

Negotiation skills

This page introduces the approach to negotiation, which can be useful for a number of work situations including arranging flexible working hours.

An awareness of positive ways to approach negotiation can be useful for many work situations.

Good negotiation skills can be useful to:

- arrange part-time working (or, if you are a doctor, a less than full-time programme) which meets your needs
- request a change in the pattern of your working hours suggest a change of meeting-time, so you can attend other appropriate activities, such as departmental meetings or training
- increase your skills and experiences
- improve professional relationships and increase your resilience



There are various approaches to negotiation but usually the most effective line to take in situations, is the win-win (sometimes called integrative) approach. A win-win approach is particularly important for creating stable long-term relationships with people. It's therefore considered the most effective approach to adopt for negotiations at work. In these negotiations an attempt is made to come to an agreement that benefits both sides.

How to adopt a win-win approach

Preparation is important and will put you in a strong position before you start to negotiate. Consider the following:

Objective (desired outcome)

- what do I want to get out of this negotiation?
- what do I think the other person wants to get out of this negotiation?

Trades

- is there something the other person wants that I can trade with them – in return for something I want?

Alternatives

- if I don't achieve my objective, do I have an alternative request?
- what alternative do I think the other person may be able to offer?

Relationship with negotiator

- what relationship do I have with the other person?
- will it affect the current negotiation in a positive or negative way?
- do I think there are any hidden agendas?

Anticipated result of negotiation

- do I think this will be affected by the results of a previous negotiation?

Consequences

- what are the consequences for me if this negotiation is successful - or it fails?
- what are the consequences for the other person?

Possible solutions (compromises)

Based on all of the above, what compromises are negotiable?

For a win-win approach to work you need to be:

- rational
- not overly emotional
- assertive, not aggressive
- prepared to listen to the other side
- professional

For long negotiations it may be important to keep a written record of the progress of the negotiation as well as the result. You may need a signed written record of the details of the agreement.

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Negotiation: example 1

You have been working for only two weeks in your new job and you wish to change your shifts and your rostered day off. You are working part-time and this will affect the work of the person with whom you are splitting your role. She is visibly not happy with your request and asks stiffly how long you were 'thinking of keeping this change to the rota?' You would ideally like to change shift permanently. However you would be still be happy with keeping the change for one month only. You have a three-way meeting with your supervisor. Do you ask that your rota can be changed for:

- a) one week (as a trial)
- b) one month
- c) permanently

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Answer to example 1

Best answer: c) permanently. It is best to start boldly and work down if you have to. If you do your homework as set out in the above section (win-win negotiation), then you can be in a better position to negotiate to get to as near as what you want as possible. For example, you could compromise by offering to cover your colleague's shift if there is some course they wish to do, or study-leave they would like to take. In this case as you are new in your job you will want to keep a good relationship with your colleagues.

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Negotiation: example 2

The person with whom you need to negotiate in order to move onto a part-time contract (or, in the case of doctors, the LTFT programme), catches you in the corridor and asks if you can spare a moment to discuss your application informally. You are taken by surprise, so do you:

- a) accept – this is an excellent opportunity
- b) refuse politely, but agree to fix a time to meet and enter into informal discussions

c) refuse politely and state that a formal date has been set to discuss the issue formally?

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Answer to example 2

Best answer: b) refuse politely, but agree to fix a time to meet and enter into informal discussions. This will give you some time to do your homework and prepare for the negotiations. An informal setting will mean that you can start the negotiations on a friendly, relaxed footing. As you will be in a working relationship with the other party, you will want to negotiate a win-win solution.

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