

Characteristics of Great Sales Negotiators

Virtually everyone in sales is required to negotiate. After conducting hundreds of workshop and working with thousands of people during the last decade, I have discovered that most sales people are not as effective at negotiating as they could be.

However, I do come across great sales negotiators from time-to-time and have noticed that they typically have a few things in common. Here are the characteristics they usually possess.

Understanding of the negotiating process. Highly effective negotiators recognize that negotiating is a process, not just something that is done when discussing the terms and conditions of a solution. Negotiating is much more than haggling about price. It requires an understanding of the dynamics that affect the process and influence the behavior of people. Great negotiators invest time learning different tactics and strategies and how each technique contributes to the overall outcome.

Focus on win-win. Win-win means that both parties feel good about the outcome of the negotiating process. Some books that state win-win solutions are not possible in business negotiating; the authors write that someone usually gives away more than they should and the outcome becomes a win-lose situation. Great negotiators don't believe that. They help their customer try and solve problems and look for opportunities to give as much value as possible. They also know how and when to limit their concessions, give-aways, and discounts so they can work out an agreement that is equitable for both parties.

Patience. Too many people search for the quick fix try to close the sale as fast as possible so they can move on the next prospect. Great sales negotiators recognize that patience is a virtue and that rushing the process often leads to an undesirable outcome. They don't hurry to reach an agreement. Instead, they take time to gather the necessary information. They think carefully about possible solutions. They take their time during the entire process. This is critical because major mistakes are made when we try to reach an agreement too quickly. We rush through the process, not giving the other person's offer ample attention, and often end up with an outcome that is win-lose. Simply because we were in a hurry.

Creativity. Most great negotiators are also very creative. They use their problem-solving skills to determine the best solution and look for unique ways to achieve their goal. A friend of mine was once embroiled in a bitter lawsuit with a company and after months of negotiation, he came up with a solution that ended the suit. He stretched out beyond the normal

answers and developed an alternative that was accepted by the other party. In other words, he got creative.

Willingness to experiment. Negotiating is a very dynamic process because no two people are alike. What works extremely well in one situation can backfire in another. That's why great negotiators practise using a variety of concepts and techniques. They experiment with different strategies, solutions, and tactics. And a small failure does not prevent them from experimenting with new ideas in the future.

Confidence. Great negotiators are confident when they enter a negotiation. They aren't arrogant or rude or cocky—they are simply confident. They have developed a high belief in their ability to reach an win-win agreement. They are confident that they can handle anything that comes their way in a negotiation and this confidence is developed through experience. Great negotiators evaluate themselves regularly. They learn from their mistakes and victories. They focus on improving their skill. They develop an internal confidence that is unshakable.

Keen listening skills. People will tell you virtually everything you need to know if you ask the right questions AND listen carefully to their answers. I personally believe that this one attribute is the most important skill in selling and negotiating. I remember my wife talking to a prospect on the telephone and at one point during the conversation she sensed that he had more to say. She waited patiently and listened carefully and the other person eventually gave her valuable information that helped her close the sale. Unfortunately, too many sales people simply wait for their turn to talk, or even worse, interrupt their prospect. This lack of listening means they often miss hearing key information that will assist them in the negotiations.

Negotiating is not a skill that is easily acquired. It takes time, effort and energy. If you want to improve your negotiating ability you must be ready to work at it. Invest the time learning the dynamics and science of negotiating. And be prepared to push yourself out of your comfort zone.

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