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GETTING PAST NO

**Negotiating in
Difficult Situations**

Revised Edition

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2

Don't Argue:

STEP TO THEIR SIDE

Rarely is it advisable to meet prejudices and passions head on. Instead, it is best to appear to conform to them in order to gain time to combat them. One must know how to sail with a contrary wind and to tack until one meets a wind in the right direction.

—*Fortune de Felice, 1778*

An AT&T sales team was negotiating to sell Boeing a new telecommunications system valued at \$150 million. The sales team made a persuasive pitch on the kind of service to be delivered, the company's prompt response to problems, and the speed of repairs.

Then the Boeing purchasing director said, "Fine. Now put each one of your promises in writing. And we want guarantees that if the system isn't fixed on time, you'll pay us damages."

"We'll make our best efforts," replied the AT&T sales

chief, "but we can't be held liable for all the things that can go wrong. Lightning can strike—"

"You're fooling around with us!" interrupted the Boeing negotiator, losing his temper. "First you tell us about your services—now you're not willing to commit yourself to what you promised!"

"That's not true!" protested the sales chief, aghast at the turn in the negotiation. "Let me see if I can explain—"

But the Boeing negotiator refused to listen. "You're not negotiating in good faith!" he complained. "We can't deal with you."

The AT&T sales chief made a last-ditch effort: "Let's talk about it. Maybe we can put some of it in writing." But the Boeing purchasing director had already made up his mind. He and his team walked out the door.

What happened? When AT&T refused to go along with Boeing's demand, the Boeing negotiator got angry and went on the attack. The AT&T sales chief defended himself, but this just fueled the buyer's anger. When the sales chief tried to explain, the buyer wouldn't listen. Nothing seemed to work.

The mistake, a common one, is in trying to reason with a person who is not receptive. Your words will fall on deaf ears or be misconstrued. You are up against the barrier of emotion. The other side may feel distrustful, angry, or threatened. Convinced they are right and you are wrong, they may be unwilling to listen.

It is tempting to ignore the emotion and focus on the problem instead, but this is unlikely to work. The negative emotions will emerge in the form of inflexible positions. Before you can discuss the problem, you need to disarm the person. Going to the balcony has enabled you to regain your mental balance. Now you need to help the other side

regain theirs. Your challenge is to create a favorable climate in which you can negotiate.

(Disarming the other side means defusing their hostile emotions. It means getting them to hear your point of view. And it means garnering a measure of their respect. They don't need to like you, but they do need to take you seriously and treat you as a human being.

The secret of disarming is surprise. To disarm the other side, you need to do the opposite of what they expect. If they are stonewalling, they expect you to apply pressure; if they are attacking, they expect you to resist. So don't pressure; don't resist. Do the opposite: Step to their side. It disorients them and opens them up to changing their adversarial posture. Moreover, as practitioners of Japanese martial arts have long recognized, it is hard to attack someone who is suddenly on your side. And most important, it puts you and your opponent side by side—just where you want to be in order to engage in problem-solving negotiation.

Stepping to their side means doing three things: listening, acknowledging, agreeing. Listen to what they have to say. Acknowledge their point, their feelings, and their competence and status. And agree with them wherever you can.

Stepping to their side may be the last thing you feel like doing in a confrontational situation. When they close their ears, you naturally feel like doing the same. When they refuse to recognize your point of view, you certainly don't feel like recognizing theirs. When they disagree with everything you say, you may find it difficult to agree with *anything* they say. Although entirely understandable, this tit-for-tat response is a recipe for stalemate.

To break through the other side's resistance, you need to reverse this dynamic. If you want them to listen to you,

begin by listening to them. If you want them to acknowledge your point, acknowledge theirs first. To get them to agree with you, begin by agreeing with them.

Listen Actively

Too often negotiations proceed as follows: Party A sets out their opening position. Party B is so focused on figuring out what they will say that they don't really listen. When Party B's turn comes to lay out *their* position, Party A thinks, "They didn't respond to what I said. They must not have heard me. I'd better repeat it." Then Party B concludes that they, too, have not been properly heard, so they repeat their position. And on it goes—in a dialogue of the deaf. "Everything has been said before," says a character in a novel by André Gide, "but since nobody listens, we have to keep going back and beginning all over again."

You have an opportunity to interrupt the chorus of monologues if you are willing to be the first to listen.

