

TRUTH

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If you have only one hour  
to prepare...

Negotiation does not just occur in used car lots, boardrooms, or lawyers' offices. You negotiate every day: with your spouse to split up household tasks, with your colleagues regarding who will take a client's call, with your young kids to determine the best time for bed. Any time meeting your goals requires the cooperation of others, you must negotiate.

Sometimes you have significant time to prepare for a negotiation. But other times you get blindsided: You get a call from an old friend with a "hot" business opportunity. Or you receive a disturbing email from a colleague claiming resources you believe to be yours. Or your nanny or assistant threatens to leave unless you give her a raise and a three-week vacation. In all these situations, you may feel there's no time to prepare for negotiation.

But even if you've got only an hour—or just moments—to prepare, there are several crucial steps you have to take.

1. Identify your key goals.
2. Brainstorm your options.
3. Plan your opening move.

## Get in touch with your goals

Negotiators are often quick to stake out a position. A position is a demand, such as, "I want a bonus check!" The danger in stating a position is that it can lead the other party to stake out a position, such as, "No way; I'm not paying you a bonus!"

Conversely, negotiators who move past positions to focus on their interests usually achieve their goals. A real goal reflects a negotiator's interests and answers the "why" question. Take the case of two colleagues negotiating who gets the more spacious office in a suite. It would be easy for both colleagues to say, "I want the bigger office." That is a demand. If the colleagues articulate why they desire the bigger office, they are getting closer to stating their goals. For example, one colleague might want the larger office because it would allow her to have team meetings that are

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currently impossible to schedule in a conference room, and she is under pressure to deliver on a deadline. The other colleague might want the office to impress important clients.

People's demands may be incompatible, but their goals might be compatible or at least complementary. For example, if the two colleagues articulate their goals, they might create an arrangement in which they share the big office, reserving it for meetings with clients.

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### **Brainstorm your options**

Negotiations do not always end in mutual settlement. A colleague may pull rank to acquire the big office; the nanny may quit; the company may not take your offer. So you need to face the thorny question of what you would do in the absence of agreement. In short, what are your alternative courses of action? Most people have tunnel vision when it comes to their alternative courses of action in a negotiation. They are so focused on their demands that they can't see all the different paths through the forest. Identify your options using the four fundamental rules of brainstorming.<sup>1</sup>

- Suspend your initial judgment and just list all options that come to mind, even outlandish ones.
- Strive for quantity—often, a good idea emerges from several silly-sounding ones.
- Reserve judgment and evaluation until later.
- Mix, match, and combine different options.

### **Plan your opening move**

Your opening offer should clearly articulate your goal and suggest how to reach it. ("I would like the corner office because my client load is highest in the office, and my team is unable to fit in the current space.") You don't need to blurt out your opening offer the

moment you meet with the other party. But, at some point, after you exchange pleasantries or perhaps even after the other party places something on the table, it will be your turn to anchor the negotiation. Your opening offer should represent the ideal situation for you. State it clearly, but do not position your offer as a demand. One direct but nondemanding way of doing this is, “In the spirit of getting the discussion started, I’ve mapped out a set of terms that works for me....” Or “I want to respect your time, so I have prepared a proposal that I would like to get your reaction to....”

Be firm on your interests but flexible on how to achieve them. Don’t make take-it-or-leave-it demands. If you are feeling demanding or indignant before the negotiation, rehearse an opening that you might present to someone you care about (such as your spouse or friend)—even if you don’t particularly care about the other party. The danger of making insulting, take-it-or-leave-it offers is that most people will opt to leave it.

