



## The **TRUST** Method for Successful Negotiations

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“Joe, hurry or we’ll be late for class,” Meg said as she motioned Joe to follow her into the building. Joe was looking forward to taking this negotiations class.

Arlene, the instructor, introduced herself to the class. “Today, we’ll cover negotiation skills using the trust method. The primary goal of this course is to equip you with the necessary skills that result in successful negotiations, which can be summed up in one word: trust. Trust displays itself in tangible forms. For instance, commonality is the common ground where the property owner and agent can easily identify with one another. How can an agent find commonality with an owner that would result in mutual trust?”

Arlene calls on Jonna, who works for an electric company. “One day I arrived at the owner’s home and commented on their elaborate garden,” Jonna said. “I also have a garden and love to work in it. After exchanging secret garden tips, they invited me into their home. I was surprised how a simple garden could help me build rapport.”

“Thanks for sharing that, Jonna,” Arlene smiled. “Rapport is another form of trust. You can hear rapport in owners by the ease in their conversation. You can see rapport by their gestures. Owners who have rapport do not sit with a frown on their faces, arms folded and legs crossed.”

Joe raised his hand to make a comment. “A few weeks ago, Meg and I had a meeting with some farmers in Harvestville. We were but two inches into their living room when the wife acted as though she was ready to throw us out.”

“Well, I don’t think she liked the way we were dressed,” Meg offered, “We looked liked we had an important meeting with the President. She gave us a quick look, an icy glare covered her face and she began arguing with everything we said.”

“Something as simple as what an agent wears can cause mistrust with owners,” said Arlene. “An agent can intimidate an owner by dressing too formally. For example, a suit and tie agent who meets with a farmer dressed in overalls and a faded flannel shirt

# **“A good agent keeps their instinctive antenna on full alert during the entire negotiation process.”**

may not have much success. Conversely, a property owner may not take an agent seriously if she is dressed too casually.”

Arlene projected the word TRUST up on the screen. “Let’s discuss each letter of this word to learn the foundational importance of trust and its necessary role in negotiations.”

## **T - TEST YOUR ATTITUDE**

What’s your attitude toward yourself? Do you respect yourself? Trust yourself?

“Self-trust is expressed in our attitude through self-respect. It helps us take an objective view of our strengths and weaknesses and welcomes criticism. Self-trust promotes trust in others. What’s your attitude toward your job? Is it, ‘Take this job and shove it?’ I certainly hope not! Negotiation reveals your innermost feelings about who you are. If you have a poor attitude, then expect failure in negotiations!”

Arlene continued, “A poor attitude also stymies creativity, which is the key to problem-solving and working around a stalemate.” Emphasizing the importance of creativity, Arlene reflected on a personal experience she had a few months earlier. It involved acquiring easements from 18 property owners for an aerial telecommunication line extension in a rural community within an upscale community.

The acquisitions had progressed well, but Arlene had one owner who dragged his feet. He had so many questions, and none of her answers seemed to satisfy him. She recommended that they meet out in the field and thankfully, he accepted. She arrived at the site early only to find that he had arrived earlier. Moreover, she observed that the job had already been built.

Arlene digressed after noticing the disappointment on the student’s faces. “The engineer released the job in advance of right of way. Don’t you just hate when that happens? Talk about losing leverage.”

After a cordial handshake with the property owner, Arlene remained silent, noting the well-known tactic that the first to speak is the first to lose control. He spoke first, noting, “Looks like the job is already done!”

Arlene replied confidently, yet sympathetically. “Yes, it is. It’s rare, but it does happen. Normally, jobs aren’t built until all

easements are secured. Regardless, my company requires an easement on private property. Now that you can actually see where the aerial line is on your property, it may be easier for you to grant the easement.”

Not quite. The owner was upset that the work was done without his consent. He explained that he lived in the city, and he was planning to build his dream home on this property. He was not going to have his dream home surrounded with aerial lines. It didn’t matter to him that normal construction was aerial. It didn’t matter that the aerial line wouldn’t interfere with his view, as indicated on his proposed floor plan. He just didn’t like aerial lines. In his mind, the line was in trespass, and he had every right to ask that it be placed underground.

“My goal was to build trust, steer him from NO, and move him toward YES,” assured Arlene. “To embark on this journey, I asked him a series of questions to find out exactly what it would take for him to sign the easement document.”

“Would you grant an easement if the line was placed underground?”

“Yes,” he replied.

“We would only underground the line that crosses your property. Is that agreeable to you?”

“Yes,” he said.

Two out of two! We progressed in the right direction, Arlene told the class. If the phone company were to immediately comply and underground the section of aerial cable, then the owners whose easements Arlene hadn’t received would want the same consideration. “All I saw were added costs for my employer.”

So she asked him another question. “When do you plan to build your home?”



“Not for another three or four years,” he said. Would he consider a statement in the easement document that said something like, ‘Grantee shall underground the aerial line as it affects your property only when future improvements are made upon written notice from you, the Grantor?’

While he thought, Arlene held her breath, and just before turning different shades of red and a little blue, he responded with, “Yes, I’m agreeable to this.”

“Through creativity and trust, I was able to negotiate a win-win situation,” Arlene concluded. “Remember the value of asking questions to reach a place of common ground, because questions help agents know what the owner wants and needs.”

