

EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Chris Voss is a former FBI hostage negotiator and the founder and principal of The Black Swan Group, a consulting firm that provides training and advises Fortune 500 companies through complex negotiations.

Never Split the Difference

THE NUTSHELL

Random House Business Books 2016

The New Rules

The first step to achieving a mastery of daily negotiation is to get over your aversion to negotiating. You need to understand that's how the world works. Negotiating does not mean browbeating or grinding someone down. It simply means playing the emotional game that human society is set up for. In this world, you get what you ask for, so you just have to ask correctly. Claim your prerogative to ask for what you think is right. Effective negotiation is applied people smarts which includes how to size someone up, how to influence their sizing up of you, and how to use that knowledge to get what you want.

Be a Mirror

Mirroring is essentially imitation. It's another neuro-behavior humans display in which we copy each other to comfort each other. As negotiators a "mirror" focuses on the words and nothing else. It's not the body language, not the accent, not the tone or delivery. It's just the words. For the FBI, a "mirror" is when you repeat the last three words (or the critical 1-3 words) of what someone has just said. By repeating back what people say, you trigger this mirroring instinct and your counterpart will inevitably elaborate on what was just said and sustain the process of connecting.

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Don't Feel Their Pain, Label It

Labeling is a way of validating emotion by acknowledging it. Give someone's emotion a name and you show you identify with how that person feels. Think of labeling as a shortcut to intimacy, a time-saving emotional hack. Labeling has a special advantage when your counterpart is tense. Exposing negative thoughts to daylight makes them seem less frightening. The first step to labeling is detecting the other person's emotional state. Once you've spotted an emotion you want to highlight, the next step is to label it aloud. Labels can be phrased as statements or questions. Labels almost always begin with roughly the same words. It seems like... It sounds like... It looks like.... When you phrase a label as a neutral statement of understanding, it encourages your counterpart to be responsive. They'll usually give a longer answer than just "yes" or "no." If they disagree with the label, that's okay. You can always step back and say, "I didn't say that was what it was. I just said it seems like that."

Beware "Yes"—Master "No"

Saying "No" gives the speaker the feeling of safety, security, and control. You use a question that prompts a "No" answer and your counterpart feels that by turning you down he has proved that he's in the driver's seat. Good negotiators welcome — even invite — a solid "No" to start, as a sign that the other party is engaged and thinking. Gun for a "Yes" straight off the bat, though, and your counterpart gets defensive, wary, and skittish.

Trigger the Two Words That Immediately Transform Any Negotiation

When your adversaries say, "That's right," they feel they have assessed what you've said and pronounced it as correct of their own free will. They embrace it. In hostage negotiations, we never tried to get to "yes" as an endpoint. We knew that "yes" is nothing without "how." When we applied hostage negotiating tactics to business, "that's right" often leads to the best outcomes.

Bend Their Reality

While going first rarely helps, there is one way to seem to make an offer and bend their reality in the process. That is, by alluding to a range. What I mean is this: when confronted with naming your terms or price, counter by recalling a similar deal which establishes your "ballpark," albeit the best possible ballpark you wish to be in. That gets your point across without moving the other party into a defensive position. It also gets him thinking at higher-levels. Research shows that people who hear extreme anchors unconsciously adjust their expectations in the direction of the opening number.

Create the Illusion of Control

Giving your counterpart the illusion of control by asking calibrated questions asking for help is one of the most powerful tools for suspending disbelief. Calibrated questions avoid verbs or words like "can," "are" or "does." These are closed-ended questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or

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“no.” Instead, it’s best to start with “what,” “how,” and sometimes “why.” Nothing else. The implication of any well-designed calibrated question is that you want what the other guy wants but you need his intelligence to overcome the problem. That guides the other party toward designing a solution which will be your solution.

Guarantee Execution

By making your counterparts articulate implementation in their own words, your carefully calibrated “How” questions will convince them that the final solution is their idea. That’s crucial. People always make more effort to implement a solution when they think it’s theirs. That is simply human nature. That’s why negotiation is often called “the art of letting someone else have your way.”

Bargain Hard

No part of a negotiation induces more anxiety and unfocused aggression than bargaining, which is why it’s the part that is more often fumbled and mishandled than any other. The systematized and easy-to-remember process has only four steps: (1) Set your target price (your goal) and then set your first offer at 65 percent of your target price. (2) Calculate three raises of decreasing increments (to 85, 95, and 100 percent). Use lots of empathy and different ways of saying “No” to get the other side to counter before you increase your offer. (3) When calculating the final amount, use precise, non-round numbers like, say, \$37,893 rather than \$38,000. It gives the number credibility and weight. (4) On your final number, throw in a non-monetary item (that they probably don’t want) to show you’re at your limit.

Find the Black Swan

In every negotiating session, there are those things we don’t know that we don’t know, pieces of information we’ve never imagined but that would be game changing if uncovered. Maybe our counterpart wants the deal to fail because he’s leaving for a competitor. These unknown unknowns are Black Swans. Finding and acting on Black Swans mandates a shift in your mindset. It takes negotiation from being a one-dimensional move, countermove game of checkers to a three-dimensional game that’s more emotional, adaptive, and truly effective.

I’m going to leave you with one request: Whether it’s in the office or around the family dinner table, don’t avoid honest, clear conflict. It will get you the best car price, the higher salary, and the largest donation. It will also save your marriage, your friendship, and your family.