

# Agree to Agree

FOUR WAYS TO ETHICALLY OPTIMIZE YOUR NEGOTIATION TACTICS WITH EXPERT TODD CAMP.

BY JOEL SWENSON



**T**he word “negotiation” brings all sorts of different scenarios to mind—high-profit mergers and acquisitions, tense hostage situations, employment contracts and messy divorce proceedings, to name a few. Ultimately, the goal of these and any other negotiation is reaching an agreement, regardless of context. But despite what TV shows like *Succession* would have you believe, reaching that agreement doesn’t usually involve backstabbing, name-calling or other nefarious tactics.

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For Camp Negotiation Systems co-owner and chief negotiation officer Todd Camp, negotiation is a family affair. His late father, Jim Camp, wrote the book *Start with No: The Negotiating Tools That the Pros Don’t Want You to Know* and founded the company that Todd and his brother, Jim Jr., now co-own. Jim Sr. tapped Todd as a contributor for his follow-up book, *No: The Only Negotiating System You Need for Work and Home*. The coaches at Camp help clients prepare for, execute and manage the nuanced and challenging conversations that occur during a negotiation using an ethical negotiation system. Among those clients are Fortune 500 executive teams, the FBI and many venture-backed startups.

Camp says there are four key ways individuals and organizations can optimize their negotiation tactics to reach their desired outcome ethically and more effectively. These four methods hold true whether you’re negotiating as part of a fundraising campaign, an acquisition, contracts with investors or board members, large commercial agreements and countless other scenarios.

1.

## SHIFT YOUR MINDSET

Most people have detrimental mindsets that impede their ability to reach that outcome. Typically, they fall into two camps (no pun intended). The first believes that all negotiations require compromise. While compromise does happen, expecting to concede does a lot of harm, especially when negotiating against the second mindset—those who take a “by-any-means-necessary” approach. Using power and leverage to get everything they want, this type of negotiator is often aggressive, dishonest, contentious and, frankly, a bully. Again, think *Succession*.

Camp doesn’t believe in either of those styles. Compromise isn’t compulsory in a successful negotiation. He also coaches clients to act empathetically and demonstrate respect toward those they’re negotiating with.

“The mindset shift that we ask people to go through is to be comfortable forgetting about how you’ve negotiated in the past and how you’ve previously thought about it,” Camp says. “Be open-minded and coachable to a new way of thinking about it.”

2.

## TAKE ‘NO’ FOR AN ANSWER

Camp defines negotiation as an effort to bring about an agreement between two or more parties, with all parties having the right to veto—and that right to veto is critical. He coaches clients to not only get comfortable hearing “no” at the negotiation table but to welcome it. It signals that the other party feels safe to do so. More than that, hearing “no” makes you more apt to say it yourself.

“We look for a ‘no’ three or more times before it might be a good business decision to make a concession,” Camp continues. “Every time you hear ‘no,’ it’s important to find out what’s happening. Where’s that ‘no’ coming from? How are they able to make that decision? What don’t they see today that we need to help them see?”

Camp says a “no” typically stems from one of four places:

**They lack the emotional vision of the benefit of saying “yes.”** If you don’t paint a clear enough picture and go straight to the price tag, that’s an easy way to lose a deal quickly.

**They need more data. Data is important.** Every decision people make is based on some combination of data and emotions. Presenting the right balance is critical to getting a “yes.”

**They don’t have the authority to say “yes.”** The person you’re negotiating with might not be able to say anything other than “no.” Negotiations are likely to stall if they aren’t the real decision-maker.

**They’re using “no” as a tactic to drive concessions.** That “no” is a bluff to force you to give up things you don’t need to.

## 3.

### KNOW WHAT YOU WANT

One of the most important things an organization can do to ensure a successful outcome is to negotiate amongst themselves first. If your team doesn't have alignment on what it is you're trying to achieve, you're operating at a considerable disadvantage. But if everyone from the CEO to the company representatives at the table knows exactly what success looks like, it's much easier to confidently ask for what you want until you hear a "yes."

Camp acknowledges that negotiating with your boss or peers isn't fun. But he says it's important to have a "consult-and-then-decide" internal culture instead of "decide and tell people what we're doing." Team members deserve an opportunity to have a voice and provide their input.

"The other party is going to continue asking for things until they see you aren't moving over multiple iterations," he says. "You have to have a stomach for that. It's uncomfortable because you don't know what's going to happen. But, usually, where we see the magic happen is when our teams can become 100% aligned and not move off what they're asking for over a period of time."

## 4.

### KNOW WHAT *THEY* WANT

Even more important than knowing what you want is knowing what the other party wants and how they want you to provide it. Determining that may seem daunting, but Camp says it all starts with a thesis of what you *think* they want. Then, it's as simple as asking them to confirm your assumptions. The sooner both parties can get on the same page about what they're each trying to achieve, the real negotiations can begin.

The advantage of understanding the other party's desires ultimately makes it easier for you to ask what you want—and vice versa. When everyone in the room understands what's at stake, you should feel more confident in asking for what you want, enabling you to give them what they need to get the deal done. ♦

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**SWENSON** IS A MINNEAPOLIS-BASED WRITER SPECIALIZING IN EVERYTHING FROM TECH AND BUSINESS TO MUSIC.

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