

Preparing to Negotiate

Seven questions to consider as you get ready to go to the table...

- What do I want to accomplish?
- Why is this important to me?
- How emotionally vested am I in one particular solution (or point-of-view)?
- What will the other side be concerned about?
- What's at stake for me, or for others, if we do not reach a mutually agreeable resolution?
- What can I do or say to make the process go smoothly?
- What can the other side do, or say to make me feel my interests are being heard and considered?



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Reaching Agreement

Toolbox Skills for Disability Advocates



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Working in groups can require people with differing points-of view to reach meaningful AGREEMENTS that will guide next steps, frame policy decisions, or specify the investment of resources. These agreements are a kind of negotiated consensus.

Effective negotiators pay attention to at least 2 things when trying to reach agreement. First, they pay attention to the people around the table— including those who are not present but whose interests are being represented by others (such as children represented by parents, or school system personnel). Next, they work to understand the issues that are on the table (or close to it). Making sure that everyone at the table is on the same page is not always simple— but it is certainly important in reaching good agreements.



Reaching good agreements takes practice and some skill. An effective negotiator has two important goals. The first goal is to identify and address the issue in a way that leads to a good agreement. People often need to take some action after an agreement is reached. If the agreement is one-sided the follow-up will be too.

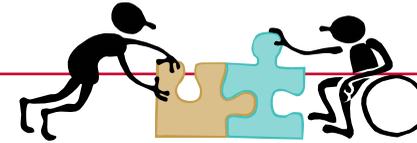
The second goal of a good negotiator is to work with the other person or people involved in a way that lets everyone leave the table feeling that their views were heard. Many agreements are made between people who have relationships that will continue— a bad agreement can damage a relationship while a good one can strengthen it and make future work together easier.

When these two goals are met it is more likely that the people who need to agree—or need to take action based on the agreement— will have reached consensus.

Consensus is a key word. It means that people agree that the approach, decision or solution is workable. It does not mean that every concern was addressed. Consensus is a way for groups to make progress toward a shared ideal. In the process, when a consensus agreement is negotiated, group members learn what is important to others involved in the dialogue. This approach helps lay the groundwork for future agreements!

Six steps follow to help you prepare for a negotiation that focuses on REACHING AGREEMENT. See the bibliography for books to help you learn more.

Reaching Agreement



Individual Preparation:

Step 1: Briefly describe the problem, issue or decision you are seeking?

Step 2: What is your alternative to reaching agreement? (What can you do if others do not have the ability or interest to deal with this problem?)

(Note: In *Getting to Yes*, Fisher and Ury call this a BATNA— your Best Alternative to Negotiated Agreement).



Step 3: What are the options that you believe could address the problem? (These are possible solutions— try to think of at least four that could work).

Step 4: What standard can you propose to judge the quality of options each party thinks will solve the issue or problem?

(You can invite each party to propose an external standard. A “standard” provides an opportunity to compare the invented options to something similar that has already been accepted more broadly).

Working Together: The Dialogue and Decision

Step 5: What alternatives to address the issue or problem are reasonable and doable?

Step 6: How well does each alternative address the needs of the people? Remember, that the people at the table and those being represented by others as well as those who the issue affects will need to “agree” at least in principle. (*Needs* include dealing with the problem as effectively as possible and dealing with short-term constraints like resources and personnel).

When you and the other people working to reach agreement have talked about these issues, you’re ready to pick one of the alternatives. Keep working together to pick the one that works the best, given the issue, the people’s interests and the constraints identified.

Congratulations! You’ve reached an agreement!

Resources

Covey, S.R. (1990). *Principle-Centered Leadership*. New York: Summit Books.

Fisher, R., and Ury, W. (1983). *Getting to Yes. Negotiating Agreement without Giving In*. New York: Penguin Books.

Fisher, R., and Brown, S. (1989). *Getting Together. Building Relationships as We Negotiate*. New York: Penguin Books.

Goleman D. “What Makes a Leader?” Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review; November-December 1998.