

## 4

### **Don't Push:**

#### **BUILD THEM A GOLDEN BRIDGE**

Build your opponent a golden bridge to retreat across.

—*Sun Tzu*

You are now ready to reach agreement, having successfully suspended your reactions, defused the other side's emotions, and reframed their position. Still they may not agree. You face the barrier of their dissatisfaction. They may be asking themselves, "What's in it for me?" Things can still go wrong—as they all too often do.

A classic example is the failure of what might have been the world's biggest media merger. Every story has two sides; this is Al Neuharth's account of how he, in his own words, "blew the big one." In 1985, CBS was fighting a hostile takeover bid by media mogul Ted Turner. Neuharth, president of Gannett, had long had his eye on CBS and had cultivated a cordial relationship with CBS president Tom Wyman. Neuharth arranged an exploratory meeting with Wyman to discuss the possibility of a merger that would enable CBS to resist the takeover.

After several meetings, the two men reached agreement on most of the basic issues. They decided that because of his age and greater experience, Neuharth would become chairman and CEO, while Wyman would become president and chief operating officer. In a draft press release that Neuharth showed Wyman, Neuharth proposed that the new company be called Universal Media.

Then executives from both companies began ironing out the details. This is how Neuharth in his memoir describes the collapse of the talks:

A dozen bankers, lawyers and executives were assembled around the long rectangular table. Tom and I sat side by side. I was really pissed that people in this room for nearly three days had been unable or unwilling to do what Wyman and I had agreed upon.... I didn't waste a lot of time with social niceties:

"Tom and I thought it might help if the two CEOs got in on the act and explained to all of you how to get this deal done. It's pretty damn simple.... Tom and I have agreed

on the management structure of the company. The directors will be seven (CBS), seven (Gannett), and one (jointly selected). I will be chairman and CEO. Tom will be president and chief operating officer.”

The CBS guys looked surprised and puzzled. Our people nodded and smiled.

“You don’t have to argue about this or even talk about it or think about it. It’s all settled.”

Wyman looked uncomfortable. He sat up straight in his chair. “Yes, we’ve agreed on that,” he said a bit hesitantly....

I sensed immediately that I had screwed up. I had come on too directly and forcefully. Wyman’s people were hearing this news for the first time from me, not from him.... I should have let Wyman explain the terms. He could have put a more gentle face on it. I had satisfied my ego at the expense of crushing his.

Two days later Wyman telephoned to call off the deal. He objected to changing CBS’s name and was angry because he had learned Neuharth had also been discussing a merger with Time Inc.

After Neuharth hung up the phone he turned to his executives and said, “The game’s over. We lose. And he’ll lose.”

## Obstacles to Agreement

After exploring each side’s interests and the options for agreement, you may be ready to deal. But when you make your proposal, the other side may stall. Their resistance can take various forms: lack of interest in your proposals, vague statements, delays, renegeing on agreements, or a flat no. In the case of the media merger, CBS’s resistance manifested itself in the stymied negotiations between the two teams.

We often blame our negotiating counterpart’s resistance on personality or basic nature, but behind the impasse usually lie some very good reasons. Consider the four most common ones:

**Not their idea.** The other side may reject your proposal simply because “it wasn’t invented here.” Neuharth failed to involve Wyman in choosing the new name and in presenting the merger terms to the assembled executives.

**Unmet interests.** You may be overlooking one of your counterpart’s basic interests. CBS did not relish the thought of giving up its name.

**Fear of losing face.** No one wants to look bad to his or her constituents. Neuharth attributed the failure of the CBS-Gannett merger in large part to having made Wyman lose face in front of his own people.

**Too much too fast.** Your counterpart may resist because the prospect of agreeing appears overwhelming. The decision seems too big and the time too short. It may seem easier just to say no.

Your challenge is to persuade the other side to cross the chasm that lies between their position and the agreement you want. That chasm is filled with dissatisfaction, uncertainty, and fear.

