had earlier collaborated on a book for international mediators, which is of course a rather small audience. The idea of *Getting to Yes* was to translate their thinking about multilateral peace agreements into lessons that might be applied to more quotidian forms of negotiation. The new audience would be all of those who have ever figured they were getting screwed when they tried to argue for a raise, dicker with cantankerous suppliers, sell a used car, or buy a new house.

Getting to Yes offers a sort of archetype of what we imagine "negotiation" means: A customer and a shopkeeper haggle over a brass dish, the latter asking \$75, the former offering \$15. Both sides seem to have picked a number out of thin air with the hope of arriving at the most advantageous price at the end of a series of concessions. *The Power of Nice*, by sports agent Ronald Shapiro and Mark Jankowski, summarizes this common vision as "Two SOB's locked in a room trying to beat the daylight out of each other." The only choice is whether to play hardball or roll over.

One way or another, all the experts advise that you leave behind simple-minded dickering based on gamesmanship and emotion and attain a new mindset, an almost Zen-like state of rationality. In *Getting to Yes*, the great leap is to focus not on your adversary and his or her position, but rather to negotiate "on the merits." The idea is to "attack" not the other negotiator, but the underlying issue. The emphasis is on seeing negotiation not as a zero-sum game, but as something that might be resolved by discovering a "creative solution" that simple haggling obscures. This is illuminated by the Parable of the Orange: Two parties each want an orange and agree finally to split it in half. But it turns out that one side simply wanted the juice, and the other side wanted the rind. If only they had worked together to solve the problem, each side could have gotten what it wanted. The Parable of the Orange pops up a lot.

Almost all of the experts endorse using out-and-out silence as a negotiating strategy.

What the experts make of it varies a bit, but a point that pretty much everyone makes is that the outcome of most negotiations has less to do with how vehemently you argue in the moment than it does with how well you prepared beforehand. You are advised, everywhere, to research the issue extensively. How much are other vendors selling that brass dish for? What do your competitors charge for the service you're offering? How much does a person with your experience usually get paid? What you're looking for is a standard, and your real goal, of course, is to find the standard that suggests the best deal for you.

Bargaining for Advantage, the book by Wharton professor G. Richard Shell, often backs its arguments with tidbits drawn from psychological research. For example, the "consistency principle" refers to people's need to appear reasonable. You can take advantage of this by "skillful use of standards" to make other people feel they need to use your standards to feel reasonable. And the more authoritative your standards seem, the better. *You Can Negotiate Anything*, probably the most entertaining of the books, skips any allusion to scholarship about the human tendency to defer to authority, instead citing an old *Candid Camera* episode in which a surprising number of highway drivers confronted with the sign "Delaware Closed" actually turned around. And, of course, you want to give special attention to sussing out what your opponent really wants.

The other key thing that preparation should give you is alternatives. *Getting to Yes* talks about arriving at your BATNA, or best alternative to a negotiated agreement. Others command you to never, ever negotiate without good alternatives.

Of course, when you start trying to apply advice about research to your own situation, you may run into the problem of limited information. One of the things that makes us feel weak as negotiators -- and it's those of us who feel weak that are likely to go looking for advice -- is the sense that the other side has more information than we do. That guy in the bazaar sells brass dishes all day, every day; I'm just walking by and haven't given brass cookware a thought. How am I supposed to know that he desperately needs cash to meet short-term rent payments on his stall? Or where I might find alternative cookware?

The advisers who get most specific about information gathering are the memoirists -- the re-nowned negotiators offering their own glorious past as the model you should emulate. But their real-life anecdotes don't always help. When sports agent Leigh Steinberg says in *Winning With Integrity* that you should "surround yourself" with a support team to gather information, he is probably right, but not in a way that will help you get a raise next month. It would be great to have a staff of 20, as he does, to help you with every negotiation, but you probably don't. At one point he recounts a negotiation with the Minnesota Vikings. As the team made its case to Steinberg, one of his minions took its written presentation into another room, "worked out a detailed set of responses, and delivered them to me just as [the team was] wrapping up." Sounds nice. I'll try to remember that at the used-car lot.

