

It's All in Your Approach

Review of Roger Fisher's *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*

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In Roger Fisher's book, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, Fisher presents the idea that traditional means of negotiating are both outdated and ineffective. Fisher argues that the negotiation tactics he presents are far more likely to reveal a mutually beneficial outcome for all parties, that can maintain positive relationships and truly find a solution that can make everyone satisfied with minimal sacrifice and maximum gain. His central message, that the problem and solutions should be the focus of negotiating, suggests compromise without settling. The root of concerns should be the focus, and personal emotions and egos shouldn't be left to interfere with finding a proper solution. Getting to yes comes from saying yes, and not due to rolling over or steamrolling your negotiations partner.

Fisher believes methods of negotiating are subject to three criteria to determine fairness: efficiency, improvement of or no damage to the relationship between parties, and a wise agreement where possible (Fisher 2011, Ch.1). Positions should be thrown out; there should be no "bid high, bid low" negotiations that require a back-and-forth give-and-take to find the midpoint. There should not be a dominant or submissive party. To negotiate and build stronger future relations, a compromise should be met that is based on underlying concerns of parties only truly properly. Fisher concedes that involved parties are in fact human beings and not abstractions; this cannot be ignored but should not be the deciding factor in a negotiation. All parties should attempt to focus on true need and not just desires or emotions, as human emotional unpredictability is what can lead to hurt feelings and business or personal rifts that benefit no one (Ch. 2).

Let's put Fisher's method to the test at a public library, by presenting a situation in which a library employee may need to negotiate with a patron. Perhaps they never returned a book and are being charged \$20 dollars to replace it- they try to bargain the cost with you by arguing it can

be found more cheaply on Amazon or insist that they returned it despite endless searching around the library without discovering it. Rather than pay their fine, they insist on an alternative. This is where Fisher's method comes in handy. Are they refusing to pay because they truly believe they returned it, or are they simply trying to get out of the fees? Are the arguments because they truly cannot afford the replacement fee, or simply because they don't want to? By attempting to see the situation from the patron's side, a library employee may discover that the cost is simply a financial burden that the patron cannot handle. This understanding opens the possibility of a deal with the patron- pay a penny every time you come in and you can continue to check out at each visit. Alternatively, if there is no history of claiming items were returned that weren't? We'll check this one up to being lost this time and not charge for the item. Both solutions present an option that requires compromise of both parties but can prevent a negative situation from souring the relationship between library and patron. Presenting both options of what you may be able to do to work with the patron gives the patron a stake in the outcome (do they pay slowly for the item because maybe they didn't return it and are able to use their "claims returned" option later with a more expensive item, or do they have this one let go and risk a lack of forgiveness on a future item?). Fisher points to this as a way of easing tensions and separating the people (and your feelings about them) from the problem (Fisher 2011, Ch. 2). You allow them to assist you in making the final decision by presenting the Best Alternatives to a Negotiated Agreement or BATNA (Ch. 6) based on library policies as listed above and offer a solution that could work for both parties. You are also offering them the opportunity to decide which better serves their own values and reasons.

The Tulsa City-County Library began moving to an 80-20 service model several years ago. This model relies on the assumption that 80% of patrons can self-serve and navigate the

library without assistance, while only 20% truly need staff help. This model required negotiating with customers once it was implemented to readjust previous conceptions about what a library should or shouldn't be, as well as which services a library staff member might be able to provide and when. For patrons to understand why we moved to the model (which some took as library staff no longer wanting to assist them), we had to explain the library interests and reasoning (we have limited staff and allowing patrons that can self-serve the option to self-serve, staff have more time to dedicate to those who truly do need help). Most patrons were reassured knowing the reasons behind the decision and the reasoning of library administrators. They were willing to listen and understand how it helped us better address their concerns of assistance when and where they truly needed it (Fisher 2011, Ch. 3).

As someone who has had over 12 years of experience working in a public library but is only just beginning their master's degree in the field, Fisher's approach to negotiating offers me insights into landing better-paying jobs by leveraging my experience and current school endeavor as a promise of intent for high achievement in more involved positions. By pointing to my reasons for wanting to advance my career (I'm passionate about public libraries and their impact in communities through responsible spending of taxpayer funds), and seeing the library's needs for a particular, higher position in the system (well-trained and experienced staff who can supervise a team ethically and efficiently), I can apply Fisher's method to explaining that my years of experience and record of high achievement show my capacity for future achievement and an assessment of my more-than-adequate training. I can go further by explaining that my current enrollment shows my desire to learn best practices for efficiency and ethical performance. My current enrollment means I will be learning new methods for library

management and growth as they occur in the profession; methods I can bring back to the system with me to share with others.

His advice to seek out the reasoning behind what other people can and won't offer during a negotiation could be used to sort out strained relationships with co-workers- why is the relationship strained? What are they doing that hurts it, and why are they doing it? What am I doing that could be hurting that relationship, and why? How can we sort out both of our reasons and intents to find a solution that will benefit us both? What options do we have that I can bring to the table, and how can I present those to my co-worker so that we can agree on one together. The act of agreeing on a solution itself would be one step towards repairing a strained relationship and proof that we could work together to solve other problems in the future- strengthening not only that relationship but our entire team's ability for higher levels of achievement in the future.

Getting to Yes is an insightful look at negotiation and compromise. It frames a negotiation tactic that's applicable to decisions requiring multiple inputs no matter the decisions importance, big or small. It would make for a productive read for other MLIS students, as its approach to negotiations stresses building stronger relationships while still getting what you need out of a situation. This doesn't always come easy to Librarians, who have a reputation for being introverts or passive aggressive. Yet, it's an approach that utilizes strengths that many Librarians have- researching the reasons behind decisions or offers and finding multiple solutions to a problem that could potentially work. All in all, Fisher's book would benefit students seeking a career in Library Information Sciences by offering an approach to negotiation that works well for both customer interactions and job-seeking or negotiating with Library Administrators.

Works Cited

Fisher, Roger, and William L Ury. 2011. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In*. New York, NY: Penguin. Kindle edition.

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