

Successful Negotiating in Corporate America

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CORPORATE AMERICA THRIVES BECAUSE OF SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATION

Not every negotiation table has a client on the other end. Opening negotiations with employees and giving them a voice in the direction of the business takes the success of negotiations to new levels. What makes some negotiations successful and others dead in the water? Conducting a successful negotiation requires the use of six major skills.

6 PRINCIPLES OF IMPROVISATION

These six skills will ensure every negotiation has the potential to end with a positive solution:

1. Take your ego off the table.
2. Respect the other party.
3. Be in the moment (focus).
4. Listen to the other party's needs and wants.
5. Adapt to the situation.
6. Yes, and...



These steps truly help in removing emotions from the table. Heated emotions can cause negotiations to shut down. They are more likely to end in a stalemate with wasted efforts. Anthony K. Tjan wrote in a Harvard Business Review blog, "Time and emotion — these are the two things most often wasted during a negotiation." And he is very right. We tend to react emotionally and negatively to any points of negotiation that oppose our own agenda. And that wastes time. When our goals for a negotiation are so firmly anchored that we cannot budge, it becomes hard to see any common goal as a solution. Instead, emotions kick in, and egos inflate—and we cease to listen. All we hear is our own voice in our head trying to find a way back to what we want.



SKILLFUL NEGOTIATION IS ROOTED IN IMPROVISATION

Tom Yorton was once in the corporate ranks before becoming CEO of Second City Communications, the business solutions division of the world-renowned comedy company, The Second City. He had this to say in a recent Business Innovation Factory article, "But my experience – and in fact, my scars – are from bumping up against the same organizational hurdles that improv is so effective at helping companies get over – challenges that include connecting with customers, engaging employees around change, moving into new markets, innovating new products and services, working without a script."

All of the aspects of driving positive change inside the company depend on how well leaders in corporate America can negotiate. That equates to how well business professionals can handle blocking. Blocking happens every day.

It is something brought to the table that was unexpected. It halts forward momentum. It is something that doesn't neatly fit inside the box of your agenda.

Daena Giardella teaches an improvisational leadership class at MIT's Sloan School of Management. She spends an entire lesson on teaching how to avoid using the most common block, the "yes, but." In an NPR article, she points out, "Even though you say, 'Yes,' the but says, Yeah, but that's not really valid because here is the better point."

Negotiations can quickly come to a grinding halt when "yes, but" comes to the table. It is when emotions get heated and time gets wasted.

Time to remember the 6 principles of improvisation!

Listen to the other party's needs. What are they really saying when they block your proposal? Be adaptable by taking your ego off the table. Take a deep breath if you need to and then let the next words that come out of your mouth be "Yes, and..."

A successful negotiation is birthed from being able to rebound, to take the blocks and build with them. That is how you connect with other people.

Have you ever watched preschoolers play with blocks? They take turns stacking them on top of each other until it gets so high it just topples over - or they like to watch it fall and knock it over on purpose. But the point is that both of them have an agenda. They each want to pick up a block and put it on the tower and each one probably has an idea about what the tower will look like, but they keep building until they can't build anymore.

We are more likely to succeed in negotiations when both parties can envision a common goal.

Improvisation teaches us to set aside our personal agendas and ego and take whatever the other person gives you and go with it. The glue that ties it all together is the principle of "Yes, and..." Successful people all intuitively do this. They just don't necessarily realize that they are using improvisation in their daily lives.

To succeed in negotiations, we need to drop our agendas long enough to truly listen—and with respect for all involved. It is true for formal negotiations around a conference table and is the way to success in the daily negotiations of life and career—during a chat with the boss or with one's spouse, or with a child. This is the kind of straight talk we can cultivate that truly will make the biggest difference.

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