## **Build a Golden Bridge**

Frustrated by the other side's resistance, you may be tempted to push—to cajole, to insist, and to apply pressure. Neuharth pushed hard when the negotiations bogged down.

But pushing may actually make it more difficult for the other side to agree. It underscores the fact that the proposal is your idea, not theirs. It fails to address their unmet interests. It makes it harder for them to go along without appearing to be giving in to your pressure. And it makes the prospect of agreement seem, if anything, more overwhelming.

Consequently, the other side is likely to resist all the more. In fact, they may welcome your pressure, for it takes them off the hook of having to make a difficult decision. By pushing, Neuharth actually widened the chasm that Wyman had to cross in order to reach agreement.

Instead of pushing the other side toward an agreement, you need to do the opposite. You need to *draw* them in the direction you want them to move. Your job is to *build a golden bridge* across the chasm. You need to reframe a retreat from their position as an advance toward a better solution.

Take the simple example of how, as a teenager, filmmaker Steven Spielberg built a golden bridge for a tormenting bully:

When I was about thirteen, one local bully gave me nothing but grief all year long. He would knock me down on the grass, or hold my head in the drinking fountain, or push my face in the dirt and give me bloody noses when we had to play football in phys. ed.... This was somebody I feared. He was my nemesis.... Then, I figured, if you can't beat him, try to get him to join you. So I said to him, "I'm trying to make a movie about fighting the Nazis, and I want you to play this war hero." At first, he laughed in my face, but later he said yes. He was this big fourteen-year-old who looked like John Wayne. I made him the squad leader in the film, with helmet, fatigues, and backpack. After that, he became my best friend.

Young Spielberg discovered the secret of building your adversary a golden bridge. He recognized that the bully needed to feel important. By offering the bully an alternative path to recognition, Spielberg successfully negotiated a ceasefire and turned him into a friend.

Building a golden bridge isn't easy. In a tough negotiation, you might ideally bring in a mediator to help resolve your differences. But that may be neither appropriate nor feasible. So, in the absence of a third party, you need to *mediate your own agreement*.

Instead of starting from where you are, which is everyone's natural instinct, you need to *start from where the other person is* in order to guide him toward an eventual agreement. One of the best descriptions of this process comes from a French novel. In it, a master diplomat explains, "I turn towards the other person; I become familiar with his situation; I mold myself on his destiny and, living in his place, I begin to experience his fortune and misfortune. Henceforth my concern is not so much to impose my point of view on him, as to persuade him to adopt the one I consider best for him—which always agrees with the interests of my own cause."

Building a golden bridge means making it easier for the other side to surmount the four common obstacles to agreement. It means actively involving them in devising a solution so that it becomes their idea, not just yours. It means satisfying their unmet interests. It means helping them save face; and it means making the process of negotiation as easy as possible.

### **Involve the Other Side**

One of the most common negotiating mistakes is to announce that *you* have found the solution to the problem. City planners unveil their scheme for a new waste-disposal site without having involved the residents of the surrounding neighborhood; in response, a citizens' group immediately organizes to fight the project. Management announces a streamlined work plan without having consulted its employees; the workers secretly sabotage the plan. The national budget director and the President's chief of staff closet themselves with six congressional leaders and emerge with an agreed-upon set of budget cuts; members of Congress who weren't involved denounce the agreement and reject it in the subsequent vote. So, too, your negotiating counterparts are likely to reject your proposal if they have no role in shaping it.

Negotiation is not just a technical problem-solving exercise but a political process in which the different parties must participate and craft an agreement *together*. The process is just as important as the product. You may feel frustrated that negotiations take as long as they do, but remember that negotiation is a ritual—a ritual of participation. People see things differently when they become involved. They may make allowances they would not otherwise make. They may become comfortable with ideas they once rejected. As they infuse their ideas into the proposal, they make it their own.

