



## AIA Best Practices: Six tactics for hard bargaining

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Contributed by Michael Strogoff, FAIA

### Summary

Not all negotiators come to the table open to a calm discussion. When dealing with an aggressive negotiator, you can consider these six tips provided below.

### Recognize the tactics

A basic principle of negotiating is to attack the problem, not the person. But not everyone knows how to negotiate this way. Without the knowledge or skills to negotiate collaboratively, some people resort to aggressive tactics. Others deliberately employ one or more of these aggressive tactics that most people consider off-limits:

- bullying
- using threats and ultimatums
- playing good cop/bad cop
- using misleading information
- withholding key information
- insulting the other person
- presenting take-it-or-leave-it offers
- presenting unreasonable offers
- employing emotional outbursts
- negotiating in bad faith

### Respond in kind, or walk away?

How does one maintain composure when facing a person who uses aggressive negotiating tactics? When is it appropriate to fight fire with fire?

As a general rule, do not respond in kind unless the other party proves to be so unreasonable, unethical, or dysfunctional that hardball responses are the only way of achieving your objectives. But beware: How people

behave during a negotiation usually indicates how they will act throughout a relationship. Do you really want to do business with people so unreasonable that, to protect your interests, you need to stoop to their level? Unless the project or issue at hand is of vital importance, you may be better off not reaching an agreement.

## Keep a level head

For design professionals, effective negotiation can mean the difference between profitability and jeopardizing one's livelihood, between accepting reasonable versus onerous terms, and between establishing a productive relationship or an adversarial one.

When negotiating with an aggressive person, try the following:

**Recognize the game.** Once you understand that your opponent's behavior is simply a tactic, you can respond coolly and effectively rather than reactively and emotionally.

**Detach yourself.** Even if the other party insults you or attacks your integrity, don't take it personally. Maintain your composure. Keep telling yourself that their behavior is a reflection on them, not you.

**Ignore the tactics.** When tactics don't bring desired results, people eventually change their behavior. Respond only when their behavior is acceptable. Otherwise, move on to the next topic. Spend your energy crafting solutions that satisfy all parties.

**Befriend the aggressive person.** Emphasize what you have in common. Agree with them whenever possible. Compliment them on what they have achieved to date during the negotiation.

**Discuss the negotiating process.** Point out that the larger goal of reaching agreement is at stake. Suggest that the negotiations resume based on trust and respect. Consider bringing in other people to help get the process back on track.

**Concede on something.** It may be necessary to appease someone now and then. Choose an issue that has little significance to your firm but is of great importance to the other side. See if the concession leads to a spirit of cooperation.

## About the contributor

Michael Strogoff, FAIA, is a past chair of PMKC's Advisory Group. After managing a 40-person architecture practice, Strogoff formed a consulting firm to guide design professionals in ownership transitions, mergers and acquisitions, practice management, strategic planning, and leadership training. His firm, Strogoff Consulting, Inc., ([www.StrogoffConsulting.com](http://www.StrogoffConsulting.com)) is located in Mill Valley, Calif. Strogoff remains active with various AIA committees and also produces online continuing education courses through [www.aecKnowledge.com](http://www.aecKnowledge.com).

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This article corresponds to:

*Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice, 15th edition* Unit 1 - The Profession  
Chapter 15 – Project Definition  
Section 03 – Negotiating Agreement