



# 7 Unexpected Ways to Increase Sales

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# Introduction

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From the first point of contact to a signed contract, the entire sales process is a negotiation. In author and negotiator Stuart Diamond's words, "you can't get away from it. You can only do it well or badly."<sup>1</sup> Although it's easy to focus on specific features and decimal places, negotiations are won and lost based on human emotion and perception. The way you communicate and the skills you use to navigate a negotiation impact your ability to get what you want more than the solution itself, the stakes, or the context. We've laid out seven unexpected ways to increase your influence and become a more effective salesperson in every situation.



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# **1. Demonstrate Understanding**

In his book *Getting More*, negotiator Stuart Diamond states that people are six times more likely to agree with someone they genuinely like. That said, being likeable doesn't mean being overly agreeable or good at small talk. So what is the secret to gaining esteem and influence?

In one word: understanding. We're innately drawn to people who are perceptive of our needs and who communicate in a way that shows their understanding of our perspective, even if they don't agree. In short, understanding is likeable. Of course, factors such as body language, tone, and eye contact play a role in your appeal, but the cornerstone to winning someone over begins and ends with tactical empathy. Contrary to what you were taught in elementary school, the quickest and most effective way to earn someone's trust and approval is not by treating them the way you would want to be treated, but by treating them the way they want to be treated—and keeping your own emotional preferences and projection biases out of the mix.



If you understand the emotional drivers that are influencing someone's point of view, you can adjust your communication style to resonate with their needs without sacrificing your integrity or objectives. Identifying the type of negotiator you're dealing with will help you determine the best way to gain trust and build influence. The three basic negotiation styles are:



### **Assertive**

Assertive negotiators are the most informal type. They like the feeling of being in control, need time to articulate their point of view, tend to be abrupt and are the most unceremonious of the three.



### **Accommodators**

Accommodators are focused on building relationships and earning approval. This is both their biggest strength and their biggest downfall. On one hand, they're easy to speak with and tend to be open to different perspectives. On the other hand, their desire to be liked can cloud their judgement, causing them to say "yes" without planning for the "how."



## Analyst

An analyst is inherently more doubtful, quiet, and slow to trust. They're data-focused and have trouble making decisions in the moment. They will need time to process new information.

If you can identify your counterpart's negotiation style, you can anticipate their natural reactions and communicate more effectively—a skill that will make you more likeable and increase your influence. For example, if you're dealing with an assertive type who likes to explain themselves, it's not wise to interrupt them or attempt to outtalk them when you're just beginning to establish trust. Instead, figure out what communication techniques will help you earn their confidence and make them feel comfortable and autonomous. An effective negotiator will incorporate all three negotiation styles into their own approach, bearing in mind the principles of balance, timing, and tone.



## **2. Distinguish Yourself**



Buyers today talk to multiple sellers, so it's likely that they've heard a variation of your pitch before. There are ample opportunities to set yourself apart from your competition without giving a long-winded "why we're different" speech. If you're married to a sales pitch or a specific conversational formula, it's dangerously easy to switch into autopilot and lose your situational awareness, emotional intelligence (EQ), and flexibility. Furthermore, responding to your counterpart's questions with scripted answers doesn't demonstrate that you're listening or prove that you understand their point of view. When you give scripted responses, your tone of voice suffers and your focus naturally shifts to yourself rather than the unique prospect and situation at hand.



**“Unlike preparing a speech, identifying different communication techniques encourages you to think about your seller’s point of view and anticipate their emotional reactions.”**



Instead of rehearsing a pitch, prepare for the negotiation by brainstorming different labels and calibrated questions you might use to learn more about your prospect's core motivations and perceptions. Unlike preparing a speech, identifying different communication techniques encourages you to think about your seller's point of view and anticipate their emotional reactions. Preemptively engaging in this thought process will improve your flexibility and composure under pressure. Furthermore, using labels and calibrated questions confirms listening and demonstrates understanding while simultaneously buying you time to hone your response.





### **3. Address the Negatives**



**“Regardless of whether or not you address them, they’re bound to be on your prospect’s mind.”**



Another surefire way to differentiate yourself and build trust is to state the truth, including the downside. It’s a common sales instinct to avoid drawing attention to potential negatives. Regardless of whether or not you address them, they’re bound to be on your prospect’s mind. Avoiding them, or worse—trying to qualify or spin-doctor them into positives—will only give them more power and rob you of your influence and credibility.

