FBI Negotiation Tactics You Can Use to Get What You Need

June 30, 2021 5 min read

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FBI agents face some of the most intense and consequential negotiation situations on the planet. This makes them gurus when it comes to knowing how to direct conversations and to get what they want. Most of their tactics apply perfectly to the business world and can help you drive sales, partnerships, and growth. So, let's look at some of the most important things you can do to make people feel like they own the idea/situation even while you're the one in the driver's seat.

The mirror principle

People are designed to respond to what other people are doing. You smile, it triggers someone else to smile. You yell, it triggers someone else to yell. Scientists know we've got mirror neurons in our brains that make this response happen, and they think it's meant to help us navigate situations and connect socially, to ensure a higher likelihood of being accepted into the larger group.

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With all this going on, emotions drive a lot of our behavior. You can never really eliminate them when you're working with a customer, person on your team, or anybody else. But what you *can* do is try to apply the mirror principle in different ways to show that you understand the other person, diffuse

tensions, and influence how they're feeling in a positive way. Negotiators call this "tactical empathy."

3 methods to help you get what you want and need for your company

1. Pick your tone

FBI negotiator Chris Voss asserts that there are three main "voices" you can pick to get people to relax and trust you.

- Late-night DJ voice: calm and slow, voice deflects downward, used selectively to make a point
- Positive and playful: easygoing, relaxed; smile while talking
- Direct/assertive: signals dominance

For the most part, the positive and playful voice can be your go-to. But the idea to remember is that your tone conveys just as much as the actual words you say. If you're in control of it, then thanks to mirroring, you can make the other person feel like there's no reason to worry, complain, or be upset.

Body language connects to tone because it sends nonverbal cues to the person you're dealing with. So try to be consistent between what you physically do and what you're saying. If you're going for a playful tone, then your body has to be relaxed, too. And when you're trying to read the other person, look for things like crossed arms, leaning away, etc. If what a customer signals with their body is different than what they say, then you know there's something under the surface that could stop the deal and that you have to dig a little deeper to diffuse.

2. Repeat

This strategy is as simple as it gets – just repeat the last few words the other person said. For example, if your customer says, “I like Product X, but the price is too high,” then you say “Price is too high?” Rephasing like this creates a feeling of familiarity between you and the other person. It usually gets the other person to cough up a little more information without you asking directly for it, too. They might answer “Yeah, I never pay more than $30 for one of these” or “I mean, the quality’s great, but I’m really on a budget now.” All that information becomes gold you can use to understand their pain points, needs, and wants. You can use it as leverage or sweeten the deal for them.

Another way to approach repeating is just to start your response with “I’m sorry…” For example, you could say, “I’m sorry your budget is tight at the moment.” The point here is to help them feel heard and acknowledge what they feel or are going through. Once you’ve done that, you can ask them what you can do to make things better or how you and the customer can solve their problem together.

3. Use labels

Labels describe your customer in some way. For example, if your customer is hyper-focused on cost, then a negative label could be “they hate high prices,” while a positive label could be “they love finding value.”

Either way, take that label and stick “It sounds/looks like…” in front of it. This validates how they’re feeling so you can build a bond. But it also gives them a chance to clarify your perception of them and their situation. If you get the label right, then you can figure out an action to attach to it. For instance, if they love value, then you might say, “It sounds like you love value, so what I can do is throw in/so I want to make sure you know about…” Or something along these lines.

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Has Mastered

Negotiate better – starting now

FBI negotiators are masters when it comes to taking the stress out of tough situations and getting people to agree. The mirroring idea is at the heart of what they do, and they always keep empathy and emotion in mind. Fortunately, their advice easily transfers to the office. Use their key methods of tone, repeating, and labeling starting today to create foundational rapport for long-term success.

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