

**Negotiation – the most portable, profitable, valuable skill you can master.  
Here are some simple strategies you can apply today to help you succeed  
with this important skill.**

To be frank, most people are not great negotiators.

The reasons for this are many and varied, but they all boil down to one factor – they are not ‘match fit’ for the game.

Meaning they don’t practise on a day to day basis on the ‘little scenarios’ that come up. Whether it’s dealing with their children, their spouse, a retailer, their staff, boss, manager, supplier – you name it. Every day presents a negotiation challenge on small issues and details.

Consequently, when it comes to a big issue – such as annual salary, allocation of resources for the next twelve months, buying a house – most people are just not ready to make the most of the opportunity because they haven’t had the practise.

**Make it a game to help you relax**

It’s important to note that I call it a ‘game’ for a specific reason. It’s not to trivialise the discussion or issue you’re trying to work through.

I’ve worked with people to apply these strategies when dealing with areas such as the Family Court and the Australian Taxation Office - two very serious bodies – so I know how important this can be.

**(Side note** – in two cases I know of personally, these skills saved thousands of dollars in tax fines. They also helped one parent achieve a better, more equitable custody arrangement for their children. Negotiation is a hugely important life skill.)

Rather, by calling it a ‘game’ we tell ourselves to lighten up. We can give ourselves permission to test out our skills and experiment with our strategies. Most importantly, you need to realise **you will screw up!**

By seeing it as a game, we can relax with that certainty, and start learning from it so we can improve. And that’s where the real benefits start to come. Bit by bit we get better, more experienced, and start to reap a far greater reward, both personally and professionally.

**Lady loses \$5k in one transaction – what was her mistake?**

Just this morning, I heard on the 774 ABC radio program with John Faine, a caller raising their property sale dispute with the regular guest lawyer, David Whiting (he always provides an interesting, balanced perspective on problems).

The issue of a property not being settled at the agreed time had cost this lady \$5,000. She was asking to whom she could send the bill to ease her pain. The answer in this case was the real estate agent, who had failed to finalise an aspect of the agreement in writing (what a silly mistake to make!).

**What would YOU have done differently?**

The point for you to consider is - what was this lady's strategy going into the deal? How did she prepare for the *inevitable mistakes* that other parties would make? How did she factor in that the outcome was *never as important to other parties as it was to her*?

For most people, those kinds of questions are a foreign language. At best, an afterthought that arrives way too late in the game.

For you, they can make or break a negotiation.

A powerful question to consider is this:

**What has it cost YOU - both personally and professionally – to NOT have these skills developed at a higher level?**

Some of my clients prefer to only consider this for a few moments, because to really delve into it is too depressing.

But what really matters is how will you work on this moving forward?

### **Practise every day**

The first key is to practise, practise, practise. Every chance you get. And the more you look for them, the more you'll see there are chances to practise every single day.

### **Be strategic**

The second key is to start being more strategic in your thinking. This can be a hard one to teach, because some people are more naturally attuned to this than others.

If you've ever played chess (a great way to foster the mindset of being strategic), then you'll know the process of having to think more than one move ahead. Rather, you have to consider your next move, the other party's response, then your next move after that, and so on.

The best way I can teach it to you now is to recommend you practise the right questions when you prepare for a negotiation. Eighty percent of the effort **is in the preparation**. But most people just show up and hope. And as a client once said to me, 'Hope is not a strategy'.

The answers will always change. That's part of the fun in life. But the right questions can be one of your best tools in getting a better outcome.

### **Questions to help you prepare**

Here are a few questions to consider practising in your preparation for any discussion where the outcome can be negotiated:

What do we know about the other party?

- How do they react?
- Are they well informed?

- What is their chosen strategy?

What should we consider about the long-term relationships?

- Will you be more reliant on the other party in the future?
- Who has the most power in the relationship?

How can we prepare for movement – clarify where you are willing to compromise and what are the other person's goals?

What is our agenda?

- What are your opening statements?
- What questions will you ask? And in what order?
- What do you anticipate their opening statements will be?
- What might be some of their questions? What might be some of their objections?

Again, most people do NOT do this kind of preparation.

Why?

Well the main reason I find, is that if you went into their brain and examined their main thought process right before they started negotiating, you would see one word – 'ME'.

### **It's not all about YOU**

To really achieve success in negotiations, it's so helpful to take your mind off 'ME, ME, ME' and start thinking about the other party. What do they want? What are they feeling? What are they thinking?

Then, you can start to align your approach to where they're at, not just to where YOU are at.

### **A technique you can start using right away**

Finally, let me suggest one practical technique you can apply that will significantly help speed your skill development as a negotiator.

It's called 'Think-Speak'. I taught it at the recent CIS breakfast, and its simplicity can fool you into missing how important it is.

Here it is:

Before you answer any questions, before you ask someone a question, **before you say anything at all**, pause for a second.

Have that moment in your mind, where you ask yourself, "Should I say this right now?"

If you're someone who speaks off the cuff, who can be a little lacking in diplomacy, who puts your foot in it, this technique can save you so much time and angst.

I actually learnt this from a tai chi master, but I really saw it in action when I was negotiating with a gentleman who was a former undercover police officer. This guy was excellent at choosing his words carefully, without sounding stilted or contrived.

It takes a bit of practise, but what you will start to find is you're more tactful and better timed with what you say. Therefore, what you say will have more impact.

And others, who are not so well versed in this technique, will give you more information than they intended. They'll give themselves away more easily. They will open doors for you to walk through and achieve the outcome you want.

### **It's worth it**

Good luck, and remember: practise, practise, practise! It's a fun game, and the rewards will far outweigh the effort you put in.

To your success,  
Elliot Hayes

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#### About the author:

*Elliot Hayes has worked across seven different industries – ranging from telecommunications to film and television to corporate training and development. It was during his tenure as manager of one of the top Optus franchises in Australia that he began to develop his skills as a trainer and educator. He has been running training programs in productivity for over four years, specialising in how to combine technology with time management principles for the maximum benefit. He has featured in BRW, and his clients have included Australia Post, Telstra, Department of Justice, and Optus.*

*Elliot also consults and trains in the areas of innovation in the workplace, sales and marketing. He is also a qualified tai chi instructor.. If you would like to give any feedback or contact Elliot to exchange ideas on how to improve productivity, then email [eth@findtime.com.au](mailto:eth@findtime.com.au)*

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