Give the Other Side a Hearing

Listening to someone may be the cheapest concession you can make. We all feel a deep need to be understood. By satisfying that need, you can help turn the negotiation around.

Consider a contract negotiation between union and management at an Inland Steel container plant. The cor-

porate counsel took a rigid position on the crucial issue of wage arbitration, saying, "Now *that* is one I believe we're going to have to *insist* on." The general manager, Robert Novy, added, "That is putting it pretty mildly."

Normally the union would have counterattacked, management would have vehemently defended its position, and after a futile argument a strike would have ensued. Indeed, the previous breakdown in negotiations had resulted in a mutually disastrous 191-day strike, and everyone expected a strike this time too. But instead of counterattacking, chief union negotiator Jake Shafer said quietly, "I am interested in Mr. Novy's statement. You say, 'That is putting it pretty mildly.'"

With this invitation, Novy went on to explain at length why management felt so strongly about the issue. Having received the satisfaction of a full hearing, management in turn gave the union a hearing of *its* concerns. It may have seemed at the time like a small tactical move, but Shafer's decision to sit back and ask management to discuss its point of view broke open the deadlocked issue for eventual resolution. The strike that everyone expected never materialized.

Listening requires patience and self-discipline. Instead of reacting immediately or plotting your next step, you have to remain focused on what your counterpart is saying. Listening may not be an easy thing to do, but, as the story of Inland Steel demonstrates, it can be enormously valuable. It offers a window into the other side's thinking. It gives you a chance to engage them in a cooperative task—that of understanding their problem. And it makes them more willing to listen to you.

If the other side is angry or upset, the best thing you can offer is a full hearing of their grievance. Don't interrupt—even if you feel they are wrong or insulting. Let

them know you're listening by maintaining eye contact, nodding occasionally, and responding with "uh-huh" or "I see." When they wind down, ask quietly if there is anything more they would like to add. Encourage them to tell you everything that is bothering them by using such phrases as "Yes, please go on" and "Then what happened?"

People derive genuine satisfaction from voicing their feelings and resentments. Customer-service managers know that even if there is little they can do to help an angry, dissatisfied customer, offering a full and respectful hearing can often be enough to keep the customer coming back.

Once you have heard the other side out, they will most likely become less reactive, more rational, and more responsive to problem-solving negotiation. It is no coincidence that effective negotiators listen far more than they talk.

Paraphrase and Ask for Corrections

It is not enough for you to listen to the other side. They need to know that you have heard what they have said. So reflect back what you hear. A conversation between a salesperson and an unhappy customer might go this way:

CUSTOMER: I bought this answering machine from you barely six months ago and now you can hardly hear the voices. It's not the tape—I replaced it. What kind of lousy machines do you sell here? I'm losing business because of you. I want it replaced right now with a quality machine or this won't be the last you hear of me.

SALESPERSON: Okay, let me make sure I understand. You bought this machine here six months ago to use in your business. But now you can't hear the voices. You need a working machine, and time is of the essence. Have I got it right?

CUSTOMER: That's right.

SALESPERSON: Let's see what we can do for you.

Paraphrasing means summing up your understanding of what the other side has said and repeating it back in your own words. Remember to retain *their* point of view. Adding your own or trying to make them see the error of their ways will not help. It will give the customer little satisfaction if you say "You couldn't make it work so you've brought it back?"

Paraphrasing gives the other side the feeling of being understood as well as the satisfaction of correcting you. It gives you a chance to check and see whether you have gotten their message. Paraphrasing is one of the most useful techniques in a negotiator's repertoire.

Acknowledge Their Point

After listening to the other side, the next step is to acknowledge their point. You may be reluctant to do this because of your strong disagreement. But by omitting this step you miss a critical opportunity. Every human being, no matter how impossible, has a deep need for recognition. By satisfying that need you can help create a climate for agreement.

Acknowledging the other person's point does *not* mean that you agree with it. It means that you accept it as one valid point of view among others. It sends the message "I can see how you see things." It is conveyed in phrases such as "You have a point there" or "I know exactly what you mean" or "I understand what you're saying."

The other side's mind is often like a cluttered attic, full of old resentments and angers, gripes and stories. To argue with them just keeps all this stuff alive. But if you acknowledge the validity of what they say, it begins to lose its emotional charge. In effect, the stuff begins to disappear from the attic. By letting them tell their side of the story *and* acknowledging it, you create psychological room for them to accept that there may be another side of the story.

