

# Negotiating For Success

By **Cindy Waxer**

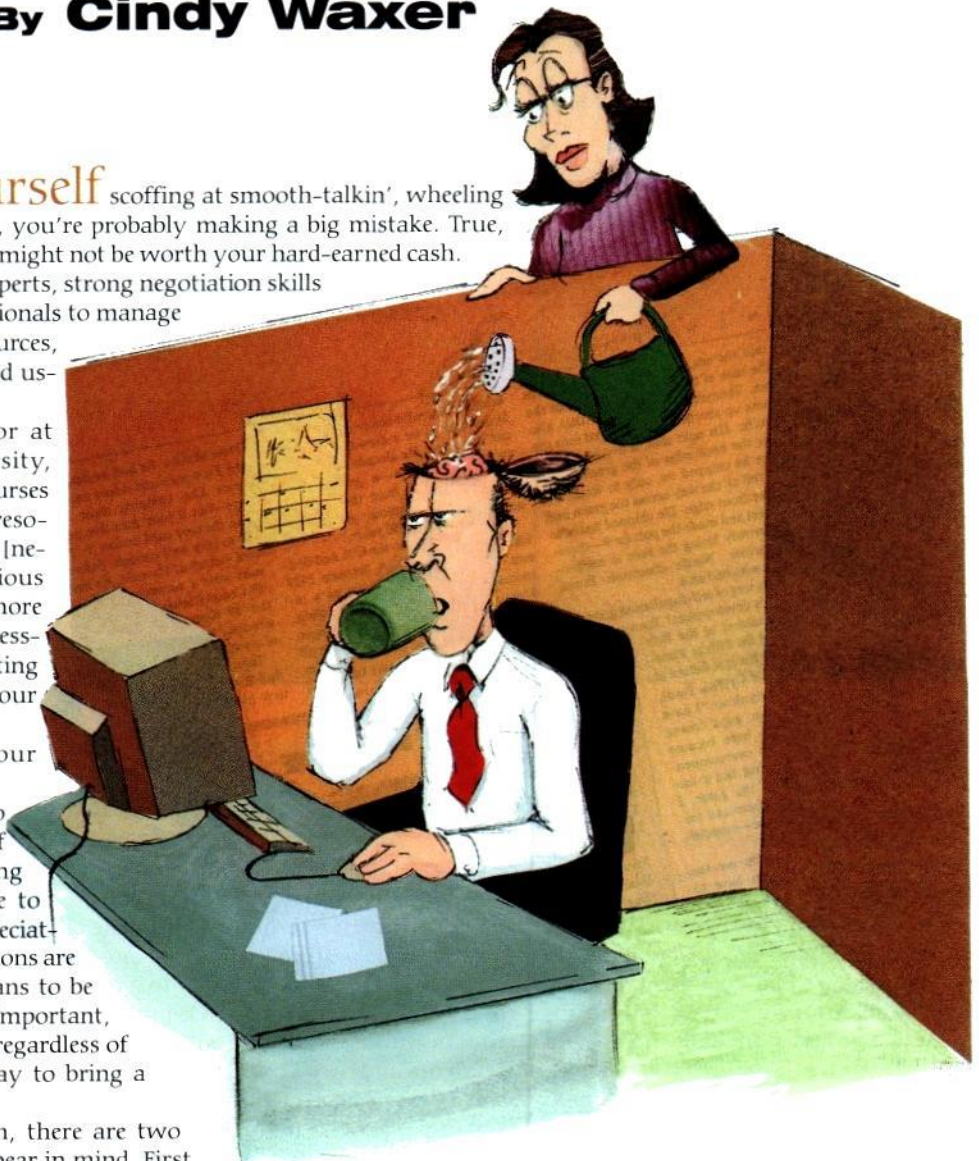
**Do you find yourself** scoffing at smooth-talkin', wheeling and dealing salespeople? Well if so, you're probably making a big mistake. True, that new and improved dustbuster might not be worth your hard-earned cash. But according to today's leading experts, strong negotiation skills are a primary means for IT professionals to manage project teams, obtain valuable resources, establish positive relations with end users and earn well-deserved raises.

Says Rick Jackson, a professor at Kingston, Ont. Queen's University, School Of Business, who teaches courses in negotiation theory and dispute resolution: "The more you know about [negotiation] processes and the various models of negotiation, and the more skills you have, then the more successful you could be in terms of protecting and enhancing the interests of your company and yourself."

So how can you improve your techniques of persuasion?

For starters, it's always best to examine the very components of excellent negotiation skills. Strong communication skills, being able to read people's behaviour and appreciating a particular individual's limitations are all part and parcel of what it means to be an effective negotiator. But more important, IT professionals must realize that regardless of finesse, there's more than one way to bring a horse to water.