## R – RESPECT

Respect involves doing all you can to prepare yourself for the initial contact with the property owner. It’s important to take time beforehand to thoroughly review the engineer’s work, understand the project goals and investigate possible alternatives with the least impact on the property owner.

Arrange a meeting with engineering to better understand their goals and why they chose this particular design. Are there alternate plans that would be acceptable? Is their timeline set in concrete? What are the budgetary restraints on compensation? If necessary, would engineering be agreeable to a field meet with the property owner?

Respect also includes learning about the property owner’s community. What kind of lifestyle is common among the residents? Is there a diverse range of income brackets? Do they have a warm and neighborly attitude, or do they prefer to keep to themselves? Taking time up front to become familiar with the environment will go a long way when it comes time to negotiate.

## U - UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE AND YOURSELF

Negotiation takes place between people. To negotiate successfully, agents must have a desire to learn about people and understand what’s important to them. “We learn by reading, listening, observing and finding out how people act and react in certain situations. Every newspaper story and casual conversation gives you a chance to build up your armor of information about human behavior,” Arlene pointed out. She then outlined how behavior is made up of habits, instincts and intelligence. A discussion of these behaviors followed:

**Habits:** Habits are forms of behavior that have become permanent by repetition. An owner, who has encountered repeated run-ins with an agency or company, may react in a hostile manner. Thus, it is important for the agent to look beyond the hostility and help the owner shift their focus to the business at hand.

**Instinct:** Some define instinct as a natural impulse. Nature equips us with instinct as a means to protect ourselves from danger or to allow us to relax in a comfortable situation. All of us have it; we just need to be aware of it and use it. For instance, an agent’s instinct may take over as intuition raises a flag of caution with a difficult owner. The successful agent should maintain a healthy sensitivity to the why’s in the property owner’s behavior.

**Intelligence:** Experts advocate a fine line between instinctive and learned behavior. Our ancestors adjusted to their environment by relying on their instincts. Over time, intelligence began to challenge those instincts. The behavior we learn - either through personal experiences or from other’s mistakes - fuels and expands our intuition or instincts. As we evolve with continuous conflict and the dynamic of change, the complexity of the various facets of behavior reaches new heights of challenge and dilemma.

“So, what’s an agent to do?” Arlene challenged. “Each owner is different. Each one has their own set of dynamics and complexities. I suggest that agents practice their gift of instinct and flow with opportunities for its continual growth.”

As the class was dismissed for a short break, Joe said, “I didn’t realize that a good agent needs to be a psychologist!”

Meg agreed. “I’ve been thinking about the Stillners in our last negotiations and see why we didn’t get very far in our last meeting with them.”

“Can you say ‘indifferent?’” Joe muttered.

Meg sighed. “I hate to admit it, but Mrs. Stillner reminds me of my crabby grandmother. I wished I had remembered what worked with Grammy. I think it would have worked with Mrs. Stillner during our negotiations.”

“Now, that’s a perfect example of learned behavior,” Joe boasted, recalling one of the key points from the class.

## S – SENSITIVITY

Arlene proceeded with the class. “Let’s continue by discussing the letter S.”

A good agent keeps their instinctive antenna on full alert during the entire negotiation process. Keen on the slightest change in the owner’s attitude, body language and mood, an agent is also flexible enough to modify their own behavior in order to adjust to the change in the owner’s behavior.

“I worked with a property owner who had recently suffered a personal loss,” Arlene recalled. “The owner was adamant when he said he didn’t want to go forward with my proposal.”

Arlene wondered what to do next. She had lost a lot of time playing phone tag with the owner, and knew his unfortunate tragedy was a major part of the delay. As her deadline approached, Arlene couldn’t move forward until the owner’s issues were resolved. Once she thought seriously about the owner’s tremendous loss, she began to empathize with his feelings. She imagined that he felt out of control, his world crumbling. Nothing was right for him, so why would he want to cooperate with anyone? Bewildered, Arlene turned to the only idea she could think of. “I gave him control of the situation,” She told the class. “I asked him, ‘What would you recommend, Mr. Bentley?’ But he was silent.”

He finally said, “I’ll give you an easement if you change the location.”

Arlene explained to her students, “This was not about location. It wasn’t about granting an easement. It was about Mr. Bentley’s sense of self-worth and the feeling he was losing control. I needed to use sensitivity and realize that his loss overwhelmed him and his world was out of control. Once I empathized with his situation, he was able to move forward in a positive way.”

## T - TEST YOUR HEARING

Practicing good listening skills is the same as watching for road signs. They will alert you to potential problems or roadblocks. A good listener will spot a change in the property owner’s behavior. Just by listening carefully to the property owners’ words, phrases, expressions and mannerisms of speech and tone of voice, you will get important clues.

Good listening occurs on different levels. Watch for changes in the way the property owner communicates. Do they seem to be struggling to make a point? Does there seem to be an odd choice of words? By watching closely and listening carefully, you will uncover the underlying issues, even if they are not articulated by the owner.

## IN SUMMARY

The TRUST method is a simple guideline designed to enhance and improve negotiation skills. Trial and error has proven that it really works.

After class, Joe and Meg walked to their car and talked about what they had learned. “This was a great class! I think the trust method could have worked with the Stillners,” Joe said. “Sure wish we could re-do our negotiations with them and use these new skills.”

As Meg drove out onto the busy street, Meg said, “Who knows, we may have another opportunity!”



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