### **Ask for and Build on Their Ideas**

The great temptation in negotiation is to *tell*. Tell the other side the way to solve the problem. Tell them why your solution is good for them. Neuharth dealt with the sensi-

tive issue of the new company name by telling Wyman in a draft press release that it should be called Universal Media. Not surprisingly, the idea didn't fly.

Negotiation is more about asking than it is about telling. The simplest way to involve the other side is to ask for their ideas. How would *they* solve the problem of reconciling both sides' interests? As Neuharth later acknowledged, he should have asked Wyman for his ideas before telling him what the new name should be. Not only would Neuharth have gotten Wyman involved, but he would have discovered how much importance CBS attached to keeping its name.

Once you have elicited your counterpart's ideas, you need to build on them. This doesn't mean accepting them as they are. Rather, select the ideas you find most constructive, and starting with them, head off in the direction you want to go. It is easier to get your boss to change her position if you say "Building on your idea, what if we...?" Or "I got this idea from something you said at the meeting the other day...." Or "As a follow-up to our discussion this morning, it occurred to me that..." Show the other side how your proposal stems from or relates to one of *their* ideas.

Building on their ideas does not mean shortchanging your own. It means building a bridge from their thinking back to yours. Keep in mind the seventeenth-century abbot about whom the Pope said, "When the conversation began, he was always of my opinion, and when it ended, I was always of his."

## Ask for Constructive Criticism

As you develop your ideas, keep the other side involved by inviting their criticism. Stress that you are asking not for a yes or no decision but for feedback. Encourage constructive comments by asking problem-solving questions, such as "Which interests of yours does this approach fail to satisfy?" "In what respect is it not fair?" "How would you improve on it?" and "Is there any way we can make it better for your side without making it worse for mine?"

Once you have elicited their suggestions, consider creating a joint draft that incorporates their ideas as well as your own. Then run it by them for further comments. In a multiparty negotiation, show it to all the relevant participants and invite their suggestions. Then revise the draft, and if necessary, ask for more criticism. Gradually you will build consensus. The process is a little like creating a mural together—the other side paints a few strokes, you do, their boss does, yours does. Everybody who gets involved begins to think of the draft as their own.

## Offer Them a Choice

If the other side resists telling you their ideas or giving you feedback on yours, try to involve them by offering them a choice. For instance, if they have been putting off talking with you, begin by asking for small decisions: “Is ten o’clock on Tuesday better for you than three o’clock on Wednesday?” and “Would you prefer to meet at your office or mine?”

If they refuse to explore options for breaking the impasse, offer them a list of alternatives to choose from. If you are deadlocked over price, for example, say, “We can resolve the difference between your asking price and my offer by having an appraiser decide, *or* I can pay the difference with assets other than cash, *or* I can spread out the payments over time. Which approach would you prefer?” It may be easier for the other side to choose between A, B, and C than to invent D.

Once they select an alternative, it becomes their idea. Take the example of the homeowner who was negotiating an agreement with a general contractor. Worried that the remodeling work on her house might take much longer than she planned, the homeowner proposed a twenty per-cent penalty for failure to finish on time. But the contractor refused. So she challenged him: “Okay, *you* name a date you’re absolutely certain the job will be done.” Put on the spot, the contractor picked a date three months after the scheduled completion. The homeowner then asked, “Okay, now will you agree to the clause?” Because she was only asking him to live up to his own worst-case estimate, the contractor agreed.

The process of working together with an opponent can be long and arduous, but the rewards can be great. Remember the Chinese proverb: “Tell me, I may listen. Teach me, I may remember. Involve me, I will do it.”

## Satisfy Unmet Interests

Even if the other side is fully involved in the process of shaping an agreement, they still may resist coming to terms. Often their resistance stems from an unmet interest that you have overlooked.

