

Clive Rich is an international negotiator who has played a crucial role in brokering deals for multi-nationals (including Sony, Apple and Yahoo), SMEs and entrepreneurs. He shares his top negotiation tips

1) Preparation

It is essential to prepare before negotiations start, particularly if you are leading a team.

Proposals must be rehearsed, the agenda agreed and roles clarified so only one person is authorized to give away concessions.

There is nothing more disheartening than a team disagreeing in front of the other side. Everyone must have a clear role and stick to it.

This includes the leader, who is very vulnerable to direct appeals from the other side which would bypass or undermine other members of the team.

2) Bid first

As long as you know the terrain, bidding first will help you to get more of what you want as your opening bid will help shape the parameters for the negotiation.

If the other side goes first, you may find that it limits your own expectations and you end up negotiating downwards.

3) Adapt your style

This isn't your dress sense but your negotiating style. You need to adapt your behavior to the style that the other side are most likely to find persuasive.

Some people like options, others like a fixed process; some are born optimists, others look for problems at every turn. Work with these typologies not against them.

You have to identify and select the right behavior for the right person through asking questions, listening and observing.

Your greatest asset in a negotiation is that the other side believes that you mean what you say. If you make idle threats and get found out then you throw that asset away.

4) Think about the other side

This is a very modern approach but it's essential in today's collaborative world. Think about why the other side wants the things they say that they want. What are their underlying motivations?

For example, do they need respect or a desire to achieve? Work this out and address those needs in order to get back more of what you want in return.

5) Be careful with cultural norms

Ultimately you are negotiating with the person, not the culture, so although local etiquette about dress, touching and cultural protocol can be important, bear in mind that many received notions about negotiating abroad are big generalizations.

Not all 1.3 billion Chinese people, for example, are "inscrutable".

6) Bargaining power

There are nine sources of bargaining power including information, expertise and reputation.

Remember that both sides will have some bargaining power – you may have niche bargaining power in the form of expertise or information that the other side doesn't have and wants.

This is something you should think about when you're preparing for negotiations, as it will give you confidence and you may struggle to work this out objectively in the heat of the haggle.

This is an area where the leader can take the initiative and model a positive mindset for the whole team.

7) Good will concessions are not essential

Good will concessions are quite popular, and can help create rapport, but the other side may not feel obliged to reciprocate. They will either feel they got something for nothing, or will feel they deserved what you gave them anyway.

If the concession you want to make has some commercial value then deploy it when you can get something back in return.

But if you're part of the team, make sure there is just one person elected to make these concessions, and their authority must not be undermined.

8) Don't rely on deadline pressure

Deadline pressure is pretty risky – it may influence the other side or alternatively they may call your bluff. If they do, you have to be prepared to walk away even if the deadline wasn't real.

Your greatest asset in a negotiation is that the other side believes that you mean what you say. If you make idle threats and get found out then you throw that asset away.

9) Don't say too much

Leaders often feel they should fill the airwave because they are in charge. However, the more you say the more you give away. People also find it difficult to actively listen for long spells.

If you are talking for more than a minute they may switch off, stop listening and start planning what they are going to say next instead. Remember the less you say, the more you understand.

10) Leave something on the table

If you leave nothing on the table then there may not be enough for the other side to be satisfied even if they accept the deal. If so, they will end up sabotaging the deal, whether covertly or otherwise.

Leaders can set an example here by not going past the point of victory.

One final point

It's very important for leaders to support the rest of the team. They are there to nurture and protect the team – the team is not just there to serve them. A shepherd looks after the sheep – the sheep are not there to serve the shepherd.

I remember one particular deal between a record company and a classical music company, who didn't like the person leading the negotiations.

Because they didn't like what they were hearing, they complained to the chairman of the record company, who reacted by pulling the negotiator off the job and replacing him with someone more malleable.

But this simply made the record company look weak and signaled to the other side that they just had to kick up a fuss to get their own way. <http://www.cliverich.com/>

Institute of Leadership & Management: www.I-L-M.com