

Business tips from a hostage negotiator

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Business negotiations can be like hostage situations. Photo / Getty Images



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The majority of business deals are not on the same stress level as a hostage situation, but former negotiator Matthias Schraner says the same rules can apply.

Originally a police officer in Munich, Schraner spent six years working undercover before being trained by the FBI as a hostage negotiator and founding his company, Schraner Negotiation Institute.

While his former work included dealing with hostage situations, bank robbers and suicide attempts, his role today is using his negotiating tactics to advise the United Nations, global corporations and political parties during difficult talks.

"Often business negotiations can be like hostage situations - tough negotiations have high demands and no offer of compromise," Schraner said. "But there are ways to get around this deadlock and to get yourself back into the discussion."

Schranner told attendees at this year's Microsoft Inspire conference that in pressured situations, people tend to have either a fight or flight reaction, adding that understanding which type of person you are could help with negotiations.

Flight reactive people tend to try and delay a negotiation, allowing the other party to dictate the terms, or bring in their boss - effectively ruling them out of the negotiation.

Fight reactive people would often talk too much, neither option was helpful in reaching an agreement, he said.

"If you tend to be a fight person, under pressure you talk too much and you often end up going off script or off book and into territory you hadn't planned on," Schranner said.

"Stop talking. Say 'difficult' or 'interesting' and count to three."

Discussing a common goal and repeating the demands in your own words could help gain more information on what the other party was after, and allow for discussion, he said.

Business negotiation tips

- You can't convince your negotiation partner they are wrong:

You shouldn't use an argument in negotiation - you just get a counter-argument. If you believe you're right and they do too then you can't negotiate and you get into an emotional phase of arguing.

- Never offer a compromise:

This signals there's more you are willing to give, and that pressure works in getting you to give in.

- Don't delay a negotiation:

It makes the next negotiation harder because you come back with different expectations. It also allows the other person to dictate the terms of the negotiation.

- Don't 'superman':

Don't bring in the boss too early or too often - it makes you look weak in terms of your negotiation abilities.

- If you don't get what you want, don't start talking about consequences for the individual or their business:

Doing this blocks their options and your own.

- Never commit yourself in the beginning of the negotiation:

Never say 'yes', 'no' or 'but' too quickly.

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