



▶ AGENDA CONTROL AIDS NEGOTIATION PROCESS

LATZ
NEGOTIATION

By Marty Latz

“What’s your price?” Maureen asked shortly after John arrived. “Cut to the chase. I’m running late, so just tell me what you’ve got and your bottom line.”

“Wait a second,” John responded. “Before we discuss price, why don’t you tell me a bit about what you want, why and how you think we might be able to help each other? Then we can discuss the value we add, which provides the basis for our fees.

“And if we run out of time, I’ll be happy to come back or put together a written proposal for you based on your needs, what we’ve discussed and include our fees. Make sense?”

“Sure,” Maureen said.

The issue? Controlling the agenda.

Maureen wanted to talk price. John wanted to ask questions and get information.

Thus they started by negotiating over the agenda -- the substantive one regarding the concrete issues on the table, and the atmospheric one dealing with issues like tone, style, trust and feelings.

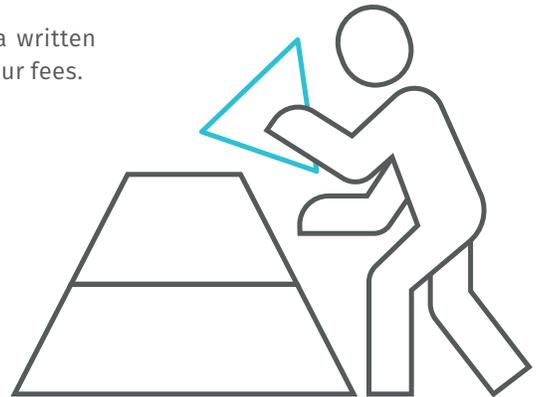
Agenda control constitutes a critical element in all negotiations. If, when and how we address issues affects our results. So does setting the appropriate atmosphere in which to most effectively explore the substantive issues.

John knew starting their discussion on price would be the kiss of death for both parties. Focusing initially on zero-sum issues like price -- where more for one side necessarily means less for the other -- often leads to more adversarial, less collaborative atmospheres.

Why? Most parties expect to competitively butt heads on zero-sum issues.

As a result, John wanted to first establish a problem-solving atmosphere, develop a relationship, and substantively explore Maureen’s needs and interests. This meant deferring their price conversation, if possible, to the end.

Interestingly, many mistakenly get into price or offers and concessions too early. In most negotiations, these issues should be among the last to arise, not the first.



So how can you control the agenda? Follow these three steps:

1. Prepare a substantive and atmospheric agenda before you start your negotiation. Don't wing it.

Think strategically about which issues you want to address first, second, and so on. Prioritize them. Then figure out what atmosphere will most likely get you what you want.

And don't forget to analyze why it also makes sense for the other side to adopt this agenda.

2. Explore and evaluate various tactics to set and control the agenda.

Consider ways to utilize the power of the pen. Perhaps propose a written agenda with a handout. Or use a blackboard or flip chart.

Alternatively, you might orally suggest a basic agenda and seek the other side's agreement or input.

Plus, judge the advantages and disadvantages of setting a deadline or series of deadlines.

Sometimes it helps to create a sense of focus and urgency. Other times it unnecessarily increases tension and competitiveness.

3. Lead the way in negotiating the process and agenda.

Don't leave the initial atmosphere and issues to chance or the other party.

Take the initiative in negotiating an agenda that will be perceived as efficient, fair and likely to satisfy both sides' interests.

This doesn't necessarily mean, however, aggressively trying to set the rules of play. Leading the way might involve initially asking the other side what they'd recommend process-wise. You might then explain your thoughts and negotiate the pros and cons of the ideas on the table.

Also in most cases, don't attempt to impose an agenda. It creates resentment. And remain flexible. Effectively resolving your process dispute may require fancy footwork.

Finally, remember the reciprocity principle. Ensure both parties have the opportunity to engage in the agreed-upon actions.

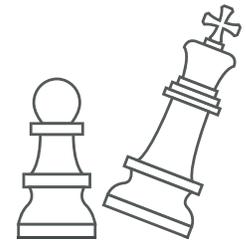
And if a party isn't honoring their commitment, remind them of their earlier agreement. Most dislike appearing inconsistent.

Few doubt the significance of positive first impressions. In negotiations, final impressions -- after you walk or sign -- also carry great weight.

Successfully accomplishing both depends in large part on controlling the agenda.

Consciously control the agenda next time. You'll walk away with a better result -- and a more satisfying process.

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Marty Latz
Internationally Recognized
Negotiation Expert, Author,
& Founder of LATZ Negotiation

ABC News Anchor George Stephanopoulos has called Marty Latz "one of the most accomplished and persuasive negotiators I know." As the founder of LATZ Negotiation, Marty has trained over 100,000 business professionals and attorneys from around the world, how to more effectively and successfully negotiate.

Latz is the author of *Gain the Edge! How to Negotiate to Get What You Want*, and has appeared as a negotiation expert on CBS, CNN, and Fox News. Latz also negotiated for The White House nationally and internationally on The White House Advance Teams. He also has written a monthly negotiation column for various newspapers since 1999.

Latz received his law and negotiation training from Harvard Law School, where he graduated *cum laude*.

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