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Negotiation 201: Refine Your Skills

Negotiation 101 taught you the basics of wheeling and dealing; now learn how to make every encounter go your way.

by Cecilia Rothenberger

In person, [Susan Podziba](#) is everything you would expect from a good, tough-as-nails negotiator. Calm, refined, and completely unflappable, she speaks slowly and deliberately, and makes you feel that she is *really* listening when you speak. That's her job.

Podziba, a professor of mediation at Harvard and MIT, plays broker for some of the hairiest negotiations around, from public policy to marital disputes. Some of her more perilous mediations have included talks between Israelis and Palestinians, and between prochoice and prolife advocates during the aftermath of a Massachusetts abortion-clinic shooting.

Several weeks ago, fastcompany.com featured [Negotiation 101](#), outlining Podziba's nine principles for negotiation success. But what happens after you've learned the basic skills? You need to apply them to your own advantage.

These last-minute tips will keep you cool and calm, and help you collect in the end.

Set Inclusive Goals

Every negotiation requires careful thought and planning. It also requires common sense. Given that many disputes cannot be fully resolved, it is best to work on the most urgent conflict and to address the most crucial interest of each side.

"We are never going to be able to sit at a table with the goal of creating peace and harmony between fishermen and conservationists," Podziba says. "But we can establish goals big enough to include the key interests of each party and resolve the specific impasse we are currently facing. Setting reasonable goals at the outset that address each party's concerns will decrease the tension in the room, and will improve the chances of



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reaching an agreement.

Set Reasonable Deadlines

"Negotiations will balloon to fill the time allotted," Podziba says. She advises setting reasonable deadlines rather than assigning arbitrary time slots. Mediators should attach consequences to deadlines to give the dates real value and to motivate parties to move more quickly toward an agreement they may otherwise evade.

Keep Emotions at Bay

Most negotiations, by their very nature, are emotional. But a properly executed negotiation can be very humane and relatively painless. Podziba believes that people can be good negotiators, provided they maintain the confidence to pursue what they want.

"It is not a matter of tactics, or scheming," she says. "The key to a successful negotiation is building trust with the other party, being clear about what you want, and legitimizing what the other party wants in order to create a joint problem-solving discussion as opposed to a hard bargaining situation."

What else must a good negotiator remember? Patience. "Impatience, or any other surge of emotion, can ruin a negotiation," Podziba says. The best way to deal with an emotional tidal wave is to channel that adrenaline into productive energy. Take deep breaths and keep yourself on target by referring back to your written [range of possible agreements](#) to keep yourself on target. Irrationality can ruin a carefully crafted relationship, or can cause you to concede to something you will later regret.

Don't Show Your Cards

Salary negotiations involve a number of issues beyond money. And while it's best to explore the options and interests of every party, Podziba advises mediators not to set down the first number in monetary negotiations. She explains, "Once you put that number out, you've locked yourself into a range that will reach away from your ideal number. Being able to set the first anchor away from the first number mentioned will get you closer to your desired goal."

In a raise discussion, a competitive job offer is your best tool. This alternative gives you security and confidence in the face of faltering agreements, and serves as its own anchor. If another organization is willing to pay you more money for the same work, your case has been argued for you.

For more on negotiation strategy, see [Negotiation 101](#).