Take the acquisitions negotiator for Campbell Soup Company who was trying to buy an extremely successful restaurant from its owner-manager. Campbell’s was interested in starting a chain of such restaurants. The acquisitions negotiator started by making what he thought was a fair offer, but the owner rejected it. Over the ensuing six weeks the negotiator increased the offer several times but to no avail. The owner would not even make a counteroffer. The talks were at an impasse, and the negotiator was on the verge of giving up. He blamed the deadlock on the owner’s difficult personality.

But then the negotiator decided to probe a little. In his next meeting with the owner, he backed off from his single-minded pursuit of a deal and encouraged the owner to discuss his reservations about selling the business. The owner said, “This business is my baby. And it has made me famous. I’m not sure I want to sell it and become part of

your company. For one thing, I like running my own show. You're going to have to pay me a lot to make it worth my while to give it all up." The negotiator came to appreciate the owner's strong needs for autonomy and recognition, interests that were clearly not met by a deal in which the owner became a company employee.

So the negotiator asked the owner: "What if you don't become our employee? This would be a little unusual, but what if we form a joint venture together to own and operate the restaurant? Campbell's would purchase, say, eighty percent of the stock from you, and you would keep twenty percent. You would be president of the joint venture; you'd stay in charge. And we would agree to buy your twenty percent at some future time. The longer you stay, the more we would pay for your stock. Would something like this meet your needs?"

The owner's response was positive, and a deal was soon struck. His needs for recognition and autonomy were fulfilled, as was his interest in a decent price. Campbell's was able to acquire the restaurant at a reasonable cost and to retain the owner long enough to benefit from his successful management formula.

This story illustrates how useful it is to look for a creative solution. More important, it shows how easy it is to miss such a solution by overlooking the other side's unmet interests. To address these interests as the Campbell's negotiator did, you have to jettison three common assumptions: that the other side is irrational and can't be satisfied; that all they basically want is money; and that you can't meet their needs without undermining yours.

## Don't Dismiss Them as Irrational

When you are frustrated by an inflexible opponent, it is easy to blame the impasse on his or her irrational nature: "My boss is crazy. No one can deal with him," or "Teenagers are just hopeless. It's no use reasoning with them." If you conclude that your opponent is impossible to deal with, you will not bother to probe for unmet interests.

It is easiest to reach this conclusion with hostage-takers: "You can't negotiate with terrorists—they're madmen." Certainly, their behavior may be irrational from our perspective, but it may make perfect sense from *theirs*. As long as there is a logical connection *in their eyes* between their interests and their actions, then we can influence them. One leading hostage negotiator, who represents corporations worldwide whenever their executives are seized, says, "They're all rational. Everyone negotiates. Even the 'dregs' give value for money." If hostage-takers are susceptible to being influenced, then your boss and teenager probably are too.

So don't give up easily. Put yourself in the other side's shoes and ask yourself honestly: "Would I agree to this if I were them? Why not?" And remember that their values may differ from yours, which might lead them to reject what you consider acceptable.

If you take a hard look, as the Campbell's negotiator did, you may well uncover interests that make it understandable from their perspective to say no.

Try to address the other side's objections and satisfy their interests while still meeting your own. Terrorists, for example, are usually motivated by the deep desire to get public recognition for their cause. Often the secret to persuading them to release hostages is to let them know that their message has been heard, and that killing the hostages would only discredit them in the eyes of the public. Many seemingly intractable hostage-taking incidents have ended after the terrorists received air time on TV and radio.

## **Don't Overlook Basic Human Needs**

We often assume, as the Campbell's negotiator did at first, that the other side is interested only in money or something equally tangible. We miss the *intangible* motivations that drive their behavior—their basic human needs. Everyone has a need for security and a deep desire for recognition. Everyone wants to identify with some group and have control over their own fate. Nations and ethnic groups have basic needs too. If unmet, these needs can block agreement.

