

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a blue pen, poised to write on a document. The document has some faint, partially legible text. A semi-transparent dark grey box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing the title text in white. The background is a blurred office setting.

How NOT To Negotiate



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15 Common Negotiation Mistakes

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Introduction

When you hear the word “negotiation” what comes to mind? Often those thoughts are less than pleasant, as negotiation conjures up images of stress, pressure, debate, arguing, or being taken advantage of. If you’re like me, you’ve probably been involved in a negotiation that didn’t go the way you wanted.

It doesn’t have to be that way. Many people have a fear about negotiating that is often rooted in a misconception around what true negotiation is. Negotiation is a skill set that can be learned, but like any skill it requires practice and patience.

If you’ve made mistakes in past negotiations, it likely cost you. If you failed to learn the lessons of a bad negotiation, you’re likely to repeat these same mistakes in the future. That is what this guide is all about. Learning to recognize the common mistakes in a negotiation and how to avoid them.

In the martial arts, we practice the art of Bunkai. This is the art of analyzing and extracting what works (and what doesn’t) from what you’re learning. In this guide, we’re going to go through a Bunkai of the 15 common mistakes people make in negotiating and how to avoid them.

But first, we need to understand what negotiation actually is and isn’t.

What is negotiation?

Negotiation, by definition, is a discussion between two or more people to reach a consensus or agreement. It is a conversation designed to help each party find common ground and create a situation where everyone wins in some way. Negotiation requires some bargaining, what my grandfather referred to as “give and take” so you can find a way to get some or all of what you want while allowing the other person to get some or all of what they want.

True negotiation is NOT an aggressive tit-for-tat. It is NOT about bullying or intimidating the other person. Negotiation is finding the common ground upon which a mutually beneficial arrangement can be achieved, a problem can be solved, or an opportunity seized upon. It does NOT have to be confrontational.

I like to refer to negotiation as the Art of the Mutual Win.

In negotiation, people may have the same goal, but different ideas of how to get there. Approaching negotiation as the Art of the Mutual Win shifts the thinking from focusing solely on your own wants and needs to the mutual interests of everyone at the proverbial table.

This shift in mindset is powerful, as it allows everyone to win. Changing how we view negotiation (and its desired outcome) can help us be more successful at it.

Negotiation is a problem-solving conversation that is mutually beneficial when it is done correctly. But when we negotiate poorly, we are not as successful as we could be – and that's when others can take advantage of us.

So what are some of the common mistakes that people make in negotiation?

In this guide, I want to identify 15 common negotiation mistakes people make that put them in a position of weakness or vulnerability, leaving them powerless to defend their position or gain any meaningful wins. Learning what not to do is just as important as learning what to do for a successful negotiation to take place.

So, let's do a bunkai of the Art of the Mutual Win and analyze what doesn't work so you can be better prepared to be a better negotiator. It's an important skill set to master, as you negotiate more often than you realize, as you will learn in the rest of this guide.

15 Common Negotiation Mistakes



1. Lack of Preparation - Whether you are negotiating the price of a household appliance or the terms of a new job, you want to go in prepared with the facts. Do your research before you go into the negotiation. Find the hard numbers for the price of the item at competitors' stores.

Learn about what others in your field with similar experience and education are getting for doing the same job. Also, make sure you know your own priorities. If you don't know exactly what you want, it's going to be impossible to get it. Educate yourself about what's available and decide what you most desire so that you can make the most advantageous deal.

Prepare what you're going to say in an interview so you can properly articulate your strength, experience, and skillset.

2. Lack of Confidence – A lack of confidence in negotiation is often due to either a misunderstanding of what the negotiation is all about and entering into the negotiation unprepared or underprepared. Many people have the wrong idea about negotiations, believing that it's all about trying to win at all costs. If you believe you have to be aggressive or intimidating to be an effective negotiator, you're going to come off as a bully.

Secondly, going in unprepared or underprepared for the bargaining makes you feel like the other person has the upper hand, which is true. It's important to always go into a negotiation knowing as much as you can about what you want, what the other person wants and the facts that can persuade the other party to give you what you want. Doing your homework in advance puts you in a position to better articulate what you want and how it benefits the negotiation.

3. Trying to Get it All - Negotiations are a give and take, allowing everyone to win in some way. When you are unwilling to give the other person anything they want, you are likely to go away empty-handed. Remember, negotiation is the Art of the Mutual Win. It is not the Art of Divide and Conquer.