When it comes to the brass-tacks moment of actually facing your negotiating adversary, the advice tends to agree on a small number of practical, basic points. In general, for example, the experts say it's better to let your adversary make the opening offer. *The Power of Nice* describes an exercise from the authors' seminars, in which attendees are paired off, each playing either the "agent" or the "publisher" in working out a book deal. Each pairing of agent and publisher gets the same canned set of facts -- yet the deals the pairs end up with range from \$550,000 to \$2.95 million. The authors often say they have found the side that makes the first offer tends not to do as well in the negotiation. Why? Because people often underestimate their own strengths and exaggerate those of their rivals. Presumably, the best way to deal with this in a real negotiation is with better preparation.

Unsurprisingly, most also say you should ask for more than you think you'll get. The more learned-sounding books position this point as asking for the most you can reasonably defend. More interestingly, while we might imagine that the likely winner is the one who makes a forceful and overbearing presentation, the experts tend to agree that this is wrong: You are better off doing more listening and questioning than bloviating.

In fact, practically everyone endorses out-and-out silence. Let's say you're faced with an opponent who behaves irrationally; resist the temptation to respond in kind, counsels *Getting to Yes*. You might counter with a question ("How did you arrive at that figure?") or you might not counter at all. "Silence is one of your best weapons....The best thing to do may be to just sit there and not say a word." Cohen agrees: "You often force the other person to talk, if only out of discomfort" -- and that person is likely to revise his or her position and reveal useful information in the process.

Questions, the experts suggest, are useful for fending off someone else's question that you're not prepared to answer. (It's tempting to imagine two negotiators stuck on the crucialness of queries, sinking into an infinite loop of statement avoidance.) And they are useful in figuring out what the other side's logic is -- meaning that you should ask questions even when you think you know the answer. Shell cites studies showing that the most successful negotiators also happen to be the most persistent question-askers -- and listeners. "You often get more by finding out what the other person wants than you do by clever arguments supporting what you need." As he later adds, "It almost never hurts to talk less."

One psych-out technique is to exaggerate the significance of issues that you don't actually care about.

Negotiation gurus Roger Dawson and Chester Karrass, among others, not only support this idea but note that questions beginning with who, where, what, why, and how are better than yes-no queries. Jim Camp, a negotiation coach whose book *Start With No* was published last year, goes into considerable detail on "interrogative-led" questions. For example "What is the biggest issue we face?" is better than "Is this the biggest issue we face?" for the simple reason that it invites your adversary to give more information. Camp's thinking is that in any conversation, it's the listener who has the power. "People have a weakness for talking," he writes, and questions should "invite the adversary to indulge this weakness." *Getting to Yes* urges the reader to phrase confrontational questions as neutrally as possible to avoid sinking into emotional bickering: "Did we overpay?" is better than "Did you screw us over?"

Many experts offer examples of inquisitorial jujitsu. Imagine your adversary, before you are ready, asks, "What is the most you would pay if you had to?" This is not an uncommon tactic, and just the sort of thing that flusters the anxious negotiator into saying something stupid (like naming a figure) or unimpressive (like a fumbly "Um, I don't know.") Here's the *Getting to Yes* response: "Let's not put ourselves under such a strong temptation to

mislead. If you think no agreement is possible, and that we may be wasting our time, perhaps we could disclose our thinking to some trustworthy third party, who can then tell us whether there is a zone of potential agreement."

The Power of Nice offers another example. "If your company agrees to be merged into ours," asks your adversary, "how many of your employees can be laid off to achieve economies of scale?" Your answer: "Which of our branch offices would you be keeping and which would you close?" The authors write that this crafty reply leads to "a real information gain."

And indeed those are very impressive responses. But can you really imagine yourself saying anything remotely like that in the heat of negotiation? When you've just been asked something that really ticks you off? In the middle of a deal that you really want to close? And if you really can't see yourself showing that sort of poise, is it possible to change yourself so thoroughly?

