

## The Art of Negotiation

*By Sheena Mayers*

Is it really true that the single and most dangerous word to be spoken in business is NO? If so then the second most dangerous word would have to be YES! Often we head straight for both a Yes or No answer to a problem, but in many instances neither is the solution and then you must negotiate. Good negotiating skills are paramount in today's business world; we negotiate for everything! Parents understand that they need to negotiate with their children, sometimes on things as trivial as what shirt to wear. Salespersons are often trained in the art of negotiation because it is seen as critical skill in performing their jobs. Managers and CEOs understand that 'give and take' is a part of the game and in order to be successful this must be done. Besides 'sealing the deal', business people, and more often than not Human Resource professionals, also negotiate with staff.

Often times the word negotiation brings a picture of two people on opposing sides of the table with fists balled and banging the table. Thus the mere concept of negotiation may cause persons to cower in fear. But this is far from reality. The Oxford dictionary defines negotiation as discussion aimed at reaching an agreement. It is a process which should be centered on trying to reach a win-win situation where both parties have dealt with their interests.

In the Human Resource and Industrial Relations arenas, negotiation constantly occurs. It is not limited to the formal collective bargaining process where trade unions, such as the Barbados Workers' Union, is the representative of the workers and the company, which may be represented by the Barbados Employers' Confederation, discuss aspects of the employment relationship.

Whether unionized or not, companies have to negotiate items such as change in hours, new benefit schemes and leave time with their employees. The employment relationship is not static. Situations arise, markets change and business arrangements differ and you will require some level of flexibility. Furthermore, your employees are evolving human beings and their needs, life situations and aspirations will change over time. Therefore the fluidity of the employment relationship causes negotiation to extend beyond the initial offer and acceptance that forms the contract of employment.

To guide you through your next negotiation, whether selling a new concept internally to staff, asking for a salary increase, or bargaining with a third party trade union, remember:

**Don't take it personally**

“During a negotiation, it would be wise not to take anything personally. If you leave personalities out of it, you will be able to see opportunities more objectively.” - Brian Koslow

### **Respect all parties**

“He who has learned to disagree without being disagreeable has discovered the most valuable secret of a diplomat.” – Robert Estabrook

### **Maintain Flexibility**

“The worst thing you can say is ‘I want \$X for this job,’ leaving no opening for negotiation by the other side. Better language is ‘I hope to earn between \$X and \$X.’ That gives the other party more flexibility.” – Bill Coleman

### **Good Faith**

Always negotiate in good faith, if you put an offer on the table don't rescind it just because you are angry or did not achieve your initial goal.

Negotiation is about knowing firstly what you want to achieve; what is the end game and then seek to achieve it. In the process respect the other parties. Remember that yes and no are not the only alternatives and that compromise is an essential element. While you look out for your interests, you must also consider the needs that are shared by the other party.