

Getting to Yes Book Summary, by Roger Fisher, William Ury

by Allen Cheng

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1-Page Summary of Getting to Yes

Overall Summary

Getting to Yes, written by the founders of the Harvard Negotiation Project, promotes a strategy called principled negotiation. This method is designed to help people get better outcomes in their negotiations and relationships. The book shows how this strategy can be applied in many different contexts such as work, school, politics, and marriage. In all these fields people negotiate on a daily basis but often end up dissatisfied or alienated from others because they don't know how to do it well. Traditional positional bargaining encourages people to take extreme positions and view agreements as requiring one-sided concessions; however principled negotiation is designed with an emphasis on effective solutions rather than stubbornly fighting for face saving points.

The first principle of principled negotiation is to separate people from the problem. In positional bargaining, one must choose between winning and losing a relationship or substance in a conflict. Principled negotiators consciously separate relationships and problems by managing misperceptions, emotions, communication and biases. First they should understand what motivates their counterpart, then account for their own emotions related to the situation at hand; finally they should maintain clear communication with each other without any misunderstandings.

The second rule of negotiation is to focus on interests, not positions. When people enter into negotiations

they have a position in mind, but their real goal is to satisfy their interests. Even though two sides may be presenting opposing views, there can still be common ground between them if the negotiators are willing to listen and compromise. People should view each other as teammates rather than enemies during negotiations and take everyone else's concerns seriously.

The authors suggest that people should negotiate to find a solution that is beneficial to both parties. They should brainstorm and come up with many options for mutual gain before beginning the actual negotiation. In these sessions, they shouldn't criticize each other's ideas and postpone making decisions until later. By doing this, negotiators will have more choices when it comes to coming up with solutions that are acceptable to everyone involved in the negotiation process.

The fourth rule is to insist on objective criteria. Instead of negotiating over individual interests, people should negotiate using external standards like fairness or scientific merit. For instance, during the Law of the Sea Conference, India and the United States made an agreement about deep-sea mining regulations with a scientific model. Objective procedures can also help make agreements easier to reach; for example, splitting dessert by “one cuts and the other chooses” is much more effective than arguing over who gets how much cake.

The authors then explain that the first step to negotiation is understanding your BATNA, which stands for Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement. It shows how much you'd lose if you didn't reach an agreement and it also determines your power in the negotiation far more than money or influence can. However, this only works if it's specific and actionable, not just an idea in general.

Next, the authors offer two strategies that principled negotiators can use with people who insist on using the positional bargaining approach. The first is negotiation jujitsu, which means refusing to engage a person's position and instead framing all discussion in terms of interests. (This can involve using open-ended questions and carefully-timed silences.) The second strategy is the one-text procedure, which involves a third party mediator creating a joint list of everybody's interests and then developing a plan to fulfill those interests in consultation with all parties involved. As an example of this process, the authors analyze Frank Turnbull's negotiation with his landlord Mrs. Jones over unfair rent increases she had been charging him for years due to her ignorance about fair market rates for renting apartments in their neighborhood. Turnbull cites objective standards like fair prices and consistently emphasizes that he isn't attacking Mrs. Jones' character or accusing her of misbehavior; when she accuses him of extortion after he refuses to back down from his demand for fair pricing based on objective standards, he ignores her accusation rather than getting into personal attacks or explaining himself further—he just gives her another chance to make her case based on principles rather than attacking him personally again. He intentionally asks for some time to think it over, then comes up with a reasonable solution that Mrs. Jones accepts without feeling cheated or misunderstood because Turnbull didn't get into any more arguments with her about whether what they were doing was morally acceptable.

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