

Managing the Sale - The Art of Negotiating

Negotiation is a word most are familiar with, but few know how to execute or take the time to perform professionally, especially in sales. Too often, sales people think of negotiations as win-lose and in many cases they are not far off the mark as that is what often happens in negotiation sessions. However, if you are involved in **professional** sales where there is an expectation or requirement of sales and service on a long term basis versus a one-time simple sale, then negotiations should not be “win-lose”.

So how do you avoid win-lose negotiations in professional sales? First, you need to ask yourself two questions:

- Did I **PLAN** for the negotiation, and if yes,
- What did I **PLAN** for?

By planning, I'm referring to knowing as many situational factors as possible about the negotiation you're about to enter. This requires **critical thinking** skills. To critically consider your negotiation strategy, you should compile a list that would include high value items to you and potentially low value to the other party. Likewise, items you list as negotiable exchanges should be low value to you, yet high value to the person across the table. If you don't plan for all of these factors, chances are the negotiation may not be successful because you didn't have any idea of what success would look if it were right in front of you. Some say, if you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there. Critical thinking in any situation demands a solid understand of where you want to end up.

A good negotiation is really nothing more than getting needs met; not taking your opponent for as much as you can get nor does it mean *giving up the farm* in order to appease your favorite customer. Negotiation has been defined as a *mutual discussion and arrangement of the terms of a transaction or agreement* (Webster's unabridged dictionary). Most people fail to see the necessary component of critical thinking in negotiation and surmise that negotiation means defeating or acquiescing to your opponent; you either win or you lose.

If you want better results in professional sales, think and act like a professional. Take the extra time to plan for what you want and how you may secure the best possible outcome. In the beginning, taking the time to plan ahead may seem strange and feel uncomfortable and may take you longer than usual to prepare. As you become more accustomed to adding a critical thinking component to your negotiations and begin to experience better results, it will become easier and more comfortable. Negotiations will **ALWAYS** require critical thinking AND demand you put yourself in the other party's shoes.

If you've taken the time to put together a plan and know what a good deal looks like, you will also know what you need to ask for and will bargain critically to get your needs and the needs of your opponent met. Here are three things to help you DURING the negotiation:

1. Leave the emotion at the door. Your outward appearance should be professional, polished and prepared as if everything were going the way you planned. If your opponent makes an absurd offer,

simply smile and attempt to disarm them by using humor. You may say something like “that’s a good one Bob. Are you ready to begin discussing this for real now?” Don’t yell, scream or curse.

2. Resist the temptation to say too much. Sometimes when the unplanned happens, some sales people tend to blurt out "something / anything" because they are nervous and feeling stuck. Use silence to collect your thoughts. There is nothing wrong with silence, and in fact, your silence may actually play to your advantage.

3. Exercise your right/ability to *walk away*. This doesn't mean *walk away* from the deal completely; you could just be walking away for an hour, a day or a week. If things get heated and you feel yourself losing control or beat up, come up with a “*break-away*” comment like "I really need to give some more thought to your offer. How about we get back together in an hour or next week at 2:00 on Wednesday”? This will give you time to critically think things through. If it turns out that you cannot get what you need, you may decide to walk away from the negotiation.

Professional sales and professional negotiation go hand in hand. Critical thinking and planning is where every successful negotiation begins. Without both, you truly limit your opportunities for win-win outcomes.

About the author: Bryan Burrs is currently the Manager of Sales Training for Cardinal Health’s Ambulatory Care Division, a Fortune 18 company. He has over 9 years of professional sales and negotiation experience with top Fortune 25 companies and has been the recipient of multiple performance-based selling and goal overachievement awards. He holds a Masters degree in Global Management and a Bachelors degree in Marketing. He may be reached at Bryan@DrBurrs.com.