

TELEPHONE NEGOTIATING

When communicating with others, we use words, tone and non-verbal cues. As many know, non-verbal communication is extremely important, if not the most. But, in today's negotiating world, face-to-face interactions have diminished and resulted in more discussions via phone, email and even text. Although it is usually better to negotiate face-to-face, geography, time and commercial priorities dictate faster communication, whether virtual or phone. Unacceptably, many negotiators lower their guard when on the phone or video. Below are things to think about when negotiating over the phone.

First, let's explore some of the positives and negatives for negotiating over the phone or possibly refusing to do so.

- For collaborative and/or complex negotiations where significant interactions are required, avoid the phone – relationships are difficult to build and maintain on the phone.
- Some individuals are more aggressive on the phone and feel more in control. If you are on the receiving side, it might be best to force face-to-face interactions to secure a better result.
- Just because someone refuses to meet, does not mean the phone must be used. You could refuse to use the phone or email. If a deal needs to be done, a meeting will happen.

PREPARATION

- **You Make the Call:** Be the one making the call. If they call you, set a time when you will call them back. (Applies to everyone on the team, most importantly, senior management – they are calling outside a set time for a reason.) Be in charge and in control.
- **Scheduling Calls:** Do not accept or schedule calls when you are on the run. Make sure you can focus in a non-public place. No calls in an airport or airplane.
- **Set an Agenda**
 - Start/End Time: Don't let them cut the call short.
 - Topics: Provide structure. What you want to cover. What you will not cover.
 - Outcome: Provides a purpose.
 - Send agenda prior to call. Possibly set a standard of "no agenda, no call"
- **Document at the Ready:** Have your data handy and easily visible – planning documents, spreadsheet, correspondence, documents etc. Don't expend mental effort scrabbling around looking for the right document.
- **Questions Ready:** Have all questions prepared (written) and ready to go in front of you.
- **Silent Observer:** You may want to have a silent observer listening to the call.
 - Listening for soft language, hesitation, etc.
 - Acting as leader and making final decisions
 - Note taker
- **Call Recording:** In some geography's it can be legal to record the call without telling the other party. If legal, and make sure it is, this can be extremely beneficial for two reasons. First, it allows you to carefully review what you might have missed. Second, it provides great training for yourself as you review what you said, when and how. There is always room for improvement.

EXECUTION

- **Small Talk:** This builds the relationship. Find something in common and build on it.
- **Agenda Review:** Secure alignment from the other party on how the call will proceed.
- **Be Mobile:** Stand up, if it suits you – especially at key moments or if the negotiation becomes adversarial. This will give you a better psychological feeling of being in charge.
- **Be Concise and Precise:** The more you explain, the greater any confusion. Confusion is much easier to generate on the telephone than face-to-face.
- **Tone is Key:** With no non-verbal communication, tone becomes even more important. Use it wisely.
- **Listen Carefully:** Listen hard for hesitations, wavering language, interrogative voice intonation, which are all indicators of discomfort and room for movement. Be an active listener. Listen to what they say and importantly, what they don't say.
- **Use Silence:** Silence will feel longer on the phone. Be prepared for the other party to ask if you are still there. Resist the temptation to fill silence. You don't learn anything when you talk.
- **Flinch Audibly:** They can't see you roll your eyes in frustration, so you are going to need to verbally tell them. The other party must get the same message of unacceptability. Make your flinch appropriate to the type of negotiation and their position. Think about how you want to achieve this before you make the call. "Wow!" "Seriously?" Sarcastic laughing.
- **Time-outs:** Use them. If appropriate, arrange a date and time to resume the call. Alternatively, put call on hold if you need to consult with a colleague.
- **Take Notes:** Simple, but sometimes overlooked.
- **Summarize:** Summarize more frequently, especially at the end of the call. It is imperative to confirm understandings of progress and outcomes. This might be done by email immediately afterwards.