

Selecting Your Management Negotiating Team
By Laura Dierking

Introduction

Selecting individuals for your management negotiating team is perhaps the single most important step in preparing for negotiations; therefore, decisions on who should comprise your management negotiating team should not be taken lightly. Several factors should be considered in selecting the team members; specifically, the selection should encompass an assessment of the individual’s relevant experience, technical abilities and personality. It is extremely important to determine the best fit for team members so that they are in the roles which are most suited to their particular talents.

The first step in selecting your negotiating team members is to clearly define the role in regard to the specific responsibilities and required deliverables. Second, it is essential to determine the competencies, talents and experience needed for each role on the negotiating team. Third, members of the team should be selected based on their particular experience, skills, and abilities. Individuals have specific strengths and weaknesses that should be considered and assessed so that they are properly placed on the negotiating team for the benefit of the whole. It is clearly to the benefit of the team for individuals to be in placed in roles that match their strengths. For example, an individual may be qualified to fill more than one role on the team, but there should be one role that fits them best. Likewise, there will be roles with such specific requirements that only one person best fits that role. Finally, each team member should have a clear understanding of their role and the expectations and responsibilities of their role.

The purpose of this paper is to assist you in determining the best selection of individuals for your management negotiating team. I will present various roles within the negotiating team and define each role. Additionally, I will provide recommendations on what should be considered as you select individuals to fill each role.

Chief Negotiator

The most visible role within the negotiating team is the Chief Negotiator. The individual in this role may be empowered to make unilateral decisions without checking with others on the team. He/she is the team member that has the authority to bind the agency in a contract. The Chief Negotiator is responsible for doing most of the speaking and leading the negotiation towards a conclusion. This team member is normally the most senior member of the team, with the most negotiating experience.

As you look to fill the role of Chief Negotiator, work experience, along with talent and personality must be considered. For example, it is essential to have someone who has a
track record of effectively negotiating an agreement. Therefore, be sure to determine the individual’s actual depth and breadth of negotiation experience prior to selecting them to be the Chief Negotiator. Not only should the individual have experience in negotiating, but he/she must also be able to demonstrate competence in the specific skill of negotiating. Experience does not necessarily equate with competence. The Chief Negotiator must be able to demonstrate effective negotiation skills. It may be to the detriment of the process and the actual contract to have an inexperienced and/or ineffectual person leading the negotiations.

In addition to the importance of depth and breadth of related experience, personality and talents must also be considered. The Chief Negotiator of the negotiation team must have solid professionalism – he/she should be able to keep their emotions out of the discussions. The Chief Negotiator should be a polished, well-spoken professional with a generous amount of patience for the process and for others involved in the process. He/she should be an excellent communicator with well-honed skills for conveying information logically and clearly. In addition, he/she should be well acquainted with the issues at hand and possess an analytical mind with which to determine the best solutions and appropriate negotiable items to bring up or to drop.

In essence, as you determine the best person to be the Chief Negotiator, you should consider the following:

- **Negotiating Experience** – Has the individual’s experience and training prepared him/her for this role? Consider level, variety, relevance and/or recency of the experience. Can he/she convey a clear sense of direction and purpose?
- **Negotiation Skill** – Has the individual demonstrated proficiency in negotiating? Has he/she demonstrated the ability to collaborate with another to achieve an agreement? Can he/she develop persuasive arguments to support management’s position? Can he/she fully consider and address alternative perspectives?
- **Professionalism** – Does the individual project a confident, polished image? Can he/she maintain control of their emotions?
- **Excellent Oral Communication Skills** – Does the individual speak clearly, concisely and persuasively? Does he/she communicate in a confident and assertive manner, using non-verbal behaviors, such as eye contact, to enhance verbal communication?
- **Analytical Ability** – Does the individual easily understand complex issues? Can he/she break complex problems into smaller components for analysis and discussion? Does he/she draw correct conclusions?
- **Knowledge of the Issues** – Is the individual intimately acquainted with the issues under negotiation? Has he/she dealt with this issue in the past and resolved it?
As you can see, there are many important factors – experience, skills, and abilities, necessary in determining the best person for the crucial role of Chief Negotiator.

