

The Six Principles of Successful Workplace Negotiation

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No matter what your job title, chances are you engage in workplace negotiations every day. Whether selling products or services to clients, vying for more company resources, driving your ideas through to completion, or simply managing the day-to-day workload, being able to successfully negotiate with others is essential for success.

At its core, negotiation is really about persuasion—how you present your ideas to others in a way that moves them to agree with you, to reach a meaningful compromise, or to take action. Researchers have identified six fundamental principles of persuasion—or influence—that do not involve the merits of the proposal but rather the way in which you communicate them. When you understand and use these principles ethically, you, too, can become a more effective negotiator.

1. The Principle of Reciprocity

People tend to give back to others what has been given to them. While some people think of Reciprocity in terms of exchanging money, goods, or services, it really involves so much more. For example, when participating in a conversation or discussion, by providing others with attention, information, concessions, and respect, you will likely receive the same from them in return. In order to maximize the Principle of Reciprocity in a negotiation, you should be the first to “give,” and be sure what you give is personalized and unexpected.

2. The Principle of Scarcity

People want what they can't have. That's why advertisements that promise “Limited Time Only” or “Limited Quantities Available” are so effective. In a workplace negotiation situation, it's important to describe the unique, or otherwise unattainable advantages of any recommendation or offer you make. However, research shows that in situations marked with uncertainty, people are more apt to take action when they know what they stand to lose, rather than what they could possibly gain. Therefore, when negotiating, it's important to not only tell people the benefits they'll gain, but also what they could lose if they don't move in your recommended direction.

3. The Principle of Authority

Research shows that people typically follow the lead of those they perceive as credible and knowledgeable experts. This makes sense, especially since legitimate authorities have attained their positions by virtue of greater knowledge, skill, or expertise in their field. Unfortunately, many experts mistakenly assume that others will naturally recognize their expertise. However, this runs the risk of sabotaging their success. For maximum impact, arrange to have a third party communicate your expertise. Another option is, before you ever start negotiating, to provide the person you want to influence with articles about your accomplishments, credentials, background and expertise (i.e. LinkedIn profile, your bio on your website, etc.)

4. The Principle of Consistency

People feel compelled to be consistent with their prior behaviors, opinions, actions, or statements. When someone makes a commitment actively, it's even more likely that they'll follow through with that commitment. When negotiating, you can activate the Consistency

Principle by recognizing a prior commitment and linking it to your current request. If possible, take it a step further by getting the commitment in writing, because people tend to live up to what they write. The more public the commitment, the stronger the pull to a related request.

5. The Principle of Liking

People are more easily influenced by those they like. But what makes someone like you? Science tells us there are three important factors that contribute to likeability: 1) we like people who like us (and tell us so); 2) we like people who are similar to us; and 3) we like people who cooperate with us toward mutual goals. Therefore, when negotiating, take the time necessary to locate genuine shared interests and points of agreement before delving into your idea, proposal, or recommendation. In other words, get to know people more meaningfully before talking business.

6. The Principle of Social Proof

People often rely heavily on others for cues on how to think, feel, and act. Hence, the “proof” of what is correct isn’t grounded in facts and statistics, but in the social environment. This tendency to look to and follow the lead of similar others is strongest in situations with uncertainty. To use Social Proof effectively in a negotiation situation, rather than trying to demonstrate it yourself, it’s important first to present testimonials from others that are similar to your fellow negotiator. The more similar the testimonial providers are, the stronger your case will be perceived.

Negotiate for a Win-Win Outcome

Negotiation is an essential component in business, and your ability to influence others is a vital skill. But remember that the key is to influence ethically. Only then will you achieve your objectives as you guide the other party to the optimal decision for their needs. That’s how your negotiation skills can benefit everyone and lead to true and lasting results.