By satisfying the other person's basic human needs, you can often turn the person around. The Campbell's negotiator was able to fulfill the restaurant owner's needs for recognition and autonomy. The young Steven Spielberg found a way to meet the bully's need to feel important. A hostage-taking in Boston ended after the authorities guaranteed that the hostage-taker would not be physically harmed. An impasse over a Wisconsin bank purchase was broken when the buyer agreed to keep the seller's name on the bank. An ethnic conflict in Italy's Trentino-Alto Adige region was defused when the German-speaking minority was granted cultural and administrative autonomy.

## **Don't Assume a Fixed Pie**

Even if you have identified the other person's unmet interests, you may believe you cannot satisfy them without frustrating your own. You may be falsely assuming a "fixed pie"—that more for that person means less for you. Frequently, however, you can expand the pie and satisfy the person's unmet interests at no cost and possibly some benefit to yourself.

**Look for low-cost, high-benefit trades.** The most common way to expand the pie is to make a low-cost, high-benefit trade. Identify items you could give the other side that are of high benefit to them but low cost to you. In return, seek items that are of high benefit to you but low cost to them.



Consider a negotiation between an American businessman and a Moscow cabdriver. In broken Russian, the businessman inquired what the fare would be from the airport to the Rossia hotel. “Forty rubles,” replied the cabbie. The price—equivalent at the time to sixty dollars—seemed high to the businessman, but when he asked another taxi driver, he was quoted the same fare. He then went back into the airport and bought a twenty-dollar bottle of vodka at a foreign currency store. He offered it to the first cabbie in lieu of payment and the cabbie eagerly accepted. Why? Because the Russian would have had to wait in a four-hour line to buy the same bottle in a local liquor store. The vodka was low-cost to the American, high-benefit to the Russian. The cab ride was low-cost to the Russian and high-benefit to the American.

**Use an if-then formula.** Another way to expand the pie is to use an “if-then” formula. Suppose that you are a marketing consultant negotiating with a client over your fee. You would normally charge fifteen thousand dollars, but your client is unwilling to pay more than ten thousand. Her resistance stems largely from uncertainty about whether your efforts will truly help her. Instead of trying to persuade her that she is wrong, address her skepticism with an if-then formula: “What do you say we make my fee ten thousand dollars as a base, but *if* your sales increase twenty percent over the next six months, *then* you agree to add a ten-thousand-dollar bonus?” Your client readily agrees, because the increased sales would make it easy to justify paying you the bonus. You take a risk, but if you are successful, you stand to earn even more than you originally requested. In sum, don’t fight the other side’s skepticism; take advantage of it by inventing a pie-expanding solution.

## Help Them Save Face

Even if you are able to satisfy the other side’s substantive interests, they still may not agree. After all, a negotiation does not take place in a social vacuum. There is always a constituency or audience whose opinion the other side cares about—their boss, their organization, their colleagues, their family and friends, or their own internal critic. Naturally they don’t want them to think they have given in. If they have previously taken a public position and then do an about-face, their constituents might say, “You sold out!” “What kind of negotiator are you?” or “You let him rob us blind!” The other side’s inflexibility may stem from constraints imposed by their constituents, rather than from their own concerns.

You may think, “Let them worry about *their* critics, and I’ll worry about mine.” But since their people can obstruct the agreement you want, it is your job to help the other side deal with them. Criticism from constituents typically boils down to two arguments: that your counterpart has backed down and that the proposed agreement is unsatisfactory. Your challenge is to help your counterpart avoid both criticisms.

## Help Them Back Away Without Backing Down

Face-saving is at the core of the negotiation process. There is a popular misconception that a face-saving gesture is just a cosmetic effort made at the end of a negotiation to boost the other person's ego. But face is much more than ego. It is shorthand for people's self-worth, their dignity, their sense of honor, their wish to act consistently with their principles and past statements—plus, of course, their desire to look good to others. All these may be threatened if they have to change their position. Your success in persuading them to do so will depend on how well you help them save face.

