

The First Step in Any Negotiation,  
Conflict or Difficult Conversation

GETTING  
TO  
YES  
WITH  
YOURSELF

and Other Worthy Opponents

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*To My Teachers  
With Immense Gratitude*

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# Getting to Yes with Yourself

## INTRODUCTION

# THE FIRST NEGOTIATION

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*Let him who would move the world first move himself.*

—SOCRATES

How can we get to yes with others? How can we resolve the conflicts that naturally arise with colleagues and bosses, spouses and partners, clients and customers, children and family members, indeed almost everyone we interact with? How can we get what we *really* want and at the same time deal with the needs of others in our lives? Perhaps no human dilemma is more pervasive or challenging.

I have been working on this dilemma throughout my

professional life. Three and a half decades ago I had the privilege of coauthoring with my late mentor and colleague Roger Fisher *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In*. That book helped people change the way they negotiate with others at work, at home, and in the community. With millions of copies in circulation around the world, it helped transform the popular mindset for dealing with differences from “win-lose” thinking to a “win-win” or “mutual gains” approach.

Reaching mutually satisfying agreements can often be highly challenging, however. Since the publication of *Getting to Yes*, I have had the opportunity to train tens of thousands of people in all walks of life in the methods of mutual gains negotiation: managers, lawyers, factory workers, coal miners, schoolteachers, diplomats, peacekeepers, parliamentarians, and government officials. Many report success in changing the game from “win-lose” to “win-win”, but others struggle. Even if they have learned the basics of a win-win approach to negotiation, when placed in situations of conflict, they revert back to costly and destructive win-lose methods, usually attributing it to the necessity of dealing with difficult people.

Because I have focused in my work on how to deal with difficult people and challenging situations, I thought I might be able to help further. So I wrote a follow-up

book called *Getting Past No* and, in more recent years, another book called *The Power of a Positive No*. The methods described in these books have also helped many people to resolve their daily conflicts, but still I sensed something missing.

What was missing, I have come to realize, was the first and most important negotiation we ever conduct—the negotiation with ourselves.

Getting to yes with yourself prepares the way for getting to yes with others. I have come to think of this book as the missing first half of *Getting to Yes*. It is the necessary prequel, but thirty years ago I did not fully realize just how necessary. If *Getting to Yes* is about changing the outer game of negotiation, *Getting to Yes with Yourself* is about changing the inner game so that we can then change the outer game. After all, how can we really expect to get to yes with others, particularly in challenging situations, if we haven't first gotten to yes with ourselves?

## **OUR WORTHIEST OPPONENT**

Whether we think of it or not, each of us negotiates every day. In the broad sense of the term, negotiation

simply means the act of back-and-forth communication trying to reach agreement with others. Over the years, I have asked hundreds of audiences the question “Who do you negotiate with in the course of your day?” The answers I receive usually start with “my spouse or partner” and “my children,” continue on to “my boss,” “my colleagues”, and “my clients,” and finally to “everyone in my life all the time.” But, every so often, one person will answer: “I negotiate with myself.” And the audience inevitably laughs—with the laughter of recognition.

The reason why we negotiate is, of course, not just to reach agreement but to get what we want. Gradually, over the decades of mediating in a variety of difficult conflicts from family feuds and boardroom battles to labor strikes and civil wars, I have come to the conclusion that the greatest obstacle to getting what we really want in life is not the other party, as difficult as he or she can be. The biggest obstacle is actually ourselves. We get in our own way. As President Theodore Roosevelt once colorfully observed, “If you could kick the person in the pants responsible for most of your trouble, you wouldn’t sit for a month.”

We sabotage ourselves by reacting in ways that do not serve our true interests. In a business dispute, one part-

ner calls the other a liar in the press, shaming the other who launches a lawsuit that is highly costly for both. In a sensitive divorce conversation, the husband loses his temper, lashes out at his wife, and storms out, undermining his own expressed interest in resolving the issue amicably for the sake of the family.