One of the most powerful and surprising ways to acknowledge the other side's point is to preempt it. Take the words out of their mouth. Tell them: "If I were in your shoes, this is the way I'd see it." Former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara used this approach at a 1989 meeting of key American, Soviet, and Cuban participants in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. Sensing that the Soviets and the Cubans were defensive about why their governments had decided to secretly install nuclear missiles in Cuba, he announced, "If I had been a Cuban or Soviet leader at the time, I would have concluded that the Americans intended to invade Cuba. From the evidence you had available to you, you were right to reach that conclusion. But I must tell you that we had no such intention." By preemptively acknowledging what the Soviets and Cubans were thinking, McNamara made them more receptive to hearing his viewpoint.

Acknowledge Their Feelings

Don't ignore the other side's emotions. Behind their attack often lies anger; behind their stonewalling often lies fear. Until you defuse their emotions, your reasonable arguments will fall on deaf ears.

Imagine that an employee storms into your office and rages, "I'm sick of being cheated! I just found out that

Dayle Turner gets two thousand dollars more a year for doing the same job that I do. I'm through!"

Trying to explain why Dayle earns more money, even if the reason is a good one, may only make your employee angrier. Instead, you must acknowledge his feelings first: "You think we're taking advantage of you. I can understand that. I'd probably feel angry too."

This is not the response your employee expects. By acknowledging his feelings, you have helped him calm down.

He then asks, "Why shouldn't I make every penny as much as Dayle does? I do the same work!"

By asking you a question, albeit an angry one, he shows that he is ready to hear your explanation. Now you can proceed to reason with him.

(Like the employee, the other side often feels embattled and unappreciated. It is disarming to be met with an acknowledgment rather than an argument. Telling them "I appreciate how you feel" or "If I were in your shoes, I'd be just as angry" lets them know their message has been heard and appreciated. Showing that you understand *why* they feel as they do enhances your acknowledgment.

One word of caution: The other person will usually be able to tell whether or not your acknowledgment is sincere. Your intent, as expressed in your tone and body language, counts just as much as your words.

Offer an Apology

Perhaps the most powerful form of acknowledgment is an apology. This is a lesson we all learn as children. If you say the magic words "I'm sorry," you can continue playing the game. Unfortunately, it is a lesson we often forget as

adults. Take the Columbia law professor who put the following question to his contracts class:

“Seller promises Buyer to deliver widgets at the rate of one thousand a month. The first two deliveries are perfect. However, in the third month Seller delivers only nine hundred and ninety widgets. Buyer becomes so incensed that he rejects deliveries and refuses to pay for the widgets already delivered. If you were Seller, what would you say?”

The professor was looking for a discussion of the various common-law theories that would, as he put it, “allow Seller to crush Buyer.” He looked around the room for a volunteer, but found none. “As is so often the case with first-year students,” he reported, “I found that they were all either writing in their notebooks or inspecting their shoes. There was, however, one eager face, that of an eight-year-old son of one of my students. He was in class because his mother couldn’t find a sitter. Suddenly he raised his hand. Such behavior, even from an eight-year-old, must be rewarded.

“‘Okay,’ I said, ‘what would you say if you were the seller?’

“‘I’d say, “I’m sorry.”’”

As the child seemed to know instinctively, “crushing” an opponent is not the right answer. We often overlook the simple power of an apology. The buyer was outraged because he felt wronged. What such people most often want is the recognition that they *have* been wronged. Only when that acknowledgment has been made will they feel safe in negotiating. An apology thus creates the conditions for a constructive resolution of the dispute.

Your apology need not be meek, nor an act of self-blame. To a disgruntled customer, you could say, “I’m sorry you’ve had this problem. You’re one of my favorite customers and the last person I’d want to see unhappy.

What can we do to make it up to you?" Even if the other side is primarily responsible for the mess you are in, consider apologizing for your share. Your bold gesture can set in motion a process of reconciliation in which they apologize for *their* share.

Project Confidence

You may be afraid that acknowledging the other side is an act of weakness. To the contrary, acknowledgment reflects your strength. To ensure that they recognize this, project confidence as you acknowledge them. In dealing with an attack, for example, put as reasonable an expression on your face as you can muster. Adopt a calm, confident posture and tone. Stand up straight, make eye contact, and use your attacker's name. Fearlessness disarms.