This is one reason why it's so important to know exactly what your list of priorities is before going into negotiations. What are your nonnegotiables? Where are you willing to yield? Finding common ground for the mutual win puts you in a position to get the most important things on your list. You must be willing to participate in the exchange and concede some points to gain others that are more important to you.

4. Caving to the High-Pressure Sale - We've all experienced this type of salesperson. Pushy and intimidating, they won't take "NO" for an answer. They are agenda-focused individuals who want to win at all costs. And their agenda is not helping you win in the negotiation.

They will play on emotions, claim scarcity or a high level of interest in their product or service, or offer a "limited time" bonus to entice you to take action now.



Their goal is to AVOID negotiation and get you to buy whatever they are selling and buy it now, at the highest profit margin possible. This is NOT a mutual win; it is a form of bullying.

Don't cave to high-pressure selling tactics used by individuals who want to stress you into making a decision that may not be in your best interest.

5. Not Being an Effective Listener – We have been given two ears and one mouth, but most of us are guilty of talking a lot more than we listen. We are all guilty of thinking about what we want to say next or the argument we want to make against what the other person said, instead of really listening.

But this can be the kiss of death in negotiations.

You want to listen carefully so that you know you fully understand what the other party is offering you. When you listen attentively, you can also learn important



things “between the lines.” Things like the party’s timeline, motivation, requirements, and expectations can all be learned by listening to everything being said.

For more on learning the Art of effective listening, [Master the Art of Listening](#) (A video masterclass)

6. Interrupting the Other Person - Even if negotiations are going well when you interrupt someone to make a point or argument, you are showing disrespect. You’re telling them what you have to say is more important than what they have to say. You should be listening for understanding to find that WIN-WIN, not waiting for your opportunity to speak.

When you interrupt, people get defensive. This can self-destruct the entire process of negotiating, leaving you with nothing. And once someone is offended (or feels disrespected), they are much less likely to be open and amenable to you, as trust has been broken.

Interruption is a quick way to abruptly end a negotiation, and not in a good way.

7. Focusing on the Unimportant – In a negotiation, it is important to keep the main thing the main thing. While it may feel safer or less intimidating to stay focused on the less important aspects of a negotiation, you're putting time and energy into details that likely don't matter right now.

For example, if you're negotiating to purchase an item debating over how it will be delivered may be a moot point. If you don't agree on the initial purchase, how it is delivered doesn't matter, does it?

Once the highest priority items are on the table, the smaller ones will naturally arise.

8. Being Unclear in Your Ask - How can you get what you want when you don't ask for it? The answer? You can't. Spend some time deciding what parts of the negotiation are the most important to you, do your research on those points, and then ask for them.

You've got to be clear in your Ask so there is no question as to what it is that you actually want, and what is most important to you in the negotiation.

If you are not clear in your Ask, how can you articulate it to someone else?

If the other party says NO and isn't willing to entertain what you want, this is where the give-and-take of negotiation comes in. Remember, negotiation is often a trade-off to arrive at a mutual win. Offer the other party a WIN by agreeing to meet one of their important demands in exchange for one of yours.



If negotiations have stalled, and one or more of the parties is being inflexible or their demands are unreasonable, you can always walk away. The one sure way you won't end up getting what you want is by not asking for it.

9. Talking Too Much – In negotiations, silence is uncomfortable. As a result, we often try to fill it by talking. But in negotiations, silence is golden. It doesn't mean the negotiation has stalled. It means the other party is thinking.



Clearly articulate your Ask, outlining what you want or need, then stop talking. Give the other person an opportunity to process what you've said, weigh their options, and respond. It may feel uncomfortable, but that is okay.

If you keep talking to fill the uncomfortable silence, you may end up giving away too much or start backing away from what you are asking for. This can put you in a powerless position to regain a WIN once you've yielded to the other person.

10. Procrastination – Putting things off to the last minute is nearly always an invitation to be taken advantage of. For example, when we wait until the last minute to buy a car, even though we knew ours was on its last legs, we are likely to rush the process.

We end up paying more than we want and not getting everything we want.

It's easy to give in to high-pressure sales tactics when we urgently need something we're bargaining for. Under stress, we don't think as clearly and we often justify a poor decision as expedient or necessary. And if we vocalize our desperation, we have once again put ourselves in a powerless position to negotiate successfully.

11. Not Having a “Plan B” – Otto Von Bismark was Chancellor of Germany in the late 1800s. He was known as a military genius who always incorporated a contingency plan in preparing his troops for battle. This strategy became known as Bismark’s “Plan B”, a common term used today as an alternative plan of action.

Professional negotiators often refer to this as your BATNA - Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement. It is a predetermined fallback position in the event negotiations stall or comes to an impasse, also referred to as your “deal-breaker”.

