

Getting to Yes

The Harvard Negotiating Project has spent many years understanding human needs in order to develop clearer guidelines for those wishing to reach agreement without giving in. They believe that as more attention is devoted to positions, less attention is devoted to meeting the underlying concerns of the parties. In positional bargaining, you try to improve your chance of a favourable settlement by starting with extreme views and stubbornly holding on to them. It becomes a contest of will with negotiators asserting what they will and won't do. Being nice is also no answer. If you are too concerned about keeping relationships sweet and play a soft game, you run the risk of reaching an agreement that does not serve your needs, especially if the other side plays a hard game. The alternative, proposed in 'Getting to Yes' involves:

- Separating the people from the problem;
- Focusing on interests, not positions;
- Inventing options for mutual gain;
- Insisting on using objective criteria.

The first point responds to the fact that human beings have emotions. Participants should see themselves as working side by side, attacking the problem, but not each other – there is no reason why they should not empathise with each other's predicament. Taking positions, however, makes things worse, as people's egos become attached to positions. The second point reflects the fact that compromising between positions is not likely to produce an agreement which will effectively take care of the human needs and interests that led people to adopt those positions.

Trying to come up with a solution that successfully fulfils both party's needs and interests requires a creative approach which can often be inhibited by having a lot at stake and being under pressure. It is best to set aside time to lay out options for mutual gain, without any pressure to agree on them. Finally, to ensure that no one party blocks proceedings by being irrational or stubborn, it is important to insist on objective criteria.

Winning people over to your idea

The principles above emphasise managing human emotion separately from the practical problem and highlight the human need to feel heard, understood, respected and valued. Dale Carnegie similarly summarises 12 general and widely relevant principles in the classic 'How to win friends and influence people' (see box).

12 principles to win people to your way of thinking

1. The only way to get the best out of an argument is to avoid it.
2. Show respect for the other person's opinions. Never say: 'you're wrong'.
3. If you are wrong, admit it quickly and emphatically.
4. Begin in a friendly way.
5. Get the other person saying 'yes, yes' immediately.
6. Let the other person do a great deal of talking.
7. Let the other person feel that the idea is his or hers.
8. Try honestly to see things from the other person's point of view.
9. Be sympathetic with the other person's ideas and desires.
10. Appeal to the nobler motives.
11. Dramatise your ideas.
12. Throw down a challenge.

Source: Carnegie (1953, p196-7)

