

The Principled Project Manager - *Negotiating Tactics*

By Dr. Bill Moylan, PMP

My PM Musings articles from September and then December 2021 continued my series of articles addressing one of the most important skills of the savvy Project Manager -- the ability to *negotiate* the best outcome that satisfies the needs of all stakeholders for Win-Win-Win. As noted in the September article, reaching consensus requires compromises between the parties to meet or exceed the necessary project goals while building and maintaining important relationships among the project stakeholders. In December, *negotiation strategies* for the Principled Project Manager noted the importance of the first five minutes of the negotiation, the need to stay objective and impersonal, using “I” statements to keep the focus on how you feel, and focus on interests.

This article will discuss *negotiation tactics* for the Principled Project Manager to consider. The Project Principles to be followed are the last four of the 12:

- Principle # 9. Navigate complexity
- Principle # 10. Optimize risk responses
- Principle # 11. Embrace adaptability and resiliency
- Principle # 12. Enable change to achieve the envisioned state

[The complete list of the 12 Project Principles is included at the end of this article.]

Negotiation Tactics

The PM as tactician starts with establishing the goals, both explicitly and implicitly, for the negotiation. Properly setting the negotiation goals focuses the Project Manager’s proper attention on what’s most important and identifies the emotional baggage to jettison. This tactical planning process follows the following requirements.

Do Your Homework

The Greek adage about knowledge is an imperative for the Project Manager entering any negotiation - “*the man who knows what he knows, and knows what he does not know, is a man who knows.*” *The PM who does not know what he does not know* is in big trouble, and not just in the negotiation.

The PM and their negotiating team must perform their due diligence and required research prior to the negotiation. The savvy attorney never asks a question in the courtroom for which they do not already have the answer.

What is your ideal outcome?

The point of any negotiation is to get to a better state of being than where the parties are now. Describing the ideal outcome prior to the negotiating session(s) start, will help establish the point at which the PM will know when to cease talking and sign the agreement.

Moreover, identifying the nirvana threshold will help quell the buyer’s remorse that often creeps in afterward. Too often a rush to “make a deal” at all costs causes doubts and misgivings in the aftermath. The PM needs to establish their minimum and maximum points – what will seal the deal and conversely what will cause them to walk away.

How will you connect with all sides of the negotiation?

Another element of the PM's preparation for the negotiation is to identify the ways in which they intend to attend to the needs and wishes of all sides involved in the negotiation process. Bringing the sides together to a mutual agreement requires connecting. Understanding what they can offer and what they cannot fulfill gives the PM an upper hand in settling the negotiation to everyone's benefit.

What can be sacrificed versus sacrosanct?

Preferably, the negotiation will lead to a Win-Win with both sides in their ideal situation. At the other end, the negotiating parties walk away from making any deal. In between, the parties make concessions and reach a compromised agreement.

The PM must establish what they are willing to sacrifice to reach a compromise and identify what they consider non-negotiable. They tactfully establish their tactical positions -- knowing when to fold them, hold them, and when to walk away.

Next time, my negotiation article will address the four principles for "getting to yes" popularized in the book of the same name by Robert Fisher and William Ury.

As always, your questions, comments, and criticisms are welcome. Feel free to contact me in care of email:

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Best regards,

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12 Project Principles

1. Be a diligent, respectful, and caring steward
2. Create a collaborative project team environment
3. Effectively engage with stakeholders
4. Focus on value
5. Recognize, evaluate, and respond to system interactions
6. Demonstrate leadership behaviors
7. Tailor based on context
8. Build quality into processes and deliverables
9. Navigate complexity
10. Optimize risk responses
11. Embrace adaptability and resiliency
12. Enable change to achieve the envisioned future state

12 Project Management Principles

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