Consider how an American diplomat, held hostage in Iran from 1979 until 1981, took control by acknowledging his opponents. Whenever his guards came into his room, he would invite them to sit down. "They became *my* guests," explained the diplomat, "and in this small way, I established command of the situation. I created the unmistakable sense that this was *my* space, *my* territory, and it did wonders for my well-being."

Agree Wherever You Can

Once you have listened to the other side and acknowledged what they have said, the next step is to agree wherever you

can. It will be hard for them to attack someone who agrees with them.)

Agree Without Conceding

You don't need to concede a thing. Simply focus on issues on which you already agree. An American senator told his legislative staff, "Don't argue with my constituents, even if they're wrong. All you do is lose me votes. Do the *opposite* of what they taught you in graduate school. There, if someone said something you agreed with ninety-nine percent, you said, 'I disagree,' and you focused on the one percent of disagreement. Here, if my constituent says something you disagree with ninety-nine percent, I want you to say, 'I agree with you' and focus on the one percent of agreement." It is natural to focus on differences because differences cause the problem. At the outset, however, you are better off focusing on your common ground.

Look for any opportunity to agree—even if it is only in a humorous way. Humor has the added benefit of humanizing you in the other person's eyes. Consider the example of a fund-raiser for United Way who had to solicit contributions one day from a group of truck drivers as they showed up for work at six o'clock in the morning. At that hour no one had the slightest interest in United Way, but the boss had ordered the drivers to attend the meeting. As the fund-raiser was cheerily showing a videotape about the charity, the atmosphere in the room turned tense. When he passed out yellow pencils and pledge cards, the truck drivers stared at them and did nothing. Finally, one burly truck driver stood up, shook his pencil in a threatening fashion at the fund-

raiser, and growled, "I'll tell you what you can do with this *pencil!*"

There was an awkward moment as everyone waited to see how the United Way representative would react. The fund-raiser looked the truck driver straight in the eye and said calmly, "Sir, I will be happy to do whatever you like with that pencil . . ." He paused, then added, ". . . *after* you sign the pledge card, of course." There was a brief moment of silence, and then one person started to laugh. Everyone joined in. The tension was broken. In the end, every truck driver signed a pledge card.

Accumulate Yeses

The key word in agreement is "yes." "Yes" is a magic word, a powerful tool for disarming the other side. Look for occasions when you can say yes to them without making a concession. "Yes, you have a point there." "Yes, I agree with you." Say yes as often as possible.

You should also try to get as many yeses as you can. One public speaker uses this technique effectively to handle hostile comments from the audience. If someone says, "Your proposal is utterly unrealistic," he responds, "Are you saying you don't see how my budget proposal can possibly erase the deficit within five years—is that what you mean?" The audience member says yes, and as he does, the relationship between the speaker and the critic changes. The "yes" transforms an antagonistic argument into the beginning of a reasoned dialogue.

(Each yes you elicit from the other side further reduces tension. As you accumulate agreement, even if only on what they are saying, you create an atmosphere in which they are more likely to say yes to a substantive proposal.

Tune in to Their Wavelength

Agreement can be nonverbal too. If you observe two friends deep in conversation, you will often notice something peculiar. If one friend leans on an elbow, the other does too. If one speaks in a low voice, the other's voice gets lower too. Almost unconsciously they align themselves with each other in order to communicate more effectively. Each is sending the other a subtle message: "I am like you."

Much of the message comes across in the form, not the content, of the communication. Observe the other side's communicative manner. If they speak slowly, you may want to slow down your own speaking rate. If they talk softly, you may want to lower your voice. Observe their body posture too. If they lean forward to emphasize a point, consider leaning forward, too, to show your interest. Don't mimic. Just adapt your own communicative style to be more like theirs. Your goal is to tune in to the same wavelength.

It also pays to be sensitive to the other side's language. If they are speaking in a colloquial fashion, you may want to make your language more colloquial. If they are from a different culture, it helps to learn and use a few polite phrases from their language in order to show your interest and respect.