Underlying our poor reactions in moments of conflict is an adversarial “win-lose” mindset, the assumption that *either* we can get what we want *or* they can—but not both. Whether it is business titans struggling for control over a commercial empire or children fighting over a toy or ethnic groups quarreling over territory, the unspoken premise is that the only way one side can win is if the other loses. Even if we want to cooperate, we are afraid that the other person will take advantage of us. What sustains this “win-lose” mindset is a sense of scarcity, the fear that there is just not enough to go around, so we need to look out for ourselves even at the expense of others. All too often, the result of such “win-lose” thinking is that all sides lose.

But the biggest obstacle to our success can also become our biggest opportunity. If we can learn to influence ourselves first before we seek to influence others, we will be better able to satisfy our needs as well as to satisfy the needs of others. Instead of being our own

worst opponents, we can become our own best allies. The process of turning ourselves from opponents into allies is what I call getting to yes with yourself.

## **SIX CHALLENGING STEPS**

I have spent many years studying the process of getting to yes with yourself, drawing deeply on my personal and professional experiences as well as observing the experiences of others. I have tried to understand what blocks us from getting what we really want and what can help us satisfy our needs *and* get to yes with others. I have codified what I have learned into a method with six steps, each of which addresses a specific internal challenge.

The six steps may at times seem like common sense. But in my three and a half decades of working as a mediator, I've learned that they are *uncommon* sense—common sense that is *uncommonly* applied. You might be familiar with some or all of these steps individually, but my hope is to bring them together into an integrated method that will help you keep them in mind and apply them in a consistent and effective way.

In brief, the six steps are as follows:

1. **Put Yourself in *Your* Shoes.** The first step is to understand your worthiest opponent, yourself. It is all too common to fall into the trap of continually judging yourself. The challenge instead is to do the opposite and listen empathetically for underlying needs, just as you would with a valued partner or client.

2. **Develop Your Inner BATNA.** Almost all of us find it difficult not to blame others with whom we come into conflict. The challenge is to do the opposite and to take responsibility for your life and relationships. More specifically, it is to develop your inner BATNA (*Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement*), to make a commitment to yourself to take care of your needs independently of what the other does or does not do.

3. **Reframe Your Picture.** A natural fear of scarcity exists in almost everyone. The challenge is to change how you see your life, creating your own independent and sufficient source of contentment. It is to see life as being on your side even when it seems unfriendly.

4. **Stay in the Zone.** It is so easy in the midst of conflict to get lost in resentment about the past or in anxieties about the future. The challenge is to do the opposite

and stay in the present moment, the only place where you have the power to experience true satisfaction as well as to change the situation for the better.

5. **Respect Them Even If.** It is tempting to meet rejection with rejection, personal attack with personal attack, exclusion with exclusion. The challenge is to surprise others with respect and inclusion *even if* they are difficult.

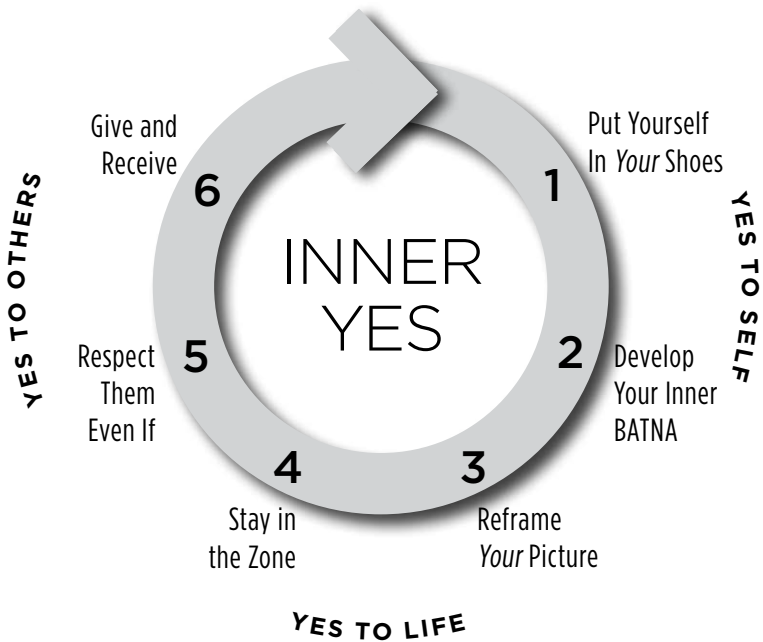
6. **Give and Receive.** It is all too easy, especially when resources seem scarce, to fall into the win-lose trap and to focus on meeting only your needs. The final challenge is to change the game to a win-win-win approach by giving first instead of taking.

