

Everybody's Negotiating Something

by Barbara Burke & Kriss Barlow

In today's environment, there's a constant need to work with, through and around others to accomplish your objectives. It's about negotiation. Sometimes, negotiations are "hard-nosed," aggressive, or confrontational — approaches that may work well when negotiating the purchase of a car or house.

In many negotiations, however, you're dealing with people with whom you want to maintain long-term relationships — they're your future business deals. If so, you need to resolve conflicts or reach resolution on matters that you can both support long-term. The solution is a negotiator who seeks win/win solutions. People who sit side-by-side and mutually seek a joint solution to a problem are focused on win/win.

Within healthcare, some negotiation often takes place on the clinical side, but the real challenge arises in the business world of medicine. The issues are complex and the number of people involved is significant.

In the past week, it's likely that someone has asked your opinion to deal with a complex issue. While general advice is offered, there is no perfect solution; the negotiation process is at work. The context may differ in each negotiating situation, but what you need to bring to these discussions is the same.

The Plan

As an active participant, negotiating means you plan.

**Success Comes to
Those Who Make
It Happen —
Not Those Who
Let It Happen**

There may be a few people who are genetically wired to negotiate. If you're not, you need to be more methodical. Ask: "What are our options?" "What will we do if we can't come to a mutual solution?"

Answer these questions for yourself and for the people with whom you are negotiating. Do you understand their needs, their vulnerabilities and their options? Thinking through this process helps you plan options that may meet the needs of both parties.

Think through the following in detail:

1. Desired outcomes: What does each party want from the negotiation? Why are you talking? What is the dream you each have that brings you to the table?
2. Concerns: What would make the deal hard to sell to your constituency? Are there needs for security (versus risk), control, or dollars that need to be met through the deal? Many members of the healthcare team, especially clinicians, are risk averse and will take a smaller upside return if the downside risk is smaller. These concerns may be apparent or you may need to discern these from your conversations.
3. Options: What are the best options for the deal that you can imagine? What issues could you put on the table that don't mean much to you, but might be very meaningful or useful to the other party?
4. Bottom line: No plan is complete without a well thought out walk-away position. If you can't agree, what will you do? When you clearly know this position, you can more easily evaluate options offered. Of course, you'll know what you believe to be the other party's best walk away position, so you can offer strategies to improve

on these. And, at the appropriate time in negotiations, you may decide to use your walk away position to press for resolution.

Process

A process needs to be established that clearly defines the rules of the road and assures the environment is geared to a win/win outcome.

During the process, keep these factors in mind:

- Insulate your hot buttons
- Draw out the other side
- Create the future together

Having your outcomes, concerns, options and walk-away position well articulated will give you power. You need to know which outcomes and options are ideal and which ones you can live with. Update this information as you negotiate. It'll provide the building blocks for a deal that both parties can support.

If the push to reach resolution is losing steam, ask, "What will you do if we walk away from this?" You may wish to volunteer what you will do if you walk away from the negotiations. Knowing your walk away position helps you evaluate whether you can come up with a better joint solution, or if walking away is in fact what needs to be done. Reinforce where your discussions have taken you so it is evident that you have truly designed the deal together.

The Good Negotiator

Who gets to be quarterback? Obviously not everyone makes a good negotiator.

Good negotiators:

- Listen well: hear what people are really saying (perhaps behind their words)
- Think well on their feet
- Formulate creative solutions and draw on options not previously on the table
- Want to not only do a business deal for today, but build a lasting partnership
- Know when to be generous and when to confront
- Behave respectfully
- Stay on task; deal with the issue at hand
- Have their own emotions well in control e.g. no hot buttons that will ignite and potentially disrupt the process.

Conclusion

The healthcare field is filled with opportunities that need to be negotiated. As consolidation, alliances and joint ventures increase, this need to negotiate will only grow.

Every aspect of healthcare benefits from the active process of negotiation. There is no single right answer in negotiations. The skill set must be developed and nurtured with the leadership clearly defining objectives and measuring the success of negotiation within the leadership team.



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