

Fisher, Roger & Ury, William (& Patton Bruce for the 2nd ed) - Getting To Yes*Random House, 1991, [Surrounding Knowledge] Grade*

A negotiation boils down to all sides taking their positions, arguing their point of view, making concessions and finally striking a compromise. A good outcome is when the compromise is wise and efficient and when the relationships of those involved are not damaged. This book tries to answer the question: “*What is the best way for people to deal with their differences?*”

Too often there is not a good trade off between getting what one wants and still behaving like a decent person. Too much ego gets invested in the opposing positions and this type of positional bargaining leads to extreme opening bids, stubbornly holding your ground and deception of the other party while loosing sight of the underlying concerns of both parties. Negotiators “winning” in this way had better be sure that they don’t need to meet the other parties in the future and that they are not dependent on their own reputation. The Harvard Negotiation Project developed a method called Principled Negotiation that aims to solve the trade off by being soft on people but hard on principles, by looking to mutual gain where possible and where it’s not search for objective standards by which to resolve the conflict. Apart from teaching negotiation at Harvard the authors have gathered impressive experience from the US Department of Justice, the Department of Defence, from mediating in the Palestinian–Israeli and US–Soviet disputes, from various labour vs. management conflicts and corporate negotiations. The book has three parts where the first introduces the Principled Negotiation, the second goes further into detail and the final wraps up by discussing complicating factors and special situations.

The method can be summarized by four key features: 1) Separate people from the problem: Be secure enough in yourself to suppress your ego. Try not to view the negotiation as a contest between persons, but instead focus on solving the problem together. Try to understand the

motivation of the others, as their thoughts in a way is the problem to solve. Without being able to put yourself in their shoes you will never succeed. Instead there is a risk that one demonizes the other and ends up being inflexible to creative solutions. All this does however not include being gullible and trying to buy friendships by letting others use you. 2) Focus on interests not on positions: It is not obviously so that all opposing positions just include opposing interests. Try to disentangle their interests by asking “Why?” and your interests by asking “Why not?” 3) Generate multiple options before deciding: With more variables the chances increase of finding a win-win solution for both. Common missteps in negotiations are premature judgement, a search for one definite answer, a lack of interest in the other parties and a focus on beating the other instead of finding synergies. All this hinders the flexibility to use multiple variables, where identified shared interests are used to sweeten the deal for the other. The thought is to get what you want by making it as easy as possible for the other party to say yes. 4) Insist on that results should be based on objective standards: Counter the “no-concession-negotiator” by proposing fair and objective standards that are hard to argue against. This standard should be independent from both parties. Frame the discussion as a search for objective criteria, be open for reasoning on principles but never give way to pressure. Using this method will give the power of legitimacy over an opponent that uses threats, manipulation or simply refuses to budge.

Negotiations consist of preparations, negotiations and a solution. It’s hardly possible to overstate the importance of the first step and *Getting To Yes* will give a good foundation to this process. The focus on mutual benefit in *Getting To Yes* gives results that are sustainable over time. Despite it being more than 30 years since first publication this book is still sold as a pocket to travelling businessmen in airports around the world. Next time you see it, I suggest you get a copy.

Mats Larsson, February 10, 2014