

BOOK REVIEW

Getting To Yes – Negotiating an agreement without giving in (Second Edition, 1992) **By Roger Fisher and William Ury with Bruce Patton (editor)**

“Getting To Yes” is a study of negotiation that works on the premise that we are all negotiators but that our standard procedure of “positional negotiation” (i.e. taking a position) leaves us feeling disappointed because we are either too “soft” and feel exploited or too “hard” which can leave us with damaged relationships. Fisher and Ury propose an alternative method called “principled negotiation,” an all-purpose strategy that is distinctive from other tactics because the same process can be applied by both sides to gain maximum advantage.

The methodology of “principled negotiation” consists of four key areas; people, interests, options and criteria, and each are dealt with in chapters 2 – 5 of the book. The first point the authors identify is to “separate the people from the problem”, which can be summed up as attacking the issues and not the negotiators. The book then suggests the need to “focus on interests not positions” i.e. identifying the thinking or what they call “silent movers” behind people’s stances which can help sides find other answers as well as shared interests. Thirdly, before making a decision, negotiators should “invent options for mutual gain” through brainstorming, expanding alternatives, blending shared and different interests and looking for solutions that work for both sides. Finally, Fisher and Ury recommend that one should “insist on using objective criteria” because this is based on fairness, saves time and removes the fight for supremacy.

The book then examines “what if” scenarios and in particular, looks at developing a BATNA (best alternative to a negotiated agreement) when the other side is in a position of power (chapter 6). Any potential deal should be evaluated against a BATNA to establish which best advances one’s interests and because identifying what to do if there is no agreement boosts confidence during negotiation. The book also suggests tips for when the other side “won’t play” (chapter 7) or “uses dirty tricks” (chapter 8) and then concludes with ten questions and answers, an additional section to the second edition of the book.

With regards to the book’s main ideas, the authors present sound arguments to support their theory of “principled negotiation” that are consistent with ethical behaviour and at first glance appear to be straightforward to apply. Indeed, some of the ideas seem so simple, familiar and practical, that it easy to question why we have never thought of employing these techniques earlier. However, the book’s simplicity is perhaps also its weakness, as the book fails to take full account of important factors such as emotion or time restraints and also makes the big assumption that the other party is willing to negotiate.

In terms of the style of the book, the authors write in a clear, logical manner and give lots of examples throughout the text. One of the most useful parts of the book is the expanded example in chapter 7 (pp. 122 – 133) entitled “getting them to play” which gives a step-by-step scenario of a negotiation between a tenant and a landlord that had charged over the rent control limit. This is helpful as one begins to understand how to put the theory into practice. Whilst the rest of the book has examples from a wide variety of sources, these end up being limited to a few lines and not developed enough.

At times, the book feels slightly repetitive, and the questions and answers section at the end (section V) was one of the least useful parts of the book as it failed to add in much new material, preferring to re-iterate principles that had already been outlined. Whilst this was irritating from the reader’s point of view, it remains an effective tool to reinforce ideas, and one is certainly left at the end of the book with a good grasp of the basic concepts.

In conclusion, “Getting To Yes” is a valuable introduction to the art of negotiation and the authors present an interesting set of tools one can use to reach agreement with another party. The concept is simple, and although the application may be harder, the book teaches effective and practical tips and places a high value on respect and preparation when negotiating. “Getting To Yes” may not be a comprehensive guide to negotiating, but it is a useful examination of the subject with constructive strategies for the budding or experienced negotiator.