Consider the face-saving skill shown by French statesman Georges Clemenceau in negotiating for a statuette in an Oriental bazaar. The shopkeeper offered it to Clemenceau for “only” seventy-five rupees “because it's you.” The Frenchman responded with a counteroffer of forty-five rupees. The haggling continued, but Clemenceau stuck to his initial offer. Eventually, the shopkeeper threw up his hands and protested, “Impossible! I'd rather give it to you!” “Done!” replied Clemenceau, pocketing the statuette. “You are exceptionally kind, and I thank you, but such a gift could only come from a friend. I hope you will not be insulted if I offer you a gift in return.” The perplexed shopkeeper said he would not. “Here,” said Clemenceau, seeking to help him save face, “are forty-five rupees for you to use in charitable works.” The shopkeeper accepted the money, and they parted on excellent terms.

**Show how circumstances have changed.** One face-saving approach is to explain that originally your counterpart may have been right but that circumstances have changed. Suppose your most important customer insists on revisions in your company's standard sales contract but the lawyer at company headquarters has told you there will be no alterations. Instead of challenging the lawyer's decision directly, identify new conditions that enable the lawyer to justify a new approach: “Your no-changes policy has always been the right one for a regulated marketplace. Now that the Feds have deregulated this sector, however, we're facing much tougher competition. Do we really want to risk losing one of our biggest customers?”

**Ask for a third-party recommendation.** A time-honored method of face-saving is to call in a third party—a mediator, an independent expert, a mutual boss or friend. A proposal that is unacceptable coming from you may be acceptable if it comes from a third party.

Take the avid fisherman who wanted to buy a cabin in the North Woods. The owner insisted on an unrealistically high figure—\$45,000—and announced he would not bargain. The fisherman tried hard to change the owner's mind but to no avail. So the fisherman finally said, “Okay, I'll pay whatever an appraiser determines to be the fair price for the house.” The owner responded, “All right, but I pick the appraiser.” The fisherman countered, “Okay, you pick an appraiser, and I'll pick an appraiser, and together the two can select a third.” The owner agreed. They each identified appraisers who in turn chose the president of the local appraisers' society. Under the watchful eyes of his peers, he

came up with a figure of \$38,000. Muttering that the appraiser didn't know what he was doing, the stubborn owner nevertheless agreed to sell the cabin at that price. Having kept his pledge not to bargain, he hadn't lost any face.

***Point to a standard of fairness.*** In the absence of a third party, you can use the next-best thing: a fair standard. Suppose you are at loggerheads with an insurance claims agent over compensation for your stolen car. She refuses to pay more than \$5,000 but you think \$7,000 is fair. So you say, "Why don't we let the marketplace decide? You check the classified ads for similar cars, and I'll do the same. Let's talk again tomorrow." With the new information on hand, you agree on a figure of \$6,500. She doesn't feel she is backing down, since she is simply deferring to the market price. She also has a legitimate explanation if her supervisor should question why she agreed to pay you the additional \$1,500.

## Help Write Their Victory Speech

Your counterpart's constituents may attack the proposed agreement as unsatisfactory. So think about how your counterpart can present it to them in the most positive light, perhaps even as a victory. What could you offer that would help make your counterpart's explanation a victory speech?

President John F. Kennedy and his advisers asked themselves this question in October 1962, as they searched for a way to make it easier for Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev to withdraw Soviet missiles from Cuba. Kennedy decided to offer Khrushchev his personal pledge that the United States would not invade Cuba. Since Kennedy had no intention of invading anyway, the promise was easy to make. But it allowed Khrushchev to announce to his constituents in the Communist world that he had successfully safeguarded the Cuban revolution from American attack. He was able to justify his decision to withdraw the missiles on the grounds that they had served their purpose.

Anticipate what your counterpart's critics are likely to say and present persuasive counterarguments. If, for example, you are an investment banker negotiating with your boss for a raise and bonus, think what your boss's partners might say if he agreed to your proposal: "You're being too lavish with the firm's money." "You're going to make us look bad when our people find out how well yours did." Then think of answers your boss could give: "He deserves it. He brought in five million dollars' worth of business last year." "If we don't reward him for his hard work, we'll lose him to the competition." When you ask your boss for more money, prepare him by raising likely criticisms and presenting the counterarguments.

