

# Aspire for the win/win

Pursue the keys to mutual-gain negotiations

## Question:

Is it realistic to embrace mutual-gain negotiating in today's world of intense competition?

## Response:

Absolutely. The goal of mutual-gain negotiating is to create a level of trust and respect that will enable both parties to collaboratively explore potential outcomes. Mutual-gain negotiating doesn't require that you make unnecessary sacrifices to close the deal but rather, claim as much value as possible without compromising the relationship.

An effective negotiation finds the balance between cooperation and competition. Cooperation allows both parties to fully explore how to get their mutual needs met. Competition is the self-serving, single-minded focus that is driven to win – it's all about getting what you want. If cooperation is absent, a negotiation will readily devolve into a squabble over sub par deals. If a healthy competitive spirit is missing, position and/or value may be relinquished too easily.

Follow these steps to claim the most value in mutual-gain negotiation:

### Prepare.

Define what's most important to you in this negotiation. What are your needs? What are your must-haves? What are your wants or like-to-haves? What is your walk-away point?

### Create viable options.

Do you have at least three options available to achieve a mutually agreeable outcome? In others words, how can you reposition and/or repackage your best option to make it more appealing? Is there a way to increase the size of the pie and get a bigger slice?

### Be ready to make adjustments.

Opportunities unfold often unexpectedly during a negotiation. If you are taken off guard by new information, be proactive and request a break to regroup. Whether it's a five minute hiatus or two days, be proactive. Your request is not a sign of weakness but rather a demonstration of your commitment to examine all of the options.

### Don't be misled by the other party's anchor.

An anchor is the first offer or starting point. The intent is to create an expectation regarding the range of possibilities. If a figure seems excessive – either too high or too low – inquire as to the justification without being defensive.

### Engage and appear flexible (within reason).

When the threat of opposing positions becomes apparent, resist the temptation to stake your territory. This will trigger the other party to become competitive and unflinching in their position. Instead of risking both the outcome and relationship, ask "What if . . .?" questions. Then listen, really listen to the other party's answers. Demonstrate your interest – pay attention, take notes and refrain from interruption. This can shake loose stick-

ing points and open the door for creative discussion to unfold.

### Have integrity.

While you might not agree on all points, and in fact, may even wildly disagree on some issues, demonstrate your commitment to finding a mutual solution – follow through on commitments and show respect in the process. Integrity of word and deed will contribute significantly to a positive experience when you decide to part ways. It's better for a negotiation to fail because the gap was too big rather than because the relationship went sour.

### Focus on maximizing value.

Working hard to claim value does not run counter to mutual-gains negotiations. When you work hard to achieve mutually agreeable outcomes, it's okay to attempt to secure the largest piece of the pie.

In a negotiation, you are under no obligation to promise anything more than the minimum necessary to produce an outcome greater than what the other party could achieve elsewhere. Many people subscribe to the theory that all negotiations should be Win/Win. I don't believe that's realistic. What I believe is that a mutual-gain negotiation ends up being either win/WIN or WIN/win. Both parties get their needs met and one party gets a little more of what they ideally want. This is not a failed negotiation, rather it's justification for celebration.



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