People also use different "sensory languages," depending on whether they process information primarily through their eyes, ears, or feelings. If the other side uses primarily visual terms such as "Can't you *see* what I'm saying?" or "Let's *focus* on that," try to match them with similar phrases: "I do *see* your point" or "I can *picture* what you're saying." If they use primarily auditory terms such as "*Listen* to this," respond with a phrase such as "I *hear* you." Or if

their language is oriented around feelings, as in "That doesn't *feel* right to me," answer with phrases like, "I'm not *comfortable* either." Connect with your counterparts by using the language they understand best.

Acknowledge the Person

In listening to the other side, acknowledging their points, and agreeing whenever you can, you are in fact acknowledging them as people. You are showing them respect. Sometimes, however, you may want to acknowledge them in a more direct fashion.

Consider one of the world's most intractable disputes: the Arab-Israeli conflict. Until 1977, Arab leaders refused to recognize Israel's existence; they would not even call it by its name. Then, in November of that year, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat broke the taboo with his dramatic journey to Jerusalem. Nothing could have been more surprising to the Israelis, more confusing to their perceptions of the Egyptians, or more disarming than the arrival of an enemy leader in the country his army had attacked a mere four years earlier. With this one action, he broke through the psychological barrier that constituted, in his words, ninety percent of the conflict. He created a climate that eventually produced a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, which few had thought possible.

By acknowledging the person, you create what psychologists call "cognitive dissonance," an inconsistency between perception and reality. The other side may think of you as an adversary. When you acknowledge them

personally, you are acting as a friend or colleague, thus inducing them to change their perceptions of you in order to reduce the cognitive dissonance. Just as Sadat capitalized on the Israeli perception of him as a warmonger, you can capitalize on the other side's negative perception of you by acting in a way that shatters their stereotypes.

Reaffirming the person does not mean reaffirming the behavior. Parents continue to love their eight-year-old even after he puts glue between the newspaper pages and tries to strangle his younger sister. You need to distinguish between the person and the behavior.

Acknowledge Their Authority and Competence)

Suppose you are trying to persuade a difficult boss to change his mind about an office issue. He may perceive you to be personally challenging his authority or competence. Are you implying, he wonders, that he is somehow incompetent or wrong? He will likely react by becoming even more resistant to what you have to say. To reassure him that you are not challenging him personally, you need to preface your remarks with a phrase such as "You're the boss" or "I respect your authority."

If the other person has a big or vulnerable ego, think of it as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. A person whose ego needs stroking is dependent on the recognition of others. To the extent you can satisfy this need for recognition, you can disarm the person. If you are seeking an exception to company policy from a self-important or insecure bureaucrat, you might begin by saying, "I've been told that you are the most knowledgeable person on this policy." To make your acknowledgment more credible, base it on facts. Instead of telling a departmental rival

“You’re the best salesperson around”—which she may dismiss as mere flattery—you might say, “Your presentation to the board was succinct, persuasive, and to the point. I don’t think I’ve ever seen it done better.”

Build a Working Relationship

One of the best ways to acknowledge the other side is to build a working relationship. Invite them out for coffee or lunch, or meet for a drink after work. You can use such occasions to talk about hobbies and families, or whatever their interests are. Take time for small talk before the negotiation session begins and as it ends. Little gestures of goodwill can go a long way.

A good working relationship is like a savings account you can draw on in moments of trouble. When we deal with someone we know and like, we tend to attribute adverse events to extenuating circumstances: “Oh, I guess he didn’t show up for the meeting because he was ill.” When we deal with someone we don’t like, we tend to attribute the same events to the person’s basic nature: “He wants to keep me waiting to show me who has the upper hand.” In short, if you have a positive relationship, your counterpart will be more inclined to give you the benefit of the doubt. You can thus prevent misunderstandings.

The best time to lay the foundation for a good relationship is *before* a problem arises. So if your job is likely to bring you into conflict with an individual, nurture the relationship from the earliest possible point. A production manager ought to have a healthy working relationship with his opposite number in marketing; a union chief, with her management counterpart; and a school principal, with the school board. When the other person is being difficult, you

want to be able to say "Come on, Chris. We've always gotten on. We go back a long way."

Express Your Views—Without Provoking

Once you have heard and acknowledged the other side, they are far more likely to listen to you. Now is the time to get *your* views across. You need to do so, however, without making them close their ears.