At little or no cost to yourself, you may be able to help the other side reframe a retreat as an advance. Suppose, for example, you are dealing with a union leader who has pledged to bring back a ten percent wage increase. You might agree to give him a

four percent increase this year and a three percent increase for the next two years. He can tell his membership that he succeeded in obtaining a ten percent increase—over three years. Or suppose you are buying a house from a couple who are determined to get \$200,000 because that's what they paid for it, even though it is now worth only \$180,000. You might agree to pay \$200,000 but stretch out the payments over time so that the deal is equivalent to a \$180,000 immediate payment.

Don't forget the value of giving credit. Even if the solution is your idea, consider letting the other side share the credit—or take all of it. In Washington, D.C., a city full of politicians eager to claim good ideas as their own, there is a saying that goes: "There's no limit to how much you can accomplish in this town if you are willing to allow someone else to take the credit." The same holds true in negotiations. Take the bride who wanted to register for china. Her fiancé resisted, saying, "We don't need all that crockery." The china became a sore subject. In a goodwill gesture he accompanied her to the store, where he saw a pattern he liked. She happily agreed to his selection and gave him credit for the choice. He proudly announced to their families and friends that *he* had selected the china.

Even if there is nothing you can give the other side, you can often shape appearances so that they do not seem to lose. When British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli was pestered by a supporter who wanted a noble title, Disraeli told him: "You know I cannot give you a baronetcy, but you can tell your friends that I offered you one and you refused it. That's much better."

## **Go Slow to Go Fast**

Even if you can satisfy the other side's interests and help them save face, they still may not agree because the process of reaching agreement seems too difficult. Too much needs to be decided in too short a time.

Your job is to make the process easy. Go slow in order to go fast. Think of yourself as a guide helping a client afraid of heights climb a steep mountain. Break the journey into small stages, pace your client, stop to rest when necessary, and look back periodically at how far you have come.

## **Guide Them Step-by-Step**

If reaching agreement on the whole package seems impossible at first, try breaking the agreement up into steps. A step-by-step approach has the merit of making the impossible gradually seem possible. Each partial agreement can open up opportunities that were not evident at the outset.

Consider how far a step-by-step approach took American diplomat Charles Thayer in negotiating with a German prison director at the outbreak of World War II. Thayer, whose mission was to deliver some belongings and supplies to a British vice-consul being held prisoner, recalled:

He [the prison director] had the British vice-consul brought from his cell, and one by one I handed over the items: pyjamas, shirts, socks, and a toilet kit.... I then produced a bottle of sherry, explaining that the vice-consul should have it served before his luncheon. The director said nothing, but took the bottle submissively. Next I produced a bottle of champagne which, I said, should be properly iced with the vice-consul's dinner. The director shifted uneasily but remained silent. Next came a bottle of gin, another of vermouth, and a cocktail shaker. This, I explained, was for the vice-consul's evening martini. "Now, you take one part of vermouth," I began, turning to the director, "and four parts of gin, add plenty of ice—" But I had reached the end of my tiny steps.

"*Verdammt!*" the director exploded. "I am willing to serve sherry and champagne and even gin to this prisoner, but he can damn well mix his own martinis."

If Thayer had presented all his requests at once, the prison director would undoubtedly have rejected the whole lot. By taking a step-by-step approach, Thayer substantially accomplished his mission.

To break the ice at the start of a tense negotiation, begin, as Thayer did, with the issue that is easiest for you to agree on. By moving progressively from the easier to the more difficult issues, you can get the other side into the habit of saying yes and show them that agreement is possible.

