

6 Powerful, Non-Sleazy Phrases to Use in a Negotiation



What's your exit strategy when you reach a stalemate in a negotiation?

That was a trick question. Exiting doesn't have to be your first and only option.

Whether you're negotiating a business partnership or a deal with a prospective customer, there are many ways to open up the conversation for a productive negotiation that benefits all parties.

For instance, if the other party wants a discount on your product, two possible responses are:

1. "No, that's not an option."
2. "Okay, I'll discount it for you."

However, there's also the option to dig deeper to understand why they think a discount is necessary. Do they not trust that the product is valuable to pay for? Why not? Is their budget an issue? Why is that?

When you find out the real root of the issue, you can speak to that challenge instead of focusing on the price.

Below are six powerful phrases you can use to have more productive negotiations and close big ticket deals.

1) “Is it okay with you if I steer the agenda you to maximize the value of this conversation?”

Sometimes the person you’re speaking to might ramble on about their weekend or an old client they had -- subjects that may not be important to the conversation. It’s important to make sure you’re using their time wisely. Staying in control of the agenda is the best way to be upfront about respecting your prospect’s time and making sure your conversation is productive for both parties.

2) “Tell me what you think I can provide.”

According to Harvard Law School’s negotiation program, you should get an understanding of the other party’s expectations and what they’d like from you. By being clear from the outset, both parties are aware of whether or not they need to raise or lower their expectations. This sets the tone for a productive conversation -- if a conversation needs to be had at all.

If you can’t provide what they’re expecting, tell your prospect. Be clear on what solutions you can provide. If you know you’re not a fit, introduce them to another option that would be a better fit. One of the worst things you can do is lie about what you can do for them.

3) “What’s the most important issue for you to solve?”

Dig deep and find out what their goals are. According to the classic book on negotiation, Getting To Yes, you should focus on the prospect’s top priorities.

You might find yourself in a situation where the prospect will bring up many challenges, but when pressed, they share that their biggest goal is to improve their marketing and generate more revenue for their business.

Follow up with, “Just so I can understand the issue better, tell me what happens if that issue doesn’t get resolved.”

Now that you know what their biggest challenge is, you can focus on how you can help them solve it.

4) “Is X a big problem or a deal breaker?”

Sometimes, the other party may present objections that may not be a real issue. This is another way of asking, “So what’s the *real* problem here?” By being straightforward, you can understand what the prospect’s concerns really are and focus on that.

For example, price objections are often raised because prospects don’t see the value of the product.

Remember that prospects aren’t really fixated on price. They want to solve a business problem, so if they can’t look past cost it’s because they aren’t sold on value.

In this case, the wrong response is: “This is actually a really good price compared to our competitors.” That response doesn’t create value for them.

Your goal should be to zero in on your prospect’s goals and demonstrate how your product can help achieve them.

5) “If [objection] is resolved, are you happy with everything else?”

If you reach a dead end in the negotiation, table a major objection for the moment and make sure everything else is satisfactory and explore what’s on the other side.

If we revisit the earlier example, say the following to your prospect with a price objection: “Let’s pretend that you have unlimited budget and cost isn’t an issue for you. Is there anything else about the software you’re concerned about?”

The prospect might share more concerns such as learning how to use the product, ease of use, the amount of time it takes to see a return on investment, and so on.

Now you have more angles to approach the negotiation. To alleviate those concerns, you can provide some concessions. You can let them know you’ll include free training and onboarding, ongoing support, or set up a call between the prospect and a current happy customer.

6) “Maybe X isn’t a good approach. What other options are there?”

Some negotiations may go down a rabbit hole because both parties are too focused on miniscule details. By asking about other options,

you open up the realm of possibilities. Perhaps you or the other party had other ideas in mind that haven't yet been brought to light.

As explained in *Getting to Yes*, negotiation participants may fall into a win-lose mentality by focusing on shared interests. When each parties' interests differ, they can find options where those differences may complement each other.

By bringing in other options, you have more leeway to negotiate a deal that works for both parties.