**5 Good Negotiation Techniques**

**These underused negotiation techniques can help professional negotiators increase their bargaining power**

By [Katie Shonk](https://www.pon.harvard.edu/author/katies5/) — on November 13th, 2018 / [Negotiation Skills](https://www.pon.harvard.edu/category/daily/negotiation-skills-daily/)

You’ve mastered the basics of good negotiation techniques: you prepare thoroughly, take time to build rapport, make the first offer when you have a strong sense of the bargaining range, and search for wise tradeoffs across issues [to create value](http://www.pon.harvard.edu/tag/to-create-value/). Now, it’s time to absorb five lesser-known but similarly effective [negotiation topics](http://www.pon.harvard.edu/tag/negotiation-topics/) and techniques that can benefit all professional negotiators:

**1. Reframe anxiety as excitement.** The preparation stage of negotiation often comes with unpleasant side effects, such as sweaty palms, a racing heart, and seemingly overwhelming anxiety. It’s common even for professional negotiators to feel nervous, but this state of mind can lead us to make costly decisions, according to Harvard Business School professor Alison Wood Brooks. We tend to believe the best negotiation techniques to deal with our anxiety is to calm down, but that can be easier said than done. Try reframing the state of high physiological arousal associated with anxiety as excitement, recommends Brooks. This subtle reframing tactic, which treats your arousal as a plus rather than a minus, actually increases authentic feelings of excitement—and improves subsequent performance in negotiation, Brooks has found in her research.

**2. Anchor the discussion with a draft agreement.** Due to a widespread decision-making heuristic known as the anchoring bias, first documented by psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, the person who makes the first offer in a negotiation is likely to sway the discussion in her favor. First offers tend to serve as powerful anchors, even for experienced professional negotiators. To make an even bigger impact, you might try opening substantive negotiations with a draft agreement, or standard-form contract, prepared with your legal counsel and any relevant decision makers from your team. Though such drafts aren’t always appropriate, they can increase your influence over the negotiation, according to Tufts University professor Jeswald Salacuse. A standard-form contract not only uses the [anchoring](http://www.pon.harvard.edu/tag/anchoring/) bias to your advantage but could save both sides time and money, making this one of the negotiation techniques that could really be worth trying.

**3. Draw on the power of silence.** In negotiation, as in any discussion, we tend to rush in to fill any uncomfortable silences that arise with [persuasion techniques](http://www.pon.harvard.edu/tag/persuasion-techniques/) and counter-arguments. That can be a mistake, according to Harvard Business School and Harvard Law School professor Guhan Subramanian. After your counterpart speaks, allowing a few moments of silence to settle can give you time to fully absorb what he just said. “Silence give you the ability to dampen your instincts for self-advocacy and amplify your instinct to listen,” according to Subramanian. Silence can also help you defuse your own tendency toward the [anchoring bias](http://www.pon.harvard.edu/tag/anchoring-bias/). If a counterpart drops an outrageous anchor, “your stunned silence will far more effectively defuse the anchor than heaps of protesting would,” says Subramanian.

**4. Ask for advice. Professional negotiators often assume that asking the other party for advice will convey weakness, inexperience, or both.** But in fact, in one recent study, participants rated partners who asked them for advice to be more competent than partners who didn’t ask for advice, Brooks, Wharton School professor Maurice Schweitzer, and Harvard Business School professor Francesca Gino found. When we ask for advice, we flatter the adviser and boost her self-confidence, the researchers discovered. So, consider taking opportunities to ask your counterpart for advice when you truly need it. Not only are you likely to benefit from the advice, but you may strengthen the relationship in the process.

**5. Put a fair offer to the test with final-offer arbitration.** When negotiating to end a dispute under the shadow of a lawsuit, you might find yourself frustrated by a counterpart’s seeming inability to make or entertain reasonable, good-faith offers. How can you come to a settlement that’s fair to both sides in such an adversarial negotiation? One promising but underused tool is final-offer arbitration (FOA), also known as baseball arbitration, according to Harvard Business School professor Max H. Bazerman. In FOA, each party submits its best and final offer to an arbitrator, who must select either of the two offers and not any other value. Parties may not appeal the arbitrator’s decision. When parties agree to use FOA, their offers typically become reasonable, as they now have an incentive to impress the arbitrator with their reasonableness. In Major League Baseball, where FOA is available, uncertainty about what an arbitrator might decide usually motivates players and teams to come to agreement in contract disputes. The next time you are in a dispute with someone you believe is being unreasonable, consider suggesting FOA, recommends Bazerman. If she has been bluffing, she likely will respond to your suggestion with a much more reasonable offer. If she takes you up on your offer, you should have confidence in your ability to impress the arbitrator with your reasonableness.