



## Achieve Better Results on Your Next Negotiation by Preparing to Fail

by Jeff Burris, Principal, Advanced Purchasing Dynamics, Inc. 734-927-0836

From our early days participating in sports and life we are trained that if we visualize and plan for success we will achieve better results. So, it seems counterintuitive or downright wrong that you can increase your negotiating power and achieve better results if you only prepare to fail.

The first time I read about this concept was in the Fisher and Ury book, "Getting to Yes". In it they put forth that negotiators should establish a "bottom line" or point where it makes more sense to walk away from the negotiations than continue. However, if you walk away what will you do? The answer to that question is what Fisher and Ury call your Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement.

Although it was the first time I had read about this concept, I quickly realized that I had seen it used successfully and even used it myself.

As a part of my undergraduate labor relations course, we conducted mock team negotiations around a new labor agreement. Our grade would be based upon how well we achieved our side's interests. In order to make sure that both teams of negotiators took the exercise seriously, the professor told us that if the teams failed to reach a negotiated settlement, each would have to write a ten-page paper explaining why the negotiation failed.

Upon reflection, here is how my team approached this exercise according to the steps Fisher and Ury laid out:

Step	What Our Team did
Develop a bottom line.	We came up with a walk away position for each major element of the negotiation. The walk-aways were based upon what we thought would happen to our grades.
Develop an alternative to a negotiated settlement.	Our professor gave us this. If we failed we would have to write a paper.
Understand the other side's alternative to a negotiated settlement.	We knew that the other side would have to write their version of a paper as well.
Set up a plan for implementing your alternative should the negotiations fail.	We identified a structure for the paper and assigned areas of the paper to each team member.



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We actually increased our negotiation power by reaching a team agreement that “failure was an option” and developing an implementation plan for proceeding should we fail. We verified that we had a more powerful position when we learned that the other side did not view writing a paper as an option and had no plans to do so.

Inevitably, the negotiations with the other side heated up. When they did we told the other side that we were prepared to write the paper and shared our plans for doing so. As the negotiations wore on we were able to achieve the results we desired all because we prepared to fail.

So for your next negotiation:

- Establish bottom-line positions.
- Brainstorm possible alternatives to an agreement.
- Evaluate the alternatives based upon the value to your organization and ease of implementation. Select the best one.
- Develop an implementation plan. The plan can be high level or detailed based upon the importance of the negotiation to your organization.
- Strive to understand the other side’s bottom-lines and alternatives.

91% of participants in APD’s Strategic Negotiation Course would recommend the course to colleagues. Contact APD at 734-927-0836 or visit [www.apurchasingd.com](http://www.apurchasingd.com) for more information.