

THE GREAT NEGOTIATION RACE: WHAT WE REALLY NEED TO DO NOW BREXIT IS REAL

10 Brexit negotiation tips!

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Negotiation

It's hard to find an article that isn't asserting a view on Brexit right now, but it's even more difficult to find one that gives real help and guidance on what business leaders, politicians and the rest of us need to get on and do.

There is much talk of the need for negotiation, and lots of it! This article gives a snapshot of the difficulties we face and outlines 10 tips around what we really need to do to survive and emerge strong in the new world of Europe - and the international marketplace beyond.

The politician's rhetoric of the moment risks painting a picture of the forthcoming Brexit world as one where we all wait eagerly for teams of specialist negotiators to charge in and save us all from certain catastrophe. Yet, in fact, Brexit and the changes that will unfold over the coming months and years aren't only the concern of politicians driving negotiations at country level.

Governments will need to talk about how trade might continue, of course. But Brexit will also demand that we all have good negotiation skills because somewhere, at some point, there will be Brexit triggered changes that affect us and the organizations for which we work, and where we will need to agree a new way forward.

The degree to which we will need to do this in only just becoming clear. However, if our personal or professional lives have any sort of EU connection, interaction, relationship, customer or supply arrangement, or need to comply with EU laws and standards, then we will most likely find we need to roll up our negotiation sleeves. Otherwise, waiting for politicians to 'do the deals' might leave us lagging, or even left out, especially if we find they are still trying to determine how best to proceed.

So, what are we up against? Today, it is widespread ignorance of the strength of our position. The more we talk of needing to negotiate, the more we weaken our position, giving the other side the power of time in the face of our desperation to end our uncertainty. We also seem to be experiencing widespread crises of confidence in our ability to negotiate our way to a new

great place, something our new 'over the border' friends will sense a mile off. Add to this the fact that those with whom we will need to negotiate didn't choose to be in this situation and may resent being forced to 'come to the table', they could decide to play 'hard to get' in response. It also doesn't help that much of the talk is already about what can be used as bargaining chips. Free trade requires free movement of people, and then there are the ex-pats and foreign nationals each becoming political bargaining chips.

The problem with this approach, whether at a country, organization or individual level is that the negotiation can soon degenerate into a big game of chicken, where there can only be one good winner. Chicken negotiations achieve only short term wins and we have too much at stake to negotiate in this way. We need a different approach. This, and in fact all of these current challenges we face should not faze us as negotiation here is not that difficult, and here is why and how.

Whether we are negotiating trade deals at country level, how we will work with a supplier, or establishing a cross-border deal with a customer, there are some simple things we can do to negotiate effectively and stay in control of the negotiation.

I. STAND STRONG AND TALL

It is easy to not believe our position could be sub-optimum and if we believe that, we are likely to start off on the back foot. Worse, our opponent will quickly spot our lack of confidence and claim advantage. If we are going to negotiate, we must first take time to understand the strength of our position, which is most likely greater than we realize - do thorough homework, plan and take the lead early on and throughout. Don't be over-confident as perceived arrogance can work against you.

2. IF WE HAVE SOMETHING THEY WANT...

...they will get it just fine! We are not negotiating for the moon in the hope that we might just swing it. We will, in most cases, be negotiating for something we already have, just in a new context. If our arrangements between countries, companies or individuals worked well for

both parties before, neither will want to jeopardize that. However, watch out for the other party seizing the opportunity to nudge things a bit more in their favour.

3. THEY MUST COME TO THE TABLE

We might encounter signs of resentment at having to come to the table - or they could resist as a deliberate tactic. If there is interdependency, or a dependency on their part, then they will have to sooner or later, even if they present the illusion they want to hold back. Would a country really want to damage exports, or a company lose a vital supplier for the sake of bad feeling? It's unlikely and, even if it were the case, good relationship building can counter this. If they are not playing ball, help them see the consequences of inaction.

4. CREATE TIME, REMOVE OUR DEPENDENCY, FIND THEIR DEPENDENCY

If the other side sees that we need to cut a deal quickly or we are dependent upon them, they have the power and can claim territory from us easily. Instead we must find a way to create all the time in the world (or at least such an illusion). Where we are dependent on them, it is important to figure out what we would have to do to remove that. It is this action, even if we never intend to follow it through, that can give us a vital power. More important is our understanding of how dependent they are on us and using this leverage to our advantage.

5. FIGURE OUT THE NEGOTIABLES

Be clear about the shopping list of things we want or need (our 'negotiables'). Crucially, we must also anticipate theirs and what they may try to use as bargaining chips against us. Here, it is essential that we negotiate around the big picture and always deploy the 'something for something' principle whilst avoiding agreeing to multiple one-sided 'salami slicing' mini-concessions along the way.

6. FOCUS ON WHAT THEY WANT, WHAT THEY REALLY, REALLY WANT

What they say they want or need might be very different to what they really want or need. Behind the things over which people bargain lie the real things that are motivating them. If we can discover what these things are, then our negotiation can provide help or solutions for these. Asking hypothetical questions such as "If we could find a way to do "x", then would that take away your concerns over "y"?" can help here as they get the other side to reveal what matters to them.

7. FIND ALTERNATIVES

Power in negotiation comes by having alternatives - or at least the illusion of alternatives. If our opponent believes we have no choice but to cut a deal with them, effectively we give them all the power. Ask "What else could we do here if we really needed to?" and this very question can open up other possibilities which might help us find alternatives. When we negotiate happy in the knowledge that we have alternatives, we will stand taller and negotiate harder to secure the right outcome.

8. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND SELL THE FUTURE

Consider what relationship we need or want to have with the other party beyond the deal and work to build it as a pre-requisite. It's easy to think that we should adopt a cold, arm's length stance, but this is counter-productive. Sales people know this, so work hard to build a relationship. When there is a relationship, the negotiation gets easier as there is a degree of trust, and even obligation, established. This is especially important when negotiating with the more southern parts of Europe. Doing this is about selling ourselves, and, quite simply, making them like us as individuals. If you like someone, you are more likely to do business with them.

9. FORGET THE CHICKEN

Playing hardball games of chicken is unlikely to succeed unless we know we have all the power in the first place. So, we need a different approach. Even if they try to play negotiation chicken with us, we must change the game. With chicken, only one of us can win - and the other ends up disappointed. Instead, focus on a negotiation style that considers how both parties can contribute to increase their overall value. Think of this like two people trying to row a boat across a river - when both agree to row, real progress is made and both move forward. This type of negotiation can often encourage the other to want to find the right deal with us.

10. SEAL THE DEAL

Close the deal as soon as you see the glimmer of agreement. Inexperienced negotiators make the mistake of keeping negotiating as if waiting for the other to do something. This is counterproductive and causes the other to lose confidence. As any sales person will tell you - know when to close, summarize what you've agreed and close it!

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