

# **GETTING TO YES**

## **NEGOCIATING AGREEMENT WITHOUT GIVING IN**

By: Roger Fisher & William Ury  
Published by Penguin Books, 1991

Fisher and Ury's "Getting to Yes" is an excellent book on the topics of; negotiation and communication, separating people from "the problem", focusing on interest and not positions, inventing options for mutual gain and the power of using objective criteria. In this book negotiation is defined in a much broader context than most of us are accustomed. Regarding leadership, negotiation can be considered a motivational tool used to help your team get behind your objectives (keeping in mind that your objectives may change and improve with the interaction of your team).

Fisher and Ury's negotiation techniques allow us to separate people from the problem. This is critically important in our dealings with people who have differing opinions from our own. Leading your team through these negotiations while maintaining a healthy relationship is essential to the longevity of the relationship. Very seldom can we afford to destroy relationships to win on any given topic. When we negotiate, we are never in negotiation with abstract representatives of the "other side", but with human beings. They have emotions, deeply held values, and different backgrounds and viewpoints. A working relationship where trust, understanding, respect and friendship are built up over time can make each new negotiation smoother and more efficient. Also, when dealing with people, we must keep in mind that people can get angry, depressed, fearful, hostile and frustrated. Failing to deal with others sensitively as human beings prone to human reactions can be disastrous for the negotiation and the relationship.

Negotiation based on interest versus positions is an excellent example of how a win-win situation can be achieved in a leadership model. The sum of the parts is greater than the whole. In this context, there are no clear individual winners, but the participants win as a team. As described in this book, many of us will form a position and fight to win-over our opponent. In this scenario, we have created a situation that would prohibit creative thought, synergistic problem solving and viewing potential solutions as beneficial to both parties. By focusing on interest, we are no longer weighted down to one solution to the problem, but are free to comfortably explore alternative solutions that give us what we want while at the same time fulfilling the wishes of our partners across the table.

Inventing options for mutual gain is an excellent tool in leadership as well as in any negotiation. Fisher and Ury's book address this issue claiming that at the end of a negotiation, something is almost always left on the table (money, resources, time, etc.). Too often our perception of reaching an agreement consist of; an offer, a counter offer and then both parties splitting the difference. This approach stymies creative thinking and may seem simpler, but overlooks opportunities for a better solution. In most negotiations there are four major obstacles that inhibit the inventing of an abundance of option for consideration; (1) Premature judgment; (2) Searching for the simple answer; (3) The assumption of a fix pie size; and (4) Thinking that "solving their problem is their problem." I'll discuss these below.

### **Premature Judgments**

Judgment hinders imagination. Criticism of new ideas will hinder the process of invention. Other obstacles may include; the presence of those on the other side of the table (your boss perhaps); inventing solutions that may disclose some piece of information that could jeopardize

your bargaining position; inventing new ideas may be perceived as an offer, or that you may look foolish in suggesting some “half-baked” suggestion. All of these concerns inhibit your ability to think creatively in developing a better solution for everyone.

The Solution? Separate inventing from deciding. Fisher and Ury suggest brainstorming and provide a step-by-step approach to successful brainstorming. This requires trust among the participants and an adherence to agreed upon rules.

### **Searching for the Simple Answer**

In problem solving, we tend to believe that the process of negotiation is already too complicated and that by adding many new options we are further complicating the process which will in turn drag the process out. Since the end product is a single decision, we fear that free-floating discussion will only delay and confuse the process.

The Solution? Fisher and Ury offer a tool called the Circle Chart which can be used to force us to think outside the box and come up with many different options. There are four methods outlined in this process, each taking different aim at the problem.

### **The Assumption of a Fixed Pie Size**

Another explanation for why there are so few options on the table is that each side sees the situation as an either/or – “either I get what is in dispute or you do.” Why bother to invent at all if this is a fixed-sum game and I can only satisfy your needs at my own expense?

The Solution? Work to identify shared interest. These opportunities are often overlooked in our quest for the quick or simple solution. This book outlines helpful tools to work together to develop creative solutions.

### **Thinking that “solving their problem is their problem”**

According to Fisher and Ury, another obstacle to inventing realistic option lies in each side’s concern with only it’s own interest. Frequently, we are reluctant to give legitimacy to the views of the other side. Emotional involvement on one side can make it difficult to achieve the detachment necessary to think up ways to meet the needs of both sides.

The Solution? Creating an environment which allows both sides to express why their interest is important to them will help create a sense of empathy for their concerns. Again, Fisher and Ury explain why this is important and how to make it happen.

Highlighted above are some of the tools explained in this book and why they are important. Fisher and Ury also explore problem solving techniques which include; what to do if one side is clearly more powerful, what to do if they do not want to “play” or if they are using dirty tricks. These topics are well written, but the most useful tools for open communication and negotiation are covered in the first five of the eight chapters. Also included in the appendix are the top ten questions we all ask about this process.

I found this book highly valuable and would strongly suggest it to anyone who wishes to improve their communication and negotiation skills. Many of the techniques outlined can be used for a host of problem solving exercises.