The appeal of the "win-win" style is obvious: You can get what you want without being a jerk. But a number of rival experts revel in taking shots at this approach. Roger Dawson snorts that the Parable of the Orange is nice, but in the real world such neat solutions are rare. Even *The Power of Nice* cautions that win-win thinking is often "a loser's excuse for surrender." You can get a pretty good sense of what Jim Camp thinks about *Getting to Yes* from the title of his book, *Start With No*. Inside he is more blunt. He quotes the *Getting to Yes* definition of a wise agreement -- "One that meets the legitimate interests of each side to the extent possible, resolves conflicting interests fairly, is durable, and takes community standards into account" -- as something that might work in a perfect world. But in this world, he says, it's "hopelessly misguided," "mush," and "lame," a style used by "naive amateurs" that "will get you killed," since your adversary may be waiting to exploit your search for compromise. As if that weren't enough, he goes on to say that the win-win approach is "partially responsible" for the "fair amount of mediocrity in American business" today (see "Can a Negotiating Coach Help Me?" page 78). Mocking his ivory tower rivals, Camp asserts that he is out there in the trenches, coaching real executives through real negotiations.

Whenever one of these experts goes off on win-win, the reader starts to expect the imminent arrival of some concise list of secret tricks of the trade -- five little things we can memorize to become better negotiators without some huge, life-changing effort. That list never materializes. Dawson may come the closest, advocating various bits of acting among his tactics. His most amusing gambits include making sure you visibly flinch at the other side's proposals, and that at the close of a negotiation that you feel you've won, you should say something like, "Wow, you did a fantastic job negotiating that. You were brilliant." One of Cohen's psych-out techniques is to exaggerate things you don't actually care about: When the refrigerator salesman has finished reciting all 32 colors available, at your request, you should be disappointed, blurting, "That's it? We have a psychedelic kitchen. Those colors are much too square."

But in the end, a lot of the intra-guru potshots are themselves a bit theatrical. Camp writes that the importance of questions is "overlooked in every other book on negotiating I've ever seen," when, of course, it's evergreen advice. Dawson wraps up *The Secrets of Power Negotiating* by advocating, of all things, win-win deals: "Instead of trying to dominate the other person and trick him into doing things he wouldn't normally do, I believe you should work with the other person to figure out your problems and develop a solution with which you can both win."

It turns out that even those who stress particular negotiation behaviors and attitudes see those things not as hollow gambits but as the natural performance traits of the smarter negotiator you must become -- by way of better preparation, rational thinking, and so on. Consider, for example, "the Columbo effect" described by Camp. This boils down to lulling your opponent into underestimating you and getting overconfident. You might drop your pen, for example. Columbo, Camp points out, "solved every crime" this way. Dawson's book also cites Columbo as a role model. Neither author really dwells on the fact that the brilliant detective is a fictional character.

Reading the drop-your-pen suggestion, it's tempting to characterize Camp as the Stanislavsky of negotiation-think. But he doesn't want you to act differently than you do, he wants you to *become* different. He offers a blizzard of techniques -- "reversing," "blank-slatting," "painting the pain" of your rival, etc. -- some of which go down easier than others. An easy one: Addressing opponents with an honorific needlessly elevates them, so stick

to first names. A harder one: Never need anything; overcome all fear of rejection. It's all good advice, likely to make you not just a more effective negotiator but a more effective human being. But that doesn't make it any easier.

Of course, much of this advice depends on what kind of negotiator you are in the first place. In *Bargaining for Advantage*, Shell urges the reader to figure out his or her own hard-wired approach to negotiation, perhaps by way of a psychological test like that Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, which will tell you whether you are a "competitor" or a "collaborator." His point is that you need this framework both so that you can work with what you've got and so that you know which aspects of your style might be causing you problems. If you're too competitive, you should probably reel that in; if you would rather just avoid negotiating altogether, you need to convince yourself that this attitude is costing you. Your mindset, he says, is more important than tactics: "Effective negotiation is 10% technique and 90% attitude."

