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All You Need Is Yes (Part II)

The key word needed to reach an agreement is “yes.” Harvard Professor William Ury observes that “yes” is a magic word, a powerful tool for disarming the other side. In negotiations, he recommends looking for occasions when you can say yes to them without making a concession. Say “yes” as often as possible: “Yes, I see your point.” “Yes, I agree with you.”

You should also get as many “yeses” as you can from the other side. This technique can be used to neutralize hostile behavior. For example, if the other side says “Your demand (or offer) has no basis in reality,” you can respond, “Are you saying you don’t see how my analysis shows damages in this amount—is that what you mean?” The other side will say “yes,” and as they do, the relationship between you and them changes. The “yes” transforms a contentious argument into the start of a rational dialogue toward agreement.

Each time you obtain a “yes” from the other side, the tension is further reduced. Professor Ury concludes that as you accumulate your “yeses” (and thus, agreement), even if only on the non-substantive things they are saying, you create an atmosphere in which they are more likely to say “yes” to a substantive proposal.