

WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?

Negotiating with a client you can't afford to lose is never easy — here are seven tips to help you get a better deal

All too often as a professional within a professional services firm, you find yourself negotiating. More often than not, it will be with a client you cannot afford to lose.

Or perhaps you are agreeing on the all-important fees and terms of engagement at the start of a contract. Here are seven top tips that will help you achieve more with your next negotiation.

1 Explore other options before negotiating

Negotiating costs time and money. Think about it. When negotiating, you have to give stuff away in return for concessions from the other side. In addition, if you negotiate too hard, you risk damaging relationships.

If you can positively influence or problem-solve together, you can often avoid the need to negotiate and preserve (perhaps even build) the relationship. As you are aware, the world of professional services is a small place and you cannot afford to get tagged as "unreasonable".

2 Know from the outset what is your "walk-away-position"

Having clarity about your "best alternative to negotiated agreement" gives you the ability to know when to walk away from a negotiation. That way, you stop yourself — in the heat of the moment — from giving away too much.

3 Look to preserve the relationship

You never know when you may need a favour (or a referral) from the other side in a negotiation. It may not be this week or next week, but in my experience, professional paths tend to cross frequently.

It goes without saying that if you are in negotiation with an existing client, it is of paramount importance to preserve the relationship.

It costs seven to 14 times as much to find a new client, than to get more work from an existing client.

4 Explore your opponent's agenda and needs

This is really best summed up by the phrase "seek first to understand". If you understand the other side's agenda and needs, you can put together a proposal that is most likely to be accepted early into the negotiation process.

5 Think creatively

Most people think negotiation is all about money. Actually, you can negotiate about anything — I found myself this week-end negotiating about "order of service" booklets and what my daughter was going to eat for breakfast.

Before going into a negotiation, think about what you can offer to the other side, which would not cost you much, but will be of a high value to the other side.

Plus, think about what the other side could offer which would help

sweeten the deal for you. Some ideas for you include payment terms, free advertising, referrals and introductions, invitations to events and delivery time, etc.

6 Hold your nerve

Negotiations can be very tense affairs. If you are not sure what you are agreeing to, ask the other side for a summary of their proposal or take a natural break to give you the much needed thinking time.

If your negotiating opponent is playing hardball, you have two choices — play hardball back or give the other side feedback on the impact they are making on you.

7 Don't give away concessions without getting something in return

Remember how the ducks at the park never seem to understand that they are only going to get one piece of your sandwich?

Well, it is the same in negotiations. If you give away a concession without asking for something in return, the other side will carry on asking for concessions until you say no. - Source: ST/ANN

● **Article by Heather Townsend, the founder and director of The Efficiency Coach, a coaching and consultancy company dedicated to helping professional service firms and small businesses achieve more.**



Negotiation is not just money; it can include invitations to events. - EPApic