And in varying ways, all negotiation advice says the same thing. It seems the best negotiators rely not on overwhelming personalities or that secret list of five tricks anyone can memorize, but rather on something closer to a specific state of being. Shell suggests that to achieve the right attitude you need "realism, intelligence, and self-respect." Power of Nice commands you to "Be a better listener." Camp says that "high self-esteem" is "absolutely required." Chester Karrass says much the same, noting that "this feeling of self-worth should come from a history of getting things done satisfactorily." He notes elsewhere that the best negotiators have "the ability to think clearly under stress." *Getting to Yes* advises a stoicism in the face of adversarial attacks that is almost saintly. "Figure out what you fear most," Dawson advises the intimidated, "and do it." Steinberg describes himself as having (and the reader as needing to acquire) "utter clarity," a thorough understanding of one's self, "the ability to be in an absolute state of denial about the ultimate catastrophe of an unsuccessful negotiation," complete self-assurance, "as comprehensive a knowledge base as possible about every conceivable subject," "extraordinary stamina," and the ability to "rapidly factor figures" in one's head while negotiating. How long would it take to acquire all that? Camp is perhaps the most honest about how difficult it is to enact the behavioral changes he recommends when he cites "theories of learning" that estimate that "we humans need about 800 hours to truly master a complex subject and the habits necessary for its application."

Eight hundred hours! That sounds awful. But it points to something that is almost certainly true, which is that you can listen to or read all the negotiating advice you want, but the only way to acquire the poise under pressure to use that advice in real time is by way of extensive practice in the real world. And sure, maybe you already negotiate several times a day, but bickering with your spouse over who does the dishes isn't going to help you steer your start-up through a complex merger agreement. Advice is nice, and all of these books make useful points, but they won't transform you into a different person. In the real world, that takes a commitment in time and effort that many of us would make a deal with the devil to avoid. But perhaps, at some level of your experience, you already knew that.

Sidebar: How to...

Close the Deal

Lindsey McAlpine
CEO, The McAlpine Group LLC
Charlotte, N.C.

About 14 years ago, I was a young man anxious to work on my first real estate project. I met with a much older industry leader who was selling a piece of land in Charlotte. Perception of ability was the key issue in the negotiation, and his perception was that my ability was not there. Sensing that, I said, "Look, I have an experienced partner. I can't tell you who he is, but he won't agree to these terms."

I sat back and waited to see what his answer would be. Then he said, "Let me think about it." But I had a feeling he wasn't going to give me the answer I wanted. I was scared to admit I had pulled a tactic on him. So I held my ground, and we agreed to meet again the next day. Within 24 hours I had to go and get a partner. My entire goal was to find a man who was older than 50 with gray hair -- what I call, to this day, my gray-headed equity. I asked

an older friend in the industry to partner with me. His sole role in that meeting 24 hours later was to sit there and look mature. That's all he had to do. And you know what happened? The old man signed the deal. We had already agreed on the basic points, but my gray-headed equity pushed it over the top.

Treat Your Adversary With Respect -- and Win

Bernie Tenenbaum
Former president of RBT, subsidiary of Russ Berrie & Co.
Oakland, N.J.

After we acquired the company that made Koosh Ball, it was my job to ensure that sales and profit would go up. We flew to Hong Kong to meet with key vendors to see if there was an opportunity to improve pricing, and we tested the integrity of the current vendor's price with a second manufacturer and found we could get the balls for 3¢ less per ball. Then we had a very elaborate dinner with the current manufacturer and his whole family to find out whether it was possible to get his price down. You have to imagine, we're sitting in this room, 16 people at the table, and we're trying to accomplish three things. First, we want to have a good relationship. Especially in China, your word really matters and the honor you give your partner means everything. If we had walked in and said, "I've second-sourced your product and can make it for 3¢ less," he might have walked away because we would've embarrassed him. Second, we wanted to let him know we were growing the business and there was an opportunity for him to make more products for us. Third, we had to ask for his help. We never told him he needed to lower his price; we asked, was there anything he could do to help us? He understood what that meant, and he came back with a price that was a penny below the second source.

Hire a Star

Barbara Corcoran
Chairwoman, The Corcoran Group
New York City

Twelve years back, I didn't have the kind of high-end real estate salespeople who attracted multimillion-dollar listings or customers. One woman had been working for a tiny real estate company that went bankrupt. She was a phenomenal producer -- the cat's meow, as my mother would say -- and every big player in town was after her. I saw her as a bridge to high-end business, so I was drooling at the mouth. I begged for an appointment. She finally agreed to come in, saying I sounded like a "nice lady."

