

How To Negotiate Your Next Job, Raise, or Kid's Bedtime

By Samantha Schneider, MD

When I finished training and started looking for my first “real” job, I knew that negotiating my contract would be part of the deal. I’ve never had to negotiate anything before and really had no idea what I was doing and just saying the word “negotiation” gave me palpitations. I did what any new graduate does and asked my mentors for advice. Fortunately for me, one of them recommended “Never Split the Difference: Negotiating as if your life depended on it” a book by Chris Voss. I bought the book to help with my job negotiation but it has completely changed how I see the majority of conversations in my life.

Chris Voss is a former-FBI hostage negotiator who wrote this incredibly articulate, interesting, and helpful book on negotiation – with real life FBI hostage examples! He argues that almost everything in life is a negotiation from the obvious job contract to getting your toddler into bed. I wanted to share a few of the key points so that you too can negotiate like a boss.



1. People want to be understood → Active Listening

Because it is a fundamental human characteristic to want to be understood, it is critically important to be a good listener during a negotiation – no matter what side that you are on. As physicians, most of us think that we are *excellent* listeners but there are certain things that you can do to make sure that the speaker agrees with your assessment of your listening skills. Key skills in active listening include mirroring certain key words or phrases, using the “pregnant pause” at key points, and validating the other person’s emotions. These tools provide a perceived safe space for the speaker because it shows that you are validating what they are saying and understanding. This gives the speaker permission to keep talking and it gives you the opportunity to hear what is important to them in this conversation. After all, the goal of any negotiation is for both sides to come out with what they perceive as a win. In order for that to happen, you need to figure out what is the minimum baseline for a deal (i.e. their need) and what is their idea of a win (i.e. their want).

2. Late night FM DJ voice

Now, technically in his book, this is a technique to aid in active listening but I have found the “late night FM DJ voice” so useful that I have given it its own section. Think about the calm, low, slow, soothing voice of a late-night radio DJ. Speaking in this voice forces you to slow down, which calms your breath and your brain and it puts the other person at ease. By slowing the conversation, you comfort the other person and give yourself time to think. It also comes off as very non-confrontational. It is best when used with mirroring or when asking “calibrated questions” (see below).

3. Calibrated Questions

I find *calibrated questions* key to any negotiation. The goal of these questions is to get the other side to think about how to effectively solve your problem for you. These questions start with “How” or “What”

and, as such, force the other party out of a “Yes/No” answer format. Now, they have to think about how to answer your question and that forces them to think about a solution to your problem. For instance, if you’re negotiating a job contract, you might ask: “How can I be expected to take on the malpractice risk as well as the time and effort of supervising a midlevel provider without receiving any compensation for that responsibility?” Now, you’ve asked the other side to answer that question and hopefully realize that it doesn’t seem reasonable to ask you to take on the malpractice risk and not pay you for it.

Additionally, “how” questions are powerful because they are a way that you can gently decline an offer: “How can you expect me to provide the high level of service that we pride ourselves on to our patients with half of my staff?” – *said in the late-night FM DJ voice with a pregnant pause afterwards.*

And, by continuing to ask “how” questions, you force the other side to consider their offer and effectively start bidding against themselves:

“Well, I see what you’re saying. That would be hard to keep the service up with the staff down. What if we decrease your staff by 25%?”

“Dr. X. Do you agree that our highly efficient system for providing quality care for our patients is important?”

“Yes”

“How can you expect me to continue to provide that level of service with fewer staff?”

“Well, what if we decrease the number of staff but increase their level of training?”

Do you see how in the example above, you’ve forced the other side to think of a solution instead of telling them what you want (which is a nurse instead of an MA)?

These are a few of the many techniques that Voss discusses in detail with examples in the book, which I would *highly* recommend you read. And, the last key piece of advice is to remember that negotiating feels uncomfortable. It is a skill and like any other skill it needs to be practiced. Find some “low stakes” situations and try some of these skills out. Is tomorrow date night and your partner really wants sushi but you’d rather go out for Thai? Perfect. Cue the *late night FM DJ voice ...*