

5 TIPS ON NEGOTIATING (FOR THEATER PROFESSIONALS)

1

LISTEN UP

One of the most important things you can do in any negotiation is actually not negotiate. Just listen.

Listen to what they want. When you have a counter argument, don't interrupt, just write it down and come back to it later.

Sometimes I find that folks want/need to get their emotions out about why they need more, deserve more, etc . . . and often when that's over and they get it out . . . and when I've shut up, listened, and agreed with them . . . and then simply explained that because of the constructs of the project, what I've offered is the best I can do, they agree. (One of my favorite things to say when someone tells me how talented, important, etc. someone I want to hire is, I usually say, "I know . . . I called you remember?")

2

KNOW WHEN TO WALK AWAY

Sometimes deals don't come together. And honestly? I can't

think of a time when a deal hasn't come together that I've regretted it. You know the saying, "Things happen for a reason?" Well, things DON'T happen for a reason too. If you aren't getting a good vibe, if your negotiating partner is asking more than the project can bear unreasonably, and, most importantly, if you don't feel there is a strong desire for the person/theater/etc. to make the project happen, then walk away. And find a person/theater/etc. who does. Creating great theater and producing great theater to financial success is waaaaay too hard to go into it feeling like you've been taken advantage of, or that the other party is doing it just for the gig. There are other fish in the sea of theater. Cut bait and "cast" again. (Bonus tip on the same subject – if you say, "If you don't get back to me by XX day and time, we are moving on," you better mean it. If you say you're going to walk, you gotta be prepared to walk . . . otherwise it has the opposite effect.)

3

YOU CAN HANDLE THE TRUTH

And you should always tell the truth. And this goes for both sides. There is

credibility for a negotiation and future negotiations more than making something up . . . and then getting busted. Because you will get busted. I've seen people lie about other people on projects, figures, etc. It's fine if you don't want to reveal information, but don't just make up something to prove your point. Remember, you're in this business for the long haul – the best way to get the best deal "now and forever" is to be honest and respectful. Lying may seem like the "sharky" thing to do, but no one wants to do business with sharks.



4

NEGOTIATE AS HIGH UP AS YOU CAN

It's always better to get the decision maker on the phone. You want to deal with the top rung of the ladder if possible. It's not always possible, but do try . . . at the same time, be careful of insulting the person who is a rung or two below when you ask. But don't hesitate to appeal to a higher power if you aren't getting what you want along the way. And I don't mean, "Will you ask SO-AND-SO to please consider this?" I mean, "I would like to speak to SO-AND-SO. Can we arrange a call?" It's kind of like asking for a supervisor when you're dealing with AT&T and not getting anywhere.

5

DON'T BE AFRAID AND HAVE FUN

This is the most important tip of all. Too many people dread getting on the phone or negotiating in person (which – and here's another bonus tip – is the best way to negotiate) and that sets the wrong tone for the discussion. First, remember, that most people feel the same way you do about negotiating . . . including the person you're dealing with. It's a necessary part of business, but we all wish we could just skip over it and get to the good stuff of making the play. But we can't. So embrace it. Don't get nervous. Have fun. If ever you do feel a little flummoxed . . . take a break, ask to call back, leave the room, "press your pause button" and then go back in. Negotiating can actually be a blast, especially if you keep your eye on its purpose and remember that you're doing it to produce something wonderful. In fact . . . oh boy, here comes an analogy I may regret someday, but I'm going for it anyway . . . think of it like sex when you're trying to have a baby. If you put that image in your mind, you're bound to have a good time. Happy negotiating, everyone!