Without a fallback position, how do you respond if the best-case scenario you envisioned doesn’t materialize in the negotiations? For example, if you can’t even get close to the salary you want, will you turn down the job? Are you willing to take their offered salary if they throw in two extra weeks’ vacation?

What if your cell phone provider won’t offer you the deal you want, are you willing to switch providers? Knowing the answers to these questions make you a formidable negotiator. When you don’t know the answers, you may leave the negotiation feeling taken advantage of.

12. Focusing Only on Price - Since most negotiations center around money in some form, when we hear the word “negotiate” we immediately think price. Of course, the price is important and shouldn’t be ignored, but sometimes the other party can’t or won’t meet your price point. So then what do you do?



Your bargaining is dead in the water at that point because there’s nowhere else to go. Think outside of money in negotiations. You might get additional services, warranties, or other benefits instead of a lower price. Or a higher salary that can be just as valuable, if not more so, than having the extra cash in your pocket.

13. Showing Desperation – We touched on this earlier, but it is worth revisiting. Desperation can, and often does, show up in our communication with others, verbally and nonverbally. People can see it, sense it, and will often use this to their advantage (and your detriment).

Even if you are desperate, you must do your best not to show it.



If you have ever watched professional poker players on television, they remain emotionless even when thousands of dollars are on the line. Practice putting on your poker face and use it when negotiating. Try to take the emotion out of the negotiation and avoid limiting your options as much as possible.

One way to decrease the amount of desperation you may be feeling is to do your homework in advance. Research your options, create your BATNA, and don't put yourself in a position of desperation by being more proactive in your planning.

Taking action earlier instead of waiting until the last minute, helps avoid a desperate situation in the first place.

14. Avoid Making Personal Connections – A common tactic used by negotiators is to befriend the other person. Asking questions about your family, your pet, or your hobbies is a means to find something you share in common, a place to build rapport. Hostage negotiators, sales professionals, and phone solicitors are masters at this subtle form of psychology.

Studies show that when a person feels a connection with the person on the other side of the bargaining table, they are less aggressive in their demands and demeanor. For example, an auto dealer doesn't want you to haggle over price with them, so they cozy up to you.

This is an effective strategy you can employ as well. In most situations, you can chit-chat before the negotiations begin so that the person feels more at ease with you so that you are more likely to persuade them or find common ground.

15. Giving Away Too Much Personal Information – The more you talk, the more you potentially give the other person an advantage in the negotiation. A good negotiator asks great questions, listens intently, and shares only pertinent information to move the conversation forward.



Remember, this is a negotiation. While building rapport is important, you don't need to tell your entire life story. Exchange a few pleasantries and get to the business at hand, negotiating a Mutual WIN-WIN for all parties.

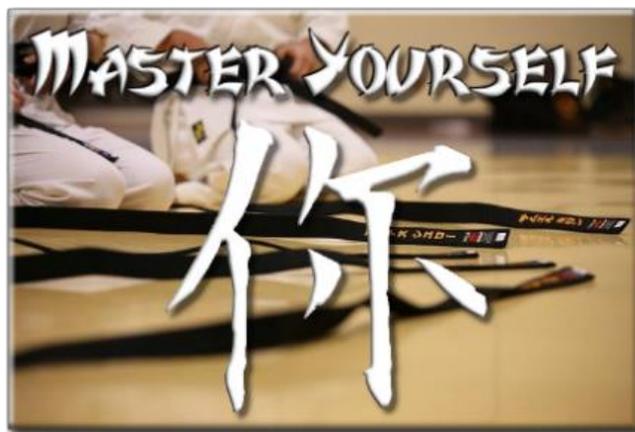
The more questions you ask, the more you learn about the other person. If you ask good questions, listen intently, and pay attention to what they are telling you, they will often tell you what you need to know so you can get what you want and they can get what they want.

Summary

In this guide, you've learned how to identify and overcome 15 of the common mistakes made when negotiating. The Art of Negotiation is a skillset you can learn, but it requires that you be purposeful and intentional. As you continue to review this guide, you'll internalize how to recognize and avoid these mistakes and improve your negotiation skills in the process.

If you'd like to learn more, let me invite you to my website where you can access my training course, **MASTER THE ART OF NEGOTIATION** (How to Get What You Want in Life). This course includes an On-Demand video class and the accompanying eBook will help you further improve your negotiation skills so you can become an even more successful negotiator.

It's one of several of the many training courses you can access from my website. Click on the image (or link) below to access this and other training resources.



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