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YOU SHOULD SETTLE. BECAUSE.

Most of us recall the classic film the *Wizard of Oz*, where Dorothy and her new friends the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Lion made a journey down the Yellow Brick Road to see the Wizard. On the way, they sang that they were off to see him “Because, because, because, because, because. Because of the wonderful things he does.”

What can we learn from that song to make us better negotiators? Using one word in your requests can make a big difference to persuade others to follow your path. That word is “because.”

Behavioral scientist Ellen Langer and her colleagues conducted a test to determine the persuasive power of “because.” In one study, Langer had a stranger approach someone waiting in line to use a photocopier and ask, “Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine?” Responding to this direct request to cut in line, 60 percent of the people agreed to allow the stranger to go ahead of them. But, when the stranger made the request with a reason (“May I use the Xerox machine, *because* I’m in a rush?”), almost everyone (94 percent) agreed.

Langer’s additional testing gets more interesting. This time, the stranger used the word “because,” but backed it up with a completely meaningless reason. The stranger said, “May I use the Xerox machine, because I have to make copies?” One would think the response would be, “You have to make copies, who doesn’t?” Despite the bogus “reason” given by the stranger, the high levels of compliance were almost the same as when a legitimate reason was provided (93 percent).

Digging deeper, in another study, the stranger asked to cut in line and make 20 copies (a higher stakes inconvenience, fraught with the risk of having to wait on a paper jam). Results: the request without a reason or the word “because”: only 24 percent complied. This percentage did not increase in another test when a bad reason was given. However, when the larger request was made with a good reason (“. . . because I’m in a hurry”), the compliance rate doubled.

These studies show that it’s best to accompany negotiation requests with a strong rationale, even when you think the reasons are quite clear. Don’t just assume that the other side understands the reasons behind your requests.

Now, if I could just get that “We’re Off To See the Wizard” song out of my head.