According to Professor Jackson, there are two primary negotiating processes to bear in mind. First,



there's positional bargaining in which negotiating parties state their positions, list a set of demands and utilize manipulative tactics in order to bring about a self-serving end. Although often effective, Professor Jackson warns that positional bargaining can put an end to ongoing relations, if, for example, one party feels that it has been unfairly outmanoeuvred and exploited by an opponent.

Interest-based bargaining, on the other hand, more closely resembles a joint problem-solving exercise, in which negotiating parties recognize each other's needs, demonstrate a willingness to share information and aim to arrive at an arrangement that is mutually beneficial.

"History has literally been changed by the application of the [interest-based bargaining] model — all of the Middle East peace deals, for example."

So now that you're familiar with the two basic negotiating processes, perhaps it's time to delve into the nitty-gritty. Like how can you improve your communication skills? Why is it important to assess your goals before launching into a Donald Trumpian spiel? What measures should you take in order to effectively negotiate project timelines and budgetary costs?

For starters, said David Smith, vice-president, operations professional services, for Xycorp Inc., a Toronto-based IT recruitment agency: "Never, never ever deviate from consistency in how you measure a project and keep on top of it."

According to Smith, project managers who wish to negotiate timelines, the delegation of duties and budgetary matters must maintain an ongoing paper trail. This involves recording performance reviews, significant milestones and authorized project modifications. After all, providing solid documentation on what and how you've directly contributed to a project's ongoing success will provide you with the credibility needed to negotiate a project's specifications.

Still, a paper trail can't do all the talking. Which is precisely why polished

communication skills are of enormous importance to IT leaders who wish to negotiate effectively. It's for this reason

that experts recommend tailoring your language, and sales pitch, to suit a particular individual. For example, a project member's performance might improve with a well-crafted 'team player' speech, but a chief executive officer is much more

likely to extend that project deadline if you present a detailed soliloquy on budgetary concerns.

If you're desperately in need of improving your communication skills, pick up a copy of *Negotiating For Dummies*, co-authored by Michael C. Donaldson and Mimi Donaldson. The book offers countless communication

tips. These include actively listening to a negotiating party's needs, stopping yourself from interrupting an individual in mid-sentence, ridding your language of defensive utterances such as 'yeah, but,' never prejudging an employee before hearing all sides of the story, counting to three before you speak, uncrossing your arms and legs, making as much eye contact as possible, keeping your questions clear and concise, and never accepting an assertion for an answer.

ITI Information Technology Institute, a nationwide postgraduate IT educator, offers students the opportunity to work in collaborative learning environments that simulate real life situations. Students practice conflict resolution and negotiating techniques in a team setting, along with a professional facilitator who instructs them on how

to communicate effectively.

"We've found that most people, once you give them solid communication skills, are in a much better position to negotiate, to identify strategies, to resolve any conflicts," said Paige Souter, manager, public relations, of the Toronto school of ITI Information Technology.

Okay, so now you know two primary negotiation processes like the back of your hand. Negotiating project deadlines and budgetary concerns is an absolute breeze. And your communication skills rival those of Bill Clinton. But how about the delicate issue of money?

Says Robert Harris, a Vancouver-based IT operations manager who is currently working on a contract basis for Seagate Software, a business intelligence and network and storage management software vendor: "The one part of the conversation, where everybody goes silent, is when you're talking about dollars."

It's for this reason that Harris suggests IT professionals carefully assess their career goals before negotiating

a raise. Are you looking for a job that will simply help you pay the mortgage? Do you find yourself desperately searching for growth opportunities? Asking yourself these questions will enable you to properly weigh your personal and financial needs.

If, however, you are certain that it's the almighty dollar you're after, experts warn to take the necessary precau-

tions. While holding out for the big bucks could prove beneficial, it could also put a quick end to your savvy negotiations.

"If you hold out too long, there's an equal chance that a company might just say, 'Okay, forget it. Robert Harris costs too much. We can get two people that have no experience for the [same] price,'" Harris said.

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## WHERE TO GET NEGOTIATION TRAINING

Consulting and training companies

Management seminars

Executive education programs

Professional associations and conferences

In-house company training

University MBA programs

Community education programs

On-line courses

## 10 TIPS TO HELP YOU BECOME A SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATOR

1. Become an active listener
2. Define goals clearly
3. Understand the problem
4. Keep an open mind
5. Consider alternatives
6. Ask questions
7. Don't fight to win
8. Focus on building relationships based on trust
9. Collaborate on a solution
10. Remember that negotiating is a process, not a one-time win