

The 5 Brilliant Emotional Intelligence Tactics This FBI Agent Uses to Negotiate

Not a hardcore negotiator? No problem. Here's how to make emotions work for you.

BY JUSTIN BARISO

My father was a [hardcore negotiator](#)--the kind that used car salesmen actually *feared*.

Not me.

For years, I cringed in similar situations. I was a [peacemaker by nature--to a fault](#). Afraid to push too much for fear of losing out altogether, I often settled...and ended up with the short end of the stick.

But that changed when I started studying successful negotiators. In time, I realized that the ability to understand emotions and use them to work for me, also known as [emotional intelligence \(EI or EQ\)](#), could be valuable at the negotiating table.

Chris Voss, founder and CEO of The Black Swan Group and author of [Never Split the Difference](#), is a former lead international kidnapping negotiator for the FBI. In a [recent piece for TIME](#), Voss detailed a few of his strategies for winning negotiations. As he explains, the traditional advice to show "a poker face" and keep emotions out of the negotiating room is completely wrong.

"How can you separate people from the problem when their emotions *are* the problem?" asks Voss. "Emotions are one of the main things that derail communication. Once people get upset at one another, rational thinking goes out of the window. That's why, instead of denying or ignoring emotions, good negotiators identify and influence them."

"Emotions aren't the obstacles to a successful negotiation," says Voss. "They are the means."

So how can you use emotions to your advantage when negotiating? Here are Voss's suggestions, with a few of my own thoughts.

Learn to mirror words selectively.

"Repeat the last one to three words your counterpart just said back to them," says Voss. "This is one of the quickest ways to establish a rapport and make your counterpart feel safe enough to reveal themselves."

Additionally, this technique allows you to slow the conversation down, providing more time to think.

Use *empathy* strategically.

Demonstrate to your counterpart that you're striving to understand their feelings.

Voss recommends phrases like "It sounds like you are afraid of..." and "It looks like you're concerned about..." to do this.

An additional tactic is to sit down before the negotiation and list the weaknesses of your position. Doing so allows you to prepare for the difficult questions, and even beat them to the punch.

Get them to "no".

Every yes is a concession to the other side; at least, it sometimes feels that way. Allowing opportunities to say no gives the other person a measure of control and gives them a sense of security.

Ask no-oriented questions like: "Have you given up on this aspect?" and "Is it too late to talk about x?"

Rephrase and summarize.

Here's Voss:

"The moment you've convinced someone that you understand their dreams and feelings is the moment a negotiation breakthrough can happen. Trigger a 'that's right' response by summarizing and reaffirming how your counterpart feels and what they want.

A great summary that will trigger a 'that's right' will be done based on feelings and passions that are driving them but that they may be blind to."

I do this personally by repeating what my counterpart says in my own words.

Let's say a client tells me they think I'm worth the price or terms I'm asking for, but they can't afford to pay it--because they're afraid other contractors would discover this and demand the same. I follow with something like: "So what you're saying is that you don't want to risk your relationships... and that you're not ready to bind yourselves to a new precedent."

Acknowledging their side and mirroring their point shows them I understand, and contributes to a feeling of working together.

Work with your counterpart. Not against them.

Good negotiators realize that striving for win/win outcomes produces the best results.

My favorite piece of advice from Voss: "Don't try to force your opponent to admit that you are right."

Because remember: In negotiations, the more the other person likes you, the more flexible he or she will be.

Putting it into practice.

Whether [attempting to persuade](#) our spouse or child, a boss or client, all of us are in the negotiation business. And emotions will *always* influence the outcome.

Base your discussion on these principles, and make those emotions work for you, instead of against you.