

Power of persuasion

Charm and courtesy are often underrated as negotiation tools, says **Mike Phillips**. Here he explains how a less abrasive approach can yield better outcomes for purchasers



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For students of negotiation, *The Apprentice* has thrown up some interesting points. The stark contrast between the abrasive Katie Hopkins and ever-so-nice

Lohit Kalburgi was particularly intriguing.

In the world of negotiation, which style is most effective? Over many years in procurement I have encountered more abrasive Katie-type buyers than charming Lohit-types, so perhaps this suggests that abrasive sorts tend to be more successful.

But, if I want you to do something for me, particularly something you do not want to do, I have a much greater chance of success if you like me than otherwise.

The edict 'people buy people' applies just as much to procurement as selling. Negotiation is the art of persuasion.

Aggressive buyers often fear that showing courtesy might be seen as a weakness. Of course, the formula is – warm toward people, tough on issues.

When I begin an important negotiation, as well as seeking the best outcome, I want to end with the other party feeling satisfied.

You may be able to afford more ruthlessness with a one-off purchase but even then the best results are usually achieved by the persuasive but quietly assertive buyer.

Of course, we cannot choose our temperament. Some people are naturally abrasive and can come across abrupt even when they do not mean to. So, how can you develop your powers of persuasion?

Start by understanding that negotiation is not a competition. A top negotiator does

not want to leave the other party feeling defeated. However, this does not mean that you should be happy with a draw. It is perfectly acceptable to wish to achieve more benefits than the other party. 'Compromise' is a dirty word in my office! Even so, it is vital that the other party takes away something acceptable from the negotiation if there is to be any future in the relationship.

Second, use the power of contrast. Seasoned salespeople have often experienced years of shoddy treatment from poorly trained buyers. So never underestimate the effectiveness of courtesy toward salespeople. Never leave them waiting in reception, even if they are early. Always offer refreshments. Never neglect to take time to build a rapport. I guarantee you, treat a salesperson in this way and he or she will be desperate to please you.

Does this sound weak? Will the salesperson think you a soft touch? Bear in mind that so far you have given nothing of any significant value.

Lastly, when the time for hard bargaining comes, avoid making it personal. It is important to keep developing that rapport, so when you dig your heels in, as every top negotiator must, make sure the other party feels

you are only being like this because you have no choice. It should be 'Because we have to' and not 'Because I want to'. Blame the board, the market, or whatever you want to, but do not let the other party feel that you just want to get one over on them.

In the introduction to *The Apprentice*, Sir Alan Sugar is described as 'tough and uncompromising'. However, throughout the series, I have been struck by how charming he can be. Surely the mark of a top negotiator.

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KEY POINTS

- Be warm towards people but tough on issues.

- Remember, it is not a competition, but this does not mean you should accept a compromise.

- Courtesy costs very little but can be extremely powerful in a negotiation.