I knew that my archrivals at bigger firms were probably offering her the world, and that the only way I had a shot was to simply gang up on her. The evening before she was due in, I asked 15 of my best, most loyal, most-in-love-with-Barbara salespeople to wear their very best suits and dresses to the office the next day. She arrived that afternoon acting deservedly self-important. I groveled. When I ushered her to our conference room and opened the door, all of my best salespeople were sitting there. I sat her down and said, "Here are some of the people who work here. They'll tell you what's good about the company." And I left. She was so startled that she didn't come out for almost two hours.

That night, she called me and said she couldn't work anywhere else. I started getting very high-end salespeople to work for me after that and, within about a year, converted my company into a multimillion-dollar label. That wouldn't have happened if I hadn't closed the deal with my first high-end salesperson. Today, she's still my top seller.

Deal With a Bully

Mark Comiso
President, Maus Haus
San Francisco

This was back in '96 or '97. Maus Haus was still a very small entity at the time, and we had just "won" a

competitive bidding process to develop a website for a very big company. The company selected us as the winning vendor, but then we had to "negotiate" with the purchasing department for the "privilege" to work with them. They wanted us to do an across-the-board 20% reduction just because they were a major corporation and should thus get "preferred" client status. We stuck to our guns because we had already incorporated a 20% discount in our initial bid. But the negotiations were tense and they definitely pulled the "everyone wants to work with us" and "you have to do better if you want to do work for us."

In the end we did give a bit on the scope (i.e., we ended up including a few more things), but we held the line on the price. When they said, "This is just the beginning, so give us a great deal on this one and then we'll pay full price on the future stuff," I retorted with, "Boy, multiple opportunities sounds wonderful, and we'd be very excited about that -- so excited, that if you pay full price for the first one, I'll give you increasing discounts on the following projects." This actually worked in that it forced them to say, "Well, how about we just figure out what a fair deal is for every project."

Get Blood From a Vendor

Mark Vadon
CEO, Blue Nile
Seattle

We recently made a decision to reduce the price of our diamond earrings to deliver a better value to our customers. One of the things I love hearing from vendors, when we ask them to reduce their price, is, "We are already making no money selling to you." I say, "Well then, look, maybe we should stop doing business with you. It doesn't make any sense for us to push you to the point that you're going out of business." Our business, selling jewelry over the Internet, runs at much lower margins than most jewelry businesses. Their response was, "We'll sharpen the pencil and see what we can do, but there's not much room here."

They came back to us with price concessions that were pretty modest. We went back and said, "Look, any concessions you give us, we'll give back to our customers." That was a new situation for them because most companies would turn that back into gross margins. We gave them the parameters on how elastic we thought the categories were and the price we paid came down by almost 11% from where we started. We did pass it all on to consumers and the business grew 70%. We are thrilled because our revenue just went up and on top of it the vendor is thrilled with the results. They have so many units selling that they are making more money at the end of the day.

Sidebar: The Ultimate Test: Can A Negotiating Coach Coach Me?

Although Jim Camp has written about negotiation, he seems like the sort of person who doesn't believe you can become a better negotiator just by reading a few hundred pages. In fact, his whole approach is based on effecting a massive behavioral change in the individual who seeks to negotiate better. What I wanted to know is how much difference Camp could effect in a single, bad negotiator: me. When I called to make an appointment, an associate in Camp's camp promised that a face-to-face meeting with the master would "rock" my world.

Eager to learn, I met Camp, 56, at his home in Vero Beach, Fla. With a handful of employees scattered around the country and no central office, his "virtual" company, Coach 2100, is presently advising and coaching clients in about 130 ongoing negotiations. The former Air Force pilot is a burly, friendly guy, who looks as if he gets plenty of sun. As affably as he comes across, he also has some provocative things to say about the negotiation game as it's typically played in American business. He argues that most negotiators are overly willing to compromise, and he blames this on the way that some win-win adherents prize "relationships" over getting the best possible deal -- a style of negotiating that others, especially non-U.S. negotiators, go out of their way to exploit. "It's really killing corporate America," he says.

