

● SKILLS

SEVEN STEPS TOWARDS SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATIONS

Moving pest management away from its chemical dependency often involves negotiations. We might need to negotiate with our school board, our county road department, our pesticide-using neighbors, our city council, a federal agency, and dozens of others who are making decisions about using pesticides. How can we make sure these negotiations are as successful as possible?

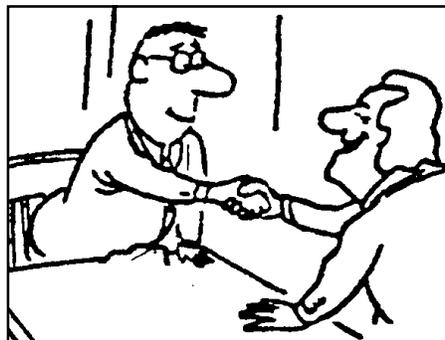
The Cooper Management Institute, an institute founded to train business and political negotiators, has distilled successful negotiations into the seven general rules below. The concepts often are equally useful in environmental situations.

1. Start high. Negotiations are a process of trading concessions. In order to be able to trade, you must start out by asking for more than you hope to end up with at the end of the negotiations. (Example: "We propose that all schools in this district be designated pesticide-free zones.") If you don't start high, you will later be faced with two unappealing choices. You will either give no concessions to the other side, thus looking unreasonable, or you will trade concessions and have to settle for less than your target.

This does not mean you should take a position that seems completely unrealistic at the beginning of a negotiation. You should start with the most assertive position that you can reasonably defend.

2. Don't make free gifts. During successful negotiations all parties will be moving away from their starting positions. Each step you make away from your start-

ing position should be matched by a concession from the other side. As you make a concession, add an "if" so that both sides are getting some of what they want. (Example: "We'll recruit parents, students, and neighbors to set up low maintenance landscapes around the school, if you'll agree to stop using herbicides in the shrub beds.") Don't undermine your ability to trade by simply giving concessions away.



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3. Make small concessions, especially at the end. Before you start negotiating, you and your supporters need to decide both your starting position and an ending target. As you begin to trade concessions with the other side, the first concession should be large. This establishes that you're negotiating in good faith and gives the negotiations a feeling of progress. Each subsequent concession should be smaller, about half the size of the last one. Roughly speaking, your first concession gets you halfway from your starting position to your target, your second concession another one-quarter of the way, and so on. As you get closer to your target, you move only in small steps. This is concrete evidence to the other side that the negotiations are nearing completion.

4. Ask for free gifts! While you would

weaken your negotiating position if you give away concessions, it's obviously in your interest to see if the other side is willing to make concessions without asking for a trade in exchange. In the language of professional negotiators, this is called a "krunch." At every reasonable opportunity, ask the other side if they have any flexibility, any room to negotiate, or any better offers. If they respond, accept their "gift" and ask again.

5. Settle everything at the end. Most negotiations tackle one issue at a time, until agreement has been reached on all issues and a deal is finalized. Don't be afraid to go back later in the negotiation process and take a look at issues that you discussed in the early stages. Maybe you can trade a concession on an earlier issue for something in the issue you're discussing now. Everything is on the table until the whole deal is finished.

6. Ask for a few minor concessions right at the end of the negotiation. Negotiation jargon calls these "nibbles." (Example: "I think we've almost got a deal here. If the school district will purchase a set of head lice combs for each elementary school, I think we can sign off.") Nibbles are not big concessions; the idea is that if you've gotten most of what you want, you can often get a little extra in exchange for your promise to close the deal. Nibbles should amount to no more than a few percent of the total agreement.

7. Look for creative concessions to trade. Sometimes there's a particular concession that's very valuable to the other side, but doesn't have a big cost to your side. (Example: "If the school district can commit to a 75 percent reduction in pesticide use over the next three years, we can nominate the district for an innovator's award from the governor.") Search for this kind of concession, because it takes your negotiations away from simply dividing up a pie; instead, the pie gets bigger.

Try these techniques next time you're negotiating about pesticides. They should help you end up with a stronger final agreement. Good luck! — *Caroline Cox*

Caroline Cox is JPR's editor. The material in this article is based on "Negotiate to Win," a seminar presented by the Cooper Management Institute.