Addressing negatives outright helps diffuse them. Before you begin a conversation, get a [cold read](#) as to what your client may be thinking about you. To do so, imagine how they would describe the situation to a group of friends over a drink, accounting for factors such as body language, history, environment, and circumstances.



For example, imagine walking out of a store just in time to see a meter maid writing you a ticket. Maybe your meter just ran out; maybe the store clerk held you up longer than you anticipated; maybe you always pay for parking but couldn't find any quarters. You're probably annoyed and may feel like you've suffered an injustice at the hands of this good-for-nothing paper pusher (and so it snowballs).

In order to get an accurate cold read, put aside your justifications and emotions and focus on your counterpart—in this instance, the meter maid. As enforcers and bearers of bad news, meter maids are likely accustomed to angry confrontations, despite the fact that they're just doing their job. Maybe they have ticket quotas to reach each day, and that puts pressure on them to be less forgiving with the rules. If it's cold out and early in the morning, maybe they're uncomfortable and tired because they just finished writing tickets for all the other cars in your row.



Use all this information to conduct an “accusation audit,” i.e., predict what positive and negative emotions your counterpart is experiencing and generate some labels to preemptively address them. Consider the opening statement, “It’s awfully cold out and you’re just trying to do your job—it must be draining to deal with idiots like me who manage to screw up something as simple as paying a parking meter.” This statement acknowledges a few powerful negatives right off the bat, demonstrates understanding, and defies the listener’s worst expectations, paving the way for an agreement. Sales negotiations are no different than countless other negotiations we navigate every day. If you can anticipate your counterpart’s negative emotions, then you can diffuse them more quickly and effectively.





## 4. Inject Humor

When used in the right context and delivered with the right timing, humor can be a powerful unifier, tension-reliever, mood-changer, and trust-builder. In his book *On Humour*<sup>2</sup>, philosopher Simon Critchley discusses the ways in which humor requires a tacit agreement between the joke-teller and audience about the way the world is. As the joke is told, tension builds and is eventually released by the punch line—a moment when the audience's expectations are subverted and a different reality is revealed. In such a way, humor can build accordance, encourage active engagement, and allow people to address mundane or even negative realities in a healthy way. That said, humor is incredibly contextual. An ill-timed or offensive joke can alienate your audience, so it's important to use [emotional intelligence](#) when getting cheeky. In a sales negotiation, the most effective type of humor is typically that which reveals your vulnerability and emphasizes your humanity.



**“As the joke is told, tension builds and is eventually released by the punch line.”**







For example, imagine that you're listening to a presentation and the speaker suddenly knocks over their coffee cup and spills coffee everywhere. Now, picture that person either: a) continuing to speak like nothing happened, or b) acting very frazzled and embarrassed. If both options made you cringe, you're not alone. These moments of vulnerability trigger an empathetic social response that can be both distracting and unnerving to witnesses. By responding with a self-deprecating joke, you allow your audience to acknowledge the situation, inspire a positive empathetic reaction, and quickly revert attention back to the discussion at hand.

Remember that humor is most effective when it's the exception to the rule. In other words, leave ample time in-between jokes and don't pull a dad move and recycle the same joke at every conversation break.




## **5. Don't Waste the Person's Time**

Sales people often get a bad rap for being long-winded and schmoozy. In writing, this tendency is known as "throat-clearing," i.e., the meandering four-paragraph introduction that readers skip over in the interest of getting to the point. Rambling or speaking in generalizations that aren't specific to your client's needs is a form of throat-clearing that tends to make people's eyes glaze over and their brains disengage. Instead, be respectful of your counterpart's time by addressing negatives, explaining action steps and options, sticking to a set timeline, and asking calibrated questions that get at the heart of their needs, challenges, and emotions.




Asking questions that begin with “what,” “how,” or “why” makes it difficult for your counterpart to give a perfunctory one-word response and makes it easier for you to learn everything you need to know to be more persuasive. Giving your counterpart ample space and opportunities to talk will also give them a sense of control—something that can make even assertive negotiators more relaxed and flexible.

In addition to these benefits, asking calibrated questions creates a collaborative dynamic whereby your counterpart must work with you and their own team members to come up with a solution. Calibrated questions that address implementation force behind-the-scenes decision-makers to engage in the negotiation process, so there's less risk that a deal will be killed internally.



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## 6. Get to “That’s Right.”



