

Ethical negotiators use smart strategies, not ploys

**Your goal is to win the sale
and keep the relationship**

By Brad Agry

Many people mistakenly put too much energy into manipulating others to get what they want versus strategizing to conduct a mutually respectful negotiation, comments Merna Skinner of Exec|Comm, a New York executive communications training company. Skinner recommends approaching the other party with a solid strategy, remaining neutral until sufficient information about them is uncovered and staying flexible when it comes to the give and take of actual bargaining and final deal-making.

So what's the difference?

How do you differentiate between *smart tactics* and *manipulative ploys*? Tactics include methodical preparations for your meetings and careful interactions that delay any commitments on your part until the other person's needs are uncovered. Ploys are behaviors designed to throw off the other negotiator by catching them off-guard so that they are apt to inadvertently agree to things while emotionally unnerved. These include deferring decisions to a higher authority to buy time, asking for more at the end of the negotiation, artificially raising one's voice to challenge a stated price or pitting your offers against fictitious competitors.

The ethical negotiator will resist such shortcuts, and use a professional and methodical approach. Below Skinner offers a proven way to negotiate:

✓ **Plan your strategy:** Know ahead of time what you want, what you'll take and what your "walk away" position is. During the planning, set your aspirations high as possible and find out as much as you can about the other negotiator. Ask yourself, "What will they likely open with or ask for during the meeting?"

✓ **List a full range of bargaining currencies:** Currencies can include the timing of a final transaction, the support and service required, or the number of units you will take. The longer your list ... the stronger your starting position.

✓ **Research the other negotiator:** Find out as much as possible about this individual beforehand. Is he a forceful negotiator? Does she have time constraints on the project? Is this person's company solidly in place or is he still building a reputation?



Merna Skinner

If you know the other negotiator's style, you will be able to modify how you communicate in a way that flexes more in their direction, thus improving rapport.

✓ **Set a positive meeting climate:** Ideally, you should be sitting at either a round table or 90 degrees from the other party. Body language should communicate receptivity and a willingness to listen to the other person's point of view.

✓ **Bring an agenda that both parties can use:** This will subtly give you control over the meeting. Get agreement from your fellow negotiator. Saying something like, "Does this include everything we need to discuss?" will ensure that you both are at the same starting point. If, the other negotiator challenges the content, this will be the first part of negotiation you must tackle.

✓ **Neutrally obtain information:** Probe the other party with open-ended questions to gain as much information as possible during the negotiation. At this stage, remain as nonjudgmental as possible. For example, acknowledge everything but agree to little. During this phase, focus on uncovering the importance of various factors to your opponent. If you know what the other person values and in what order, you will be a better negotiator.

✓ **State positions:** At this point, you and your fellow negotiator must state your respective positions, which often means talking price. Always get the other person to talk dollars first because it generally gives you a stronger position. Remember, unless both of you clearly know the other's starting position, subsequent negotiation will be fruitless.

✓ **Bargain methodically:** Remember that giving and receiving concessions are part of the process. For every concession you give, make sure that you receive one in return. Because most concessions occur at the end of a negotiation, retain as many of them as long as possible so you can trade at the very end.

✓ **Agree in writing:** You should write a contract as soon as possible outlining agreements. If the final legal document will take time, at least get a co-signed letter of agreement while you await detailed paperwork. ■