For our coaching session, we sat on the bridge of his boat, a sedan bridge Sea Ray named *Heavy Tiger* (his squadron's call sign in Vietnam). Camp had been prepping me a bit through a clever Web-based feedback system designed to help one think through a negotiation. I flunked my first test in the Camp System when I articulated

my "Mission and Purpose" as "increasing my fee" from one of my regular clients. Though I'd read Camp's book, which stresses that goals should be "set in my adversary's world," I'd immediately reverted to self-centered habit. Camp prodded me toward, "Provide my clients the highest caliber of writing talent to assure their long-term success. This will be done by placing great emphasis on my contributions."

An overeagerness to compromise, Jim Camp argues, is 'killing corporate America.'

When we sat down to talk about it, I started doing what I always do when a negotiation approaches: guessing all the reasons that the other side will turn me down. There's probably no money in the budget, my work is probably replaceable, etc. "Look at the assumptions you're making," Camp interrupted. Assumptions are another cardinal sin, and they are easily confused with preparation. He was right about that -- I did think I was preparing, cleverly getting into my adversary's head. But I hadn't collected any facts; I was just psyching myself into a compromise.

Next he helped me think through a fairly neutral e-mail I could send to my client that might yield information that I could use for the big moment, which would be actually making my case in person. When Camp suggested a few verbal lines of approach, he sounded great. I knew I could never carry it off with such aplomb and told him so. "You can make that part of what you say," he suggested. "Just start by saying, 'Look, I know this is all going to come out wrong.'" This is another one of his strategies, a willingness to come across as vulnerable or "not okay." You'd be surprised, he says, how often your adversary will bail you out, stepping into the awkward void to say something like, "No, you're going to do fine," and actually helping you get your message out.

And what if I get turned down flat? In Camp's view, that's no reason to panic, because "no" is a much better answer than "maybe." A maybe, he argues, is an evasion, but a no gives you something concrete to talk about. "That means the negotiation can start," he says. What I want to do, he continues, is not just roll over and accept it, but get as clear a picture as I can of why I've been rejected, then say that I want to think it over and get a commitment for another round of discussion. (Later, I tried out an online practice tool that Camp is making available to clients: I took the role of a computer programmer strategizing to get a raise, picking from multiple choices the best way to phrase, frame, and time my interactions with a distracted boss. I still made some wishy-washy decisions in this virtual process but overall showed some signs of improvement.)

There are a lot of variables here, depending on what gets said along the way, and of course, it will be up to me to find the fortitude to go through with any of this without Camp there to give me a boost and point out my missteps. And obviously it's much harder to find the right words in real time than it is to pick them from a computerized list in the comfort of my own home.

I don't know that my world was rocked, but the session helped me more than I thought it would, just by focusing me on exactly what Camp says is wrong with too many negotiators today: a weakness for compromise from the get-go.

Sidebar: Negotiating Tips From The Experts

If becoming a great negotiator takes more of a commitment than reading a book, then certainly no quick hit list of tips is going to do the job, either. Nevertheless, many of us are so ill-prepared for negotiation that even a handful of highlights that recur in many of the most popular advice guides can seem eye-opening:

- Stay rationally focused on the issue being negotiated.
- Exhaustive preparation is more important than aggressive argument.
- Think through your alternatives. The more options you feel you have, the better a negotiating position you'll be in.
- Spend less time talking and more time listening and asking good questions. Sometimes silence is your best response.
- Let the other side make the first offer. If you're underestimating yourself, you might make a needlessly weak opening move.
- Some gurus advocate a bit of play-acting. Always seem put off at your rival's offer. Play up the importance of factors you don't care about so it'll seem like a bigger deal when you concede on them. Seem more

befuddled than you are so your opponent will underestimate you.

Above all, if you're serious about becoming a better negotiator, don't believe that there's a quick-fix solution (like this list). Changing your mindset and behavior should be the real goal, and that's a major undertaking.

Rob Walker has written for *Slate*, *Details*, and *The New York Times Magazine*.

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