"That's right" is the response you aim to get when summarizing. Remember mastery is in tonality and the emphasis you put on certain words that resonate with your counterpart will have a direct effect on impact. Summarizing involves restating their point in an accurate and concise way. Both techniques demonstrate understanding and ask for verbal acknowledgement of that understanding, thereby inciting agreement and trust. If you don't hear a "that's right," then you've taken a wrong turn and must backtrack before you can proceed forward.

When fishing for those magic words, describe your counterpart's point of view using their own language to ensure that you don't come off as patronizing. In addition, make sure that a summary covers all of their points in a clear and concise way, so that their only option is to say, "that's right."





**“When fishing for those magic words, describe your counterpart’s point of view using their own language to ensure that you don’t come off as patronizing.”**



Lastly, don't be seduced by a "you're right." Although this response may sound like music to your ears, it has a greater likelihood of being disingenuous or half-hearted. If you've ever thrown up your hands in exasperation and blurted, "Ok! You're right!" you know that the phrase is also used to end or exit negotiations that have become tiresome or annoying. In such instances, you're is intended to distance you from your counterpart and emphasize that you're not on the same side.

You can't influence someone until you've demonstrated empathy and gained their trust. To that end, getting a "that's right" response is your green light to move ahead to the influence stage of the negotiation.





## **7. Don't Offer Solutions**



As a salesperson, it's your job to have a solution in mind long before you arrive at the negotiation table. The key is not letting it slip out too soon. If you lead with a solution, you'll never establish trust or gain the influence you need to get what you want. People make purchasing decisions based on trust, confidence in the seller, likeability, and emotion—not based on the solution itself. If you establish a strong, trusting relationship with a client, they may choose to stick with you when you change companies because they value that connection more than the solution you were selling.

Pushing a client toward a specific solution—no matter how great a fit you think it is—will breed resistance. Instead, offer understanding, present options, and explain what's possible. Use empathy to earn their trust and help position your desired solution in a way that resonates with their core values, needs, and emotional drives. As you discuss different options, let the client define terms and solutions in their own words to retain a sense of choice and control. They may only be interested in purchasing one solution, but the nature and scope of that solution could change based on the combination of options that they choose.



# The Takeaway

No matter how important a deal is, closing shouldn't be your only objective. It's important to view every negotiation as an opportunity to build trust and lay the groundwork for repeat business. Retaining an existing customer is five to 25 times less costly than winning a new one. It's also a much more predictable and sustainable revenue source, so you won't experience the added pressure of living deal-to-deal.

With that in mind, remember that your word is only as good as your team's ability to follow through. Your negotiated agreement should provide a clear and realistic framework for implementation.



To that point, don't set expectations or make promises that your team can't deliver on. If you're unsure about your company's ability to meet any aspect of an agreement, have an internal conversation sooner rather than later to ensure that the solution you're working toward is actually viable. It's okay to deny client requests that aren't realistic—in fact, it's essential to your long-term success. Getting a “yes” may make both you and the client feel warm and fuzzy in the short-term, but your relationship will suffer if that “yes” ultimately can't be realized. Lucrative, lasting relationships are built on candid and constructive communication.

Lastly, don't fear the word “no.” In negotiations, the word “No” is often an auto-response—a sort of knee-jerk self-preservation instinct that people use when they're uncertain or unwilling to concede control.



**“If you’re unsure about your company’s ability to meet any aspect of an agreement, have an internal conversation sooner rather than later.”**



By allowing someone to say “No,” you actually preserve their sense of control and calm their emotions, making it easier for them to process information and make decisions. Rather than taking a rejection personally, embrace “no” as an emotional reset button, begin to phrase your verb led questions to incite “no” responses. This has a direct effect on their emotional stability and leads to valuable clues needed for articulating your counterpart’s perspective.

Every negotiation requires the same skills, whether it’s negotiating a peace treaty, recovering a hostage, closing a billion-dollar deal, or getting a raise. Anyone can become a better negotiator, but honing your skills and flexibility under pressure requires expert training and [practice](#). Learn the skills you need to achieve more in and out of the office by taking a closer look at our interactive [negotiation training programs](#).





**Have questions about training,  
speaking engagements or coaching?**

**CONTACT US**



#### References

1. Diamond, Stuart. *Getting More: How You Can Negotiate to Succeed in Work and Life*. Portfolio, 2011.
2. Critchley, Simon. *On Humour*. Routledge, 2010.