

Negotiations (1): Building relationships

Aims:

- To discuss the importance of building relationships in negotiations;
- To teach some useful phrases for a range of relationship-building techniques;
- To analyse an example of relationship-building in practice;
- To provide practice and feedback of the situation of building a relationship in a negotiation.

Level: Intermediate (B2) and above

Introduction

When we think of negotiations, we tend to focus on the hard negotiating skills connected with bargaining. In fact, many professional negotiators will confirm that the most important skill is effective relationship building. If there is trust and understanding between the two parties, the negotiation will be much more successful, as will the long-term business relationship between them.

1. Lead-in: Negotiations quiz

Cut up enough copies of the six questions for students to work in pairs, with one set of questions per pair. They then work through the six questions in any order they choose. After about 10 minutes, open up the discussion to include the whole class. It is a good idea to keep a record of their answers to question 1, as this will help you get a better understanding of their needs from these workshops.

Suggested answers: See reading text.

2. Reading: Negotiations – the basics

Give each pair a set of cut-up paragraphs. They then spend around five minutes matching the paragraphs with the questions. Point out that the final order of the paragraphs should be the same as the six numbered questions (i.e. 1, 2, 3, etc.). They discuss the advice in each paragraph in their pairs and then share their ideas with the class. Encourage them to share their own experiences of negotiations, especially those that involved an important relationship-building element. Finally, discuss any vocabulary problems from the text (e.g. *a defensive strategy*, *manipulative*, *cheated* (adj.), *naivety*, *null and void* (see below), *to go public*, *a bluff*, *haggling* (see below)).

Language notes:

- If a contract is declared ***null and void***, the parties are no longer bound by it. In some legal systems (e.g. English law), there is a doctrine of *fraud in the inducement*, which means one party entered into the contract based on false information. If this can be proven, courts will not enforce the contract.

- **Haggling** is when a buyer and seller negotiate rapidly to find a price they can agree to. This often happens in informal negotiations (e.g. buying a tourist souvenir). Typically, both parties start with very different prices, and gradually move towards a compromise price.

Answers:1D 2F 3B 4A 5E 6C

3. Relationship-building techniques

Students work in pairs to match the techniques with the explanations and then check with the class. Go through the explanations with the class, eliciting examples of these situations from students' own experience. Discuss also what can go wrong with each technique (e.g. if they are used too much as cynical techniques, rather than genuine attempts to be nice).

Language note: In this context, if you are **cynical**, you do something because you have calculated that it is beneficial to you.

Answers:1b 2e 3d 4a 5f 6c

4. Dialogues

Students work in pairs to read the three dialogues and discuss the questions. When they have finished, discuss the questions with the class.

Suggested answers:

1. Fiona says nice things about the brochure (*impressive*), including the client list and recommendation; Hans is nice about the website (*really interesting, fascinating*), and shows that he took the time to read it and understand its relevance.
2. They accept the flattery and develop the theme, using question tags (*aren't they?, isn't it?*). Note that this is only possible because they have flattered each other's organisations. It would be inappropriate to use this to talk about oneself (e.g. *Yes, I am good company, aren't I?*)
3. It's a safe topic. Personal flattery may make people uncomfortable, especially if viewed as flirting. It's also very difficult to continue a conversation after someone flatters you, without sounding egoistic.
4. It's an ideal question because it's open-ended, and naturally leads to an interesting and relevant conversation. Most other questions (e.g. *Do you like sport? Do you have a family?*) can lead to dead ends (e.g. *No, I don't*). Other good openers involve asking about the journey or the hotel. If you are the visitor, you can ask questions about the company (e.g. *So, how many people do you have here?*) or the location (e.g. *Are you from this city? Is it a good place to live?*).
5. At least four: football; children (and worrying about their children); Bristol; karate.
6. *Wow. That's really interesting!; Really?; That's interesting; Sounds interesting.*

7. They both echoed actual words and phrases (e.g. *Football? Bristol? Krate camp?*). They also picked up on words and phrases that the other person used (e.g. *obsessed, kids* (instead of children)). They also related their experiences to the other person's, to show they were paying attention (e.g. *I don't drag my kids around to watch matches!; I've got all that to look forward to; You know what it's like to be a parent*).
8. Generosity: *I could ask him if he's got any advice*. Gratitude: *Well, that would be excellent. I'd really appreciate that*.
9. Very easy. They have many topics that they could come back to.
10. Hans is going to take Fiona to his favourite restaurant.
11. He makes it clear that it is his favourite table at his favourite restaurant; he says '*This project is very important to us, so we want to treat you well!*'; he points out that he booked the table himself.
12. She says '*Oh ... that would be lovely*' and '*Well, that's very kind of you*'. She gives Hans the chance to withdraw his generosity (*please don't go to any trouble. I'd be happy with a sandwich!*) and then accepts it with a promise to return the favour (*In that case, you must let me return the favour if ever you visit our factory in Edinburgh*).

5. Practice

Put students into pairs. If you have an odd number of students, you could have a group of three, where there are two visitors. They then role-play the three conversations, using the prompts. Make sure they know that the prompts are just intended as a starting point: they should develop the conversations in whatever way they find natural. Make sure also that everyone gets the chance to play the role of both the host and the guest at least once. Afterwards, ask some pairs to act out their conversations with the class. Elicit from the class how many things in common they found, and what other techniques they used.