



## Linda Swindling JD, CSP

### **GO AHEAD SURPRISE ME: DEALING WITH THE UNEXPECTED IN INFLUENCING AND NEGOTIATING**

Surprises can be both pleasant and unpleasant. Make sure you are ready for both. Here are three you might encounter.

**The Gift.** Occasionally you are thrown a gift, a very pleasant surprise. A gift occurs when the other party gives you a much better opening position than you anticipate. Before accepting, make sure that you have analyzed the bargain properly. For instance, if the initial offer of the other party is much higher or lower than you first anticipated, review your position before making your counter offer. An unexpected response may signal you have not realized exactly what the deal entails or even that you and the other party are talking about different expectations.

**The Shock.** If someone throws out an unattractive offer, don't immediately dismiss it or get aggravated. Instead start asking questions in a courteous and inquisitive manner. "Just so I understand, what were you including when you came up with that offer? How did you get to that number? What is that amount based on?" Good negotiators remember that you discuss any offer that is made. They determine the reasoning behind an offer they didn't expect. Remember that it is rare to ask too many questions.

**The Deadline.** Always remember to leave yourself an out or an escape. Some of the biggest negotiation nightmares occur when there isn't enough time to reflect or you are forced to make an uninformed decision. Negotiate the deadline before you negotiate a deal. Ask for a break. Get back to them if necessary but collect yourself first.

Whether you're surprised by the Gift, the Shock or the Deadline, you can always respond with the words, "That isn't what I expected." I'll need to get back with you. It's the truth. It gives you time (even thirty minutes) to think and you can regroup. Surprises, good and bad, can actually enhance an opportunity and give you time to improve your results. Accept going in that you will be surprised at some part of the process. This will put you far ahead of most negotiators. It will help you not get thrown and make you look like a pro. Go ahead...surprise me.

#### **Win/Win/Win Negotiations Have Become a Must Have**

Have you heard of the triple win in negotiations? Win/win negotiations or deals where each party walks away with the best deal possible used to be a goal to achieve. Current times actually demand a win/win/win approach if you want a durable agreement. Not only do you need to make sure that the parties at the bargaining table come out ahead but you need to consider the needs of the ones who will be affected but aren't present. This win/win/win approach is important for a number of reasons.

**Offerings have expanded not retracted.**

You have more and more parties to choose to partner with. If one party doesn't worry about your interests, you usually have the ability to choose another who does. Choices have expanded on so many levels. Now, if an agreement doesn't meet the needs and wants of each of the parties, you need just pick up a phone or surf the internet for someone else to fill the requirement.

**The market is demanding customized solutions**

Look at sales training. Scripts are out. Formulaic procedures to show benefits and push standardized offerings have been replaced by consultative selling. Consultative selling focuses on customized requirements and meeting individual needs of the buyer AND the buyers customers and employees.

**Forcing agreements doesn't work for the long haul**

So many people say they understand the need for interest-based bargaining but then diligently fight against it. They don't share information. They compete instead of attempting to problem solve. They don't make the first offer and they posture a position that is unrealistic. This attempt to conquer or a win/lose approach no longer works if you want to build long-term relationships. Applying force, going to someone's superior and attempting to just deal with decision makers does not fit in the current professional environment. Word gets around.

**Win/win/win agreements are more durable**

Remember what win/win/win stands for: it is an attempt for all the parties involved to get a better agreement for all by collaborating to meet each party's interests. If the other party feels like its interests are represented or they made a bad deal, they may try to sabotage it or look for your non-compliance. If the people who will actually have to live under the agreement aren't happy, they may find a way to make their own or ignore the terms of something they didn't have input in. People are far more likely to support something they created.

While win/win/win is an easy concept to intellectualize, it can be difficult to actually implement. It may be up to you to remind everyone involved about the shared reasons you have to participate in the agreement or venture. You may need to help the others achieve their results before ensuring you receive yours. You want to identify the stakeholders who aren't at the bargaining table. Ask who else is involved in the decision making and who will be part of the implementation and who in the end will need to live under the terms created. In the end, you want an agreement people will support, have loyalty around and encourage.

*A recognized authority on negotiations, workplace issues, and persuasive communication, Linda Byars Swindling, is an author, television expert, a former employment attorney, and a Certified Speaking Professional. As a chair for Vistage International, the World's Largest CEO Development Organization, Linda has more than 2,000 hours as a CEO advisor and facilitator. She can be reached at [linda@lindaswindling.com](mailto:linda@lindaswindling.com) or 972-416-3652.*