

Most People Fear Having To Negotiate. 8 Simple Steps To Get You Started.

Negotiation is a lot like public speaking -- it can be terrifying. Before I started to work in the negotiation field, I was terrified of having to “bargain” with someone else. I thought I would end up with the short end of the stick. I was afraid of either giving in too easily or getting so fed up that I would explode with anger. Therefore, I tended to avoid negotiating. I found myself not getting things I really needed and letting difficult issues simmer. If this problem sounds familiar, what can you do about it? Here are some simple ideas to help get you off the diving platform and into the negotiating pool.

1. See negotiation with an “abundance” view. People would not enter a negotiation unless they wanted something. Recognizing this and knowing that all parties can leave having gained something, can help reduce your anxiety. Sure, the pie has to be divided, but that’s not where you should start, nor is it where you should end. Seeing negotiation with a scarcity view is self-fulfilling at best. Try to think about why the other side is engaging you. Find ways that you could end up getting both your needs met.

2. Make progress not perfection. Negotiation can be even more challenging than public speaking, since unlike a speech, there are at least two people involved and there is no script. Therefore, the outcome is more unpredictable, causing anxiety. Expecting perfection is unrealistic. Making progress is a more realistic goal. Skill grows with experience.

3. Step into your own shoes. It is crucial to increase self-awareness and to see yourself objectively. What is it that you really want in this situation? What is success? What are the consequences of not negotiating? What will you not be able to achieve?

4. Step into their shoes. How does the other person see the situation? Are they out to get you? Or could they also be anxious and trying to protect themselves? Given your assessment of them, think how can you say things in a way that will best be heard.

5. Practice in “no-risk” situations. Opportunities to practice negotiating present themselves everyday. Go to a garage sale or flea market. Look forward to the next time you are at a restaurant and they get your order wrong. Gaining confidence in situations that are less risky can help you deal better in those negotiations that really matter.

6. Do your homework. Know your facts. What are the standards, precedents, data that may come up in the negotiation? What will you do if the negotiation goes south? Relevant information builds both negotiation confidence and competence.

7. Rehearse the challenging situations. Ask a friend or trusted colleague to help you practice. Again, since you ultimately have no control over the other party, focus on what you are going to do.

8. Relax. Most of us interact better when we’re calm and focused. Find ways to ease your anxiety. Whether it’s going for a run, meditating or reading a good novel, getting yourself in the right mindset is critical.

Getting over negotiation performance anxiety is a key to self-improvement. You can then focus on all the fundamentals and advanced skills of negotiation. Employing strategies to reduce self-consciousness, increase self-awareness and increase your comfort level are important steps toward better negotiating.