



Linda Swindling JD, CSP

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST MISTAKES IN INFLUENCING

There are three mistakes that seem to occur over and over again: not preparing adequately, not taking calculated risks and not asking enough questions.

There is a lack of adequate preparation. It doesn't matter if you are a quick thinker and do well with little research. Not preparing usually means you leave something on the table or forget one of the key aspects of the negotiation. It's dangerous if you don't distinguish between your wants and needs. If you don't differentiate, you give the signal that everything requested has equal value. This approach can confuse or even frustrate other parties. It is not unusual for another party to walk away from the appearance of too many demands that can't be fulfilled. Second, you can get confused. You may miss something critical to the negotiation because some wants or unneeded requests were met. It is terrific to receive some items from your "wish" list but not at the expense of unmet essentials.

You may prepare in great detail but forget to consider the interests of the other party. This is equally as dangerous. I conducted a mediation a few years ago with two doctors, former partners. While in a session with one of the partners, the other doctor had decorated my entire conference room with neatly written flip charts that showed "why he should win." When I asked him where the posters were that reflected his former partner's interests or why the partner should agree to the position, there was silence. The doctor had methodically planned and thought about his position, but not that of his former partner. I took a break and told the doctor that the mediation would continue after he prepared some posters representing the partner's side. Fear and force are usually not good reasons to entice someone to negotiate with you. A good negotiator provides benefits which show the other side it makes sense to come to an agreement.

There is a fear of taking risks. Sometimes, you just have to chance looking stupid or hearing no. If you are not hearing no, you probably aren't asking for enough. It also helps to remember that you are taking calculated risks that you have thought through. Luck does play a part in negotiating. However, negotiating rarely involves gambling your life savings on a roulette wheel or taking a chance that might endanger your life. The best outcomes come from minimizing the unknowns, structuring the elements you can control and then taking risks by having the courage to act.

People don't ask enough questions. Questions are one of the only ways you will discover a party's true interest. Asking questions will garner not only what someone wants, but also areas to avoid. Question every answer you receive. It will help you determine real needs and interests. When you doubt how you should act next, ask a question.

Making the best deal possible

It is difficult not to examine and re-examine the deal you made. However, once you've looked at your outcomes and how you got to the result, you must move on. Paralysis by analysis does not serve someone who wants to improve their ability to influence. Here are five questions to help you review how you did, learn from those results and put them to use for the next deal coming up.

Were you creative?

Here are the magic questions that will help you be creative. Ask yourself what others have done in the same circumstances. Ask peers, your boss, even the person you are attempting to influence what people have done in the past. Then, ask yourself, what you could offer that the other party would value a lot that doesn't isn't expensive or time-consuming for you to provide. Ask yourself the same question about the other person's position. What could they offer you that you would value a ton that doesn't cost them much in time or resources. You will be surprised at how much value can be created by these questions.

Did you beat your BATNA?

In the book *Getting to Yes*, by Roger Fisher and William Ury, the term BATNA is an acronym for the Best Alternative to The Negotiated Agreement. It is a scholarly way of saying, examine your back up plan or a Plan B. If the agreement you're facing isn't better than your BATNA or your Plan B, choose your Plan B. If your current deal is better than your BATNA, proceed knowing you've done a good job.

Was it the best deal with the information you knew?

Another question you should be able to answer is, "Was this the best deal you could achieve at the time with the people present and the information you knew?" While it is true that you can always find out more information later that could enhance your results, there is a lost opportunity cost while you delay reaching an agreement. Also, that new information could work against you and in favor of the other party.

What did you learn that will be useful next time?

Where did you have significant learning that will be useful next time? Determine where or what you are going to change the next time you attempt to persuade or influence. Many bargains are struck that suit the facts that are present at the time. This same fact scenario, stakeholders and limitations may not ever be present again.

Were you realistic?

You may have set your desires too high or too low. You may have given yourself a shorten deadline or expected a result that the other person could never agree to meet. Be realistic. Not every deal happens the way we anticipate. Not every deal should happen at all.

Finally, give yourself a break. No one is perfect. Forgive yourself for what you did wrong. Reflect on what you did to correct the mistakes you made. Celebrate if you took a risk or tried something differently. Learn from this deal and MOVE ON!

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 or 972-416-3652.