The secret lies in changing your mind-set. The standard mind-set is *either/or*: Either you are right or the other side is. The alternative mind-set is *both/and*. They can be right in terms of their experience, and you can be right in terms of yours. You can say to them, "I can see why you feel the way you do. It's entirely reasonable in terms of the experience you've had. My experience, however, has been different." You can acknowledge their view and, without challenging it, express a contrary one. You can create an inclusive atmosphere in which differences can coexist peacefully while you try to reconcile them.

Don't Say "But," Say "Yes... And"

One of the most common methods of expressing your differences is to preface your views with the word "but." When your customer says "Your price is too high," you may be tempted to refute her statement with your own: "But this product is the highest quality you'll find!" Unfortunately, when your customer hears a "but," she may

hear "I think you are wrong for the following reasons." Not surprisingly, she may stop listening.

The other side will be more receptive if you first acknowledge their views with a "yes" and then preface your own with an "and." After your customer complains about the high price, you could say, "Yes, you're absolutely correct that our price is higher. *And* what that increment buys you is higher quality, greater reliability, and better service!"

Even a direct disagreement can be framed inclusively: "I can see why you feel strongly about this, and I respect that. Let me tell you, however, how it looks from my angle," or "I am in total agreement with what you're trying to accomplish. What you may not have considered is..." Whatever language you use, the key is to present your views as an addition to, rather than a direct contradiction of, the other person's point of view.

Make "I" Statements, Not "You" Statements

As you express your views, you will be less likely to provoke the other side if you speak about yourself rather than about them. After all, your own experience is all you really know about anyway.

Suppose you are dealing with a difficult teenager who promised to come home by midnight but didn't show up until three o'clock in the morning. You could express your views by saying, "You broke your word! You're irresponsible." Or, "You only care about yourself. You never think about your family!" These are called "you"-statements. The teenager naturally becomes defensive and angry. He tunes out the familiar parental lecture.

Suppose that you were to say instead: "Ken, I felt let down last night. I worried myself sick that something ter-

rible had happened to you. I even called the highway patrol to see if you had been in an accident." Instead of attacking, you express your feelings and experience. These are "I"-statements. The underlying message is the same, but phrased this way, your feelings are more likely to be heard.

The essence of an I-statement is to describe the impact of the problem on you. You are giving the other side information about the consequences of their behavior in a form that is hard for them to reject—because it is *your* experience. Common phrases to use are: "I feel . . .," "I get upset when . . .," "I'm not comfortable with . . .," and "The way I see it is . . ."

An I-statement does not challenge the other side's views but simply offers them a different perspective—yours. It does not tell them what to do or how to think or how to feel. They are entitled to their opinions, and you are entitled to yours.

Note that just putting an "I" in front of a you-statement does not make it an I-statement. Telling your teenager "I feel that you have been irresponsible" or "I feel that you broke your word" is still accusatory and provokes the same defensive reaction. An I-statement focuses on *your* needs, concerns, feelings, and desires, not the other person's shortcomings.

Stand Up for Yourself

Don't hesitate to stand up for yourself. When threatened by the truck driver, the United Way fund-raiser did more than just humorously acknowledge his demand. After saying "Sir, I would be happy to do whatever you like with that pencil," he added: "*after* you sign the pledge card, of course." He stood up for himself and his charity.

Standing up for yourself does not negate your acknowledgment. Acknowledgment from someone perceived as confident and strong is more powerful than acknowledgment from someone perceived as weak. The combination of seemingly opposite responses—acknowledging your counterpart's views *and* expressing your own—is more effective than either alone.

Consider the parents faced with a bawling five-year-old who does not want to be left at home with a baby-sitter. Should they give in and stay home? Should they threaten to spank the child or try to appease him? A leading child psychologist suggests a third strategy. With empathy, tell the crying child: "I know you wish we were not going out tonight. Sometimes when we are not here, you get scared. You wish we would stay with you, but your father and I are going to enjoy a dinner with friends tonight. We'll have dinner at home with you tomorrow." Acknowledge the other person's views *and* stand up for your own.

(Acknowledge Your Differences with Optimism

Expressing agreement with the other side does not mean suppressing your differences. Indeed, it is often helpful to acknowledge them openly. It assures the other side that you have understood their perspective, which helps them relax. In many ethnic conflicts, for example, the parties only feel comfortable acknowledging areas of agreement *after* they have clearly delineated the areas of disagreement.

