

## Reading

### Power of Persuasion\* D. Brox

The question isn't, "Do you negotiate?" It's "How well do you negotiate?"

From requesting more resources to changing a stakeholder requirement, project professionals must negotiate every day.

Some people seem to have an innate ability to persuade others, but even the most timid project manager can hone his or her negotiation skills.

"The skills of a negotiator are just like any other technical skills you can learn," says David Freedman, sales director at Huthwaite International, a negotiation skills consultancy in Wentworth, South Yorkshire, England. "Very seldom are these skills inherent in people's DNA."

Project managers may lack the authority to make big decisions, but they can still influence factors such as budget, scope, timelines, and resources.

Before heading into your next negotiation, remember the following tips.

#### Think Positive

You might not have authority, but that's no reason to take a defeatist attitude, says Aarathi Villivallam, PMI-RMP, PMP, a program manager at Unisys, a global IT consultancy in Bengaluru, India.

"Often, project managers are not keen to negotiate, thinking that negotiating for something reflects poorly on their capabilities," she says. "Also, they interpret requests as orders and agree to them meekly. Get over these misapprehensions fast."

Remain flexible when requests for changes arise—and don't launch immediately into negotiation mode.

"Don't say no to something that might seem like an unreasonable request at first," says Tres Roeder, PMP, president of Roeder Consulting, a project management training, consulting, and coaching firm in Cleveland, Ohio, USA. "Instead, say, 'I can do that, but there are going to be tradeoffs.'"

#### Develop the Necessary Traits

Mr. Roeder explains that there are six core traits important in negotiating:

- Awareness: Assess whom you're dealing with and that person's style.
- Whole-body decisions: Use your head, heart, and gut to be fully informed.
- Clear communication: Meet face-to-face if possible and explicitly spell out why you're making a request.
- Adaptability: Know when to hold your ground and when to back down.
- Diplomacy: Be sensitive and understanding.
- Persistence: Don't give up, but also be careful not to push too hard.

Practice these skills every day, starting in small ways, such as listening to how people respond when you describe project setbacks and propose solutions, suggests Karen Brown, PhD, professor of project management leadership at the Thunderbird School of Global Management in Glendale, Arizona, USA, and coauthor of *Managing Projects: A Team-based Approach* [McGraw-Hill, 2010].

Problems constantly arise during projects: A key team member falls ill and can't work for two weeks; essential equipment breaks down and requires repair time not allotted in the initial schedule; or materials are not available at the assumed price.

"Many project managers tend to hide this information from sponsors and other decision makers because they think they can correct the problem on their own," Dr. Brown says. "The result is that many project managers don't step forward to negotiate a new schedule or budget until it's woefully too late."

Instead of concealing these issues, keep the sponsor, customer, and other high-level stakeholders informed of setbacks so they are mentally prepared when it comes time to negotiate.

"The project manager who surprises the sponsor by attempting to negotiate a three-month extension just weeks before the project deadline will not have much credibility," she says.

#### Negotiation in Action

**Project:** Construction of the London Olympics infrastructure.

**Problem:** Lack of resources. You've got a limited supply of the equipment necessary for cycling and weightlifting.

**Don't:** Say, "Clearly we've only got a finite amount of resources. As far as we can see, the obvious solution is *x*." You haven't explained your side and your language doesn't leave room for negotiation, says David Freedman, Huthwaite International, Wentworth, South Yorkshire, England.

**Do:** Ask questions such as, "How many people are you expecting for the weightlifting event? What sort of TV audience are you anticipating?" Then ask similar questions about cycling to ascertain which event is most important to the sponsor.

**Negotiation:** Propose, "Cycling seems to be our priority—even if it means cutting some corners on weightlifting. Have I got you right there?" Wait for the sponsor's confirmation.

**Result:** You've established that you understand your stakeholders' priorities, and your proposal is more likely to succeed.

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