If the other side is particularly skeptical, consider starting with an experiment. Suppose you have devised a solid proposal for a new project but your boss is reluctant to give you the go-ahead. To your boss, it seems simpler and safer to stick with the tried and true. To make it easier, make the agreement experimental: "Can we carry out a pilot project with one department?" or "Can we try it out for one month?" By reducing the risk, an experimental agreement makes it easier for your counterpart to say yes.

When you are in the thick of the negotiation, it is easy to lose perspective and grow disheartened. Identifying the expanding areas of agreement and the shrinking areas of disagreement can generate a sense of momentum. Pause at each step to sum up progress: "So we've essentially agreed on the product and price. All we have to decide is how we share the costs of service and delivery."

## **Don't Ask for a Final Commitment Until the End**

Sometimes the step-by-step approach won't work because the other side is reluctant to make even a small agreement, thinking, "If I give an inch, you'll take a mile." If this is the case, don't press them for an immediate concession. Set them at ease by reassuring

them that they need not make a final commitment until the very end when they can see exactly what they will get in return.

This is what President Jimmy Carter did during the 1978 Camp David negotiations on the Middle East. Both Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat were reluctant to budge from their stated positions, fearing that any concession would be perceived as a sign of weakness. So Carter did not ask them to change their positions until the end of the thirteen days of peace talks. During that time he focused their attention on criticizing and continually improving an American discussion draft. After twenty-three drafts there seemed to be no way to make the draft better for one side without making it worse for the other. Only then did Carter ask Begin and Sadat for a decision. Instead of having to make many painful decisions along the way, each leader had to make only one at the end. Instead of facing a slippery slope, each could see exactly what he was going to get in return for his concessions. Begin saw that in exchange for relinquishing the Sinai, he would get peace with Egypt. Sadat saw that in return for making peace with Israel, he would get the Sinai back. Both leaders said yes.

If the other side resists a step-by-step approach, make clear that *nothing* is agreed until *everything* is agreed.

## **Don't Rush to the Finish**

The closing phase of a negotiation is often characterized by a rush. The business meeting is coming to an end. A strike deadline is pending. One of the parties needs to catch a plane. Or you may simply sense an agreement is near and begin to sprint toward it like a runner at the end of a race.

Whatever the reason for the rush, it is easy to make mistakes in this atmosphere. If you hurry the other side, they will often react by exploding over something trivial or by suddenly finding fault with part of the agreement. In order not to lose them, you need to slow down, back off, and give them a chance to think.

Encourage them to consult with their constituents. Their constituents may have instructed them to maintain a rigid position. If they come back with a very different agreement, their people may well reject it. A caucus allows the other side to educate their constituents about the merits of the proposed agreement and to secure their support.

In the rush, it is also easy to conclude that you have reached agreement when in fact you haven't. As your lawyers set to drafting the contract the following morning, they may discover that you and your counterpart have different interpretations of the agreement. This can lead to accusations of bad faith that leave you worse off than if you hadn't declared agreement in the first place.

There is a simple way to avoid this problem. When you think you have reached agreement, take a moment to sum up: “Let’s make sure we both have the same understanding of what we have agreed on.” Then go over each issue carefully. If possible, set down your agreement in writing. Movie mogul Samuel Goldwyn once quipped, “A verbal contract isn’t worth the paper it’s written on.” Whatever you do, make sure the terms are as clear and specific as possible. A little bit of clarity at this stage can prevent a lot of unnecessary misunderstanding later.

### **Across the Bridge**

Building a golden bridge involves much more than making the other side an attractive proposal. First, it means involving them in crafting the agreement. Second, it means looking beyond their obvious interests, such as money, to address their more intangible needs, such as recognition or autonomy. Third, it means helping them save face as they back away from their initial position; it means finding a way for them to present the agreement to their constituents as a victory. And last, it means going slow to go fast, guiding them step-by-step across the bridge.

You have now made it as easy as possible for the other side to say yes. If they cross the bridge, congratulations. If they don’t, however, you need to make it as *hard* as possible for them to say no. That is the subject of the next chapter.