When you set out your differences, you may find they are not as great as either of you imagined. Sometimes, however, they seem overwhelming. So an optimistic stance on your part is critical. Affirm your interest in reaching

agreement and assert your belief that a satisfactory solution is possible: "I think we *can* make a deal here." Be bold in acknowledging the other person's views, bold in asserting your own, and equally bold in expressing optimism that your differences can be resolved.

Create a Favorable Climate for Negotiation)

In sum, the hurdles you face are the other side's suspicion and hostility, closed ears, and lack of respect. Your best strategy is to step to their side. It is harder to be hostile toward someone who hears you out and acknowledges what you say and how you feel. It is easier to listen to someone who has listened to you. And respect breeds respect.

Pleasantly surprised by your behavior, your opponent may think: "This person actually seems to understand and appreciate my problem. Since almost no one else does, that means this person must be intelligent." Then comes the clincher: "Maybe I can negotiate with this person after all." That is the crack in the wall you have been seeking.

To conclude, let's return to the negotiation between AT&T and Boeing described at the beginning of the chapter. Faced with the breakdown of the talks, the AT&T sales chief arranged a private meeting with the Boeing purchasing director. This is how he started off:

"I've been trying to understand your concerns. Correct me if I'm mistaken, but as you and your colleagues at Boeing see it, we've been misleading you, saying we're pre-

pared to give all this service but not to put it in writing and be held liable for it. That seems to be bad-faith negotiating. So naturally you get angry and don't see the point in continuing. Is that right?"

"That's right!" the Boeing buyer replied with fervor. "How can we trust what you say? If *we* were negotiating an aircraft sale and told the buyer the safety specifications but then said we wouldn't put them in writing, the buyer would walk right out the door. And he'd be right to leave. If we won't be held accountable, we shouldn't be in the airplane-building business. If *you* won't be bound by your promises, you shouldn't be in the communications business!"

"You're absolutely right," acknowledged the AT&T sales chief. "*I'd* feel the same way if I were you!"

Surprised, the Boeing negotiator asked, "Then *why* won't you agree to put your promises in writing and agree to pay damages if you don't live up to your commitment?"

The AT&T representative answered, "We will of course put our promises in writing. Damages are an issue we have trouble with but are at least willing to discuss. First I want to see if I can clear up what's gotten us stuck. I think I'm only beginning to understand it myself. I hear you saying that Boeing has what you might call an 'engineering culture.' There's no tolerance for ambiguity or error when people's lives are at stake. So if you promise a certain safety specification, you'd better be sure you're on target. And, of course, everything has to be clearly specified in writing. Am I making sense?"

"Yes, what you're saying is right, but I don't see what it has to do with our problem," said the Boeing buyer.

"If you'll bear with me, I'll try to explain why I think it has everything to do with our problem. You see, at AT&T we also have our engineers, but we're primarily in the business of providing a service. We're more of a 're-

lationship culture.' We see our relationship with our clients as all-important—if the client's not happy, we're not happy. That's why people call us 'Ma Bell.' Now, when your mom tells you she's going to make your lunch and drive you to school, you don't say to her, 'Now, Mom, put it in writing and I'm going to hold you liable for damages,' do you?"

"Of course not."

"You just expect that she'll do the best she can. Now obviously there's a big difference between a household and a business, but this gives you a sense of where we're coming from. We make oral promises and fully expect to deliver on them. Our track record, you'll have to admit, is very good. It's a new experience for us to meet with a lot of skepticism and a demand for damages from a client. That's why we sort of collided with each other at the last meeting—you were coming from one place, which was absolutely right for you, and we were coming from another. Does this make any sense to you?"

"It's beginning to. Let me ask you . . ."

And so the negotiations got back under way.

How was the AT&T sales chief able to get the negotiation back on track? He preemptively acknowledged what he understood to be Boeing's concerns. He listened. He didn't try to refute his client's argument or defend AT&T. He simply acknowledged that the client was right. Once the Boeing negotiator's views were understood and appreciated, his anger subsided and he became more receptive. He asked a question, inviting the AT&T representative to offer his explanation. In short, the sales chief stepped first to the buyer's side. Only then did he describe how the situation looked from his side. In the end, he was able to allay his client's suspicions, get him to listen, and garner his respect. Not long afterward, AT&T and Boeing reached agreement on the \$150 million sale.