I have come to understand the process of getting to yes with yourself as a circular journey in three stages, as the diagram depicts. Each stage takes you from *no* to *yes*. *Yes* means an unconditionally constructive attitude of acceptance and respect. The first yes you say is to *self*—by putting yourself in your shoes and developing your inner BATNA. The second yes you say is to *life*—by reframing your picture and staying in the zone. The

third yes you say is to *others*—by respecting them and by giving and receiving. Each yes makes the next yes easier.

The three yeses result in a single inner yes that sets you up for outer success. This method for getting to yes with yourself can appropriately be called the “inner yes method.”

### The Inner Yes Method



To help illustrate the inner yes method, I will draw on my own experiences as well as those of others. As a mediator and negotiation adviser in some of the toughest conflicts on the planet, I have had to train myself over the years to hold steady under pressure while being attacked by presidents and guerrilla commanders, to observe myself and suspend my reactions, and to respect people who are difficult to respect.

As I have found, the very same negotiating principles that are used for getting to yes outside can be used for getting to yes inside. What works in resolving external conflict can work in dealing with internal conflict. If you have read my earlier books, you will find much of my vocabulary familiar but applied in an entirely different way, looking inward rather than outward. If you are not already familiar with my work, don't worry. I will explain enough so that this book stands on its own.

While getting to yes with yourself may sometimes seem simple, it is often far from easy. In fact, based on my personal and professional experience, I would say that the process of getting to an inner yes is some of the hardest work we ever have to do. As straightforward as listening to yourself, taking responsibility for your needs, or respecting others may appear, *doing* these things eludes us more than we would perhaps like to admit—and never

more so than when we are in a conflict. I have tried to distill the process of getting to yes with yourself into its simplest form so that it will be easier to apply when the work gets tough and especially when emotions are running high.

Whatever difficulties may arise, however, the truth is that we are more than capable of overcoming them. The very best instrument we have for getting what we really want in life is in our hands. Through learning and practice, through examining our existing attitudes and testing out new ones, we can achieve results in personal satisfaction and negotiation success that are worth far more than the investment in time and effort. As I have personally experienced, getting to yes with yourself is not just the most challenging, but the most rewarding negotiation of all.

## **HOW TO USE THIS BOOK**

You can use the inner yes method in a number of ways. One is to review the six steps *before* an important conversation or negotiation—ideally a day in advance to fully prepare, but in just a few minutes if you are in a jam. Reviewing the six steps will help ensure that you do not

show up as your worst opponent, but rather as your best ally, when you interact with the other person. As you read this book, in fact, I encourage you to keep in mind a challenging situation or problematic relationship in your life. You will not only learn more by applying it in this way, but will also emerge better prepared psychologically to reach a mutually satisfying agreement with the other side.

Of course it will be a lot easier to get to yes with yourself in preparation for an actual negotiation if you have practiced the six steps regularly beforehand. Just as athletes train consistently in order to perform their best in a competition, so can you. Getting to yes with yourself is a daily practice, not just reserved for special situations. For those who are unaccustomed to looking inside themselves, the internal homework may feel like a bit of a stretch. It's okay to take it slow. As a lifelong hiker and mountain climber, I am a strong believer in taking long journeys in small steps.

Ultimately, the inner yes method offers a way of living your life and conducting your relationships with anyone, at home, at work, and in the world. Many readers may remember the insightful and useful book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by my late friend Stephen Covey. Like *The 7 Habits*, *Getting to Yes with Yourself* aims to

offer you a set of life skills, a successful and satisfying way to live and work well with others that comes from learning to live and work well with yourself.

While *Getting to Yes with Yourself* seeks to improve your ability to negotiate effectively, it is designed with a much broader goal in mind: to help you achieve the inner satisfaction that will, in turn, make your life better, your relationships healthier, your family happier, your work more productive, and the world more peaceful. My hope is that reading this book will help you succeed at the most important game of all, the game of life.