**Summarizer**

The role of the summarizer is very important to the Chief Negotiator. He/she is responsible to intently follow the argument and intervene at opportune times. This activity slows the argument and allows the Chief Negotiator time to think. Intervening in the negotiation can be done by asking for clarification on a point, or summarizing the negotiations thus far. The individual in this role should not make concessions.

The Summarizer must have two main talents, discernment and logic, plus strong oral communication skills. A mind that thinks logically is vital for the responsibility of following the discussion and having the ability to summarize the argument thus far. The Summarizer should be able to take a convoluted discussion and capsulize the information into clear and concise statements. He/she should have the special ability to concentrate on the core issue and be able to communicate it at the table. Not only is logic a vital ability of the Summarizer, excellent communication skills are a must. He/she should be able to project confidence and poise as they communicate their understanding of the issues and present the sides of the argument. Discernment is also vital to the role of the Summarizer, as he/she is responsible to determine when the Chief Negotiator needs a bit of time to collect his/her thoughts. The Summarizer must be able to use his/her judgment to determine when intervention is necessary.

As you consider the best person to fill the role of Summarizer, take note of the following abilities and skills:

- **Logic** – Does the individual easily understand complex issues? Does he/she draw correct, logical conclusions? Can he/she break complex problems into smaller components for analysis and discussion?
- **Discernment** – Does the individual demonstrate the ability to render judgment in critical situations? Is the individual able to determine the best time to speak and the best time to remain silent?
- **Excellent Oral Communication Skills** – Does the individual speak clearly and concisely? Can he/she take a confusing discussion and paraphrase it so that it is easily understood? Can he/she communicate in a well-organized and logical manner?

Be careful to incorporate measures of these factors as the selection decision is made in regard to filling the Summarizer role.
Note Taker

The note taker role within the negotiation team is responsible for writing quality notes of the negotiation. This individual should remain silent throughout the negotiation process unless called upon to answer a direct question. The individual in this role has the important responsibility to note important discussions and decisions. Quality note taking at the table is absolutely essential. Notes of the negotiation will be the basis for resolving disputes over the intent of language, should they arise.

The Note Taker should have experience in taking quality notes or at the very least, have been trained in taking good notes. He/she should be able to discern all pertinent comments and discussions so that important information is recorded. The Note Taker should be detail-oriented and be able to note important items in clear, understandable language. In addition, it is important that the Note Taker be able to write legibly (or type quickly).

As you chose a person to best fill the role of Note Taker, consider the following:

- **Experience** – Does the individual have relevant experience? Has he/she been trained in the techniques of quality note taking?
- **Analytical Ability** – Can the individual fully synthesize all information provided to understand pertinent issues? Can he/she make correct determinations regarding the criticality or importance of each issue? Can he/she determine the detail needed on each issue?
- **Written Communication** – Does the individual express written concepts clearly and concisely? Is he/she able to translate technical information, company policies, etc. into simple, understandable language? Is he/she able to organize the information in a logical order and highlight key points? Can he/she produce written notes that are legible?

As you consider the importance of quality notes for the lifetime of the contract, I am sure you will agree that it is essential to choose the best person to fill the role of Note Taker, and with that thought in mind, will consider the above-listed factors in your selection.

Team Member (Silent Observer)

Team Members are often legal or technical specialists. They are needed for clarification and basic understanding of the issue in light of their specific expertise. Along with their responsibilities as the technical or legal expert, their job is to carefully observe the team members on the other negotiating team. The purpose of their careful watch is to look for verbal and visual clues that might reveal the position or opinions of the opposition – or perhaps an “ally” on the other team.
Selecting your Team Members will be based on the needed expertise with regard to the items under negotiation. Each Team Member should be able to significantly contribute according to their knowledge base and expertise level. In addition to technical knowledge and experience, Team Members must be able to keep their emotions and opinions in check. Team Members should be aware that they should not give away any views (or leanings) on particular issues; in other words, the opposing team should not be able to “read” anything from