

NEGOTIATING AGREEMENTS GOD'S WAY**By Rick Boxx**

Business negotiations are fraught with opportunities to turn into stressful experiences. To help in reducing this tension, I have learned five guiding principles on how best to negotiate agreements. The first principle is: Clearly define your desired outcome from the transaction. Recently, Rod needed to hire a new videographer. He examined his budget and considered the maximum value he could afford to pay. Even though his preferred new vendor quoted a higher price, because of Rod's research, he was able to counter the price and strike a mutually beneficial deal.

One day religious leaders asked Jesus about the greatest commandments. Jesus responded, "The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). Researching and knowing a fair outcome for yourself is a way of loving yourself, so that you can also love others well.

The second principle is: **Avoid negotiating with those you cannot trust.** A previous bank customer of mine was represented by a chief financial officer who was very manipulative. This CFO would use his other bank relationships to pressure us to give him a better deal. We agreed to better pricing until I learned that the CFO had been lying to me. When I realized I could not trust him, I refused to negotiate our terms any longer. If it had been up to me, I would have terminated the relationship. Proverbs 12:22 teaches, "The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy." If you cannot trust someone, any agreement will likely become meaningless later.

The third principle is: **Understand the other parties' needs and concerns.** In the Bible's Old Testament, the story of Boaz's pursuit to marry Naomi's daughter-in-law, Ruth, is an example of shrewd negotiating. Because of Jewish law, one person had first rights to redeem Naomi's land and marry Ruth. Boaz considered the situation and the impact on the other potential redeemer. He introduced the subject by highlighting that negative impact. The potential redeemer declined, enabling Boaz to marry Ruth. Proverbs 13:3 teaches, "Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding." By gaining understanding and knowledge of the other party's needs, you likely will have a favorable outcome.

The fourth principle is: **Always work toward a mutually beneficial, "win/win" agreement.** Stan was a bank customer who believed he always needed to win all points of every negotiation, making the bank the loser and his business the winner. Stan won occasional battles, but that did not bode well for a fruitful long-term relationship. I began dreading negotiations with Stan; out of frustration, I was not as generous as I could have been. In Philippians 2:3, the apostle Paul wrote, "In humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." God prefers that we focus on win/win solutions rather than ignoring the needs of the other party.

The final principle is: **Lean toward being generous.** In the biblical story of Joseph, Egypt had seven years of famine. To afford to buy food, all Egyptians sold their land to Pharaoh. The

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Egyptian king, however, needed them to farm the land, so Joseph worked out a win/win sharecropping arrangement.

We see in Genesis 47:24 that Joseph told the Egyptians, “But when the crop comes in, give a fifth of it to Pharaoh. The other four-fifths you may keep as seed for the fields and as food for yourselves and your households and your children.” By only requiring 20 percent for Pharaoh, Joseph received favor from the Egyptians and provided them the opportunity to create wealth both for themselves and for Pharaoh.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. How do you typically feel when you are about to engage in negotiations, whether with a client, your supervisor, or an employee? Do you find it stressful? Why or why not?
2. When you are negotiating, do you usually know your desired outcome – or do you just go into it hoping for some kind of acceptable resolution? Explain your answer.
3. What are your thoughts about striving to arrive at a “win/win,” mutually beneficial agreement when engaging in negotiations?
4. The final recommended principle for negotiating agreements is to lean toward being generous. As you understand it, what does that mean? What are some potential problems or challenges in trying to do this?

Challenge for This Week

During the coming week, try to think back on times when you have engaged in negotiations. How well did you align with the five negotiating principles presented in this week’s Monday Manna? Did you strive for a mutually beneficial, win/win outcome – or was your goal only to maximize your own interests.

If negotiating effectively seems to be a challenge for you, it might help to seek feedback from a friend, mentor, or small group in which you can discuss your thoughts and concerns candidly.

NOTE:

For more about what the Bible says, consider the following passages:
Proverbs 12:19; 16:11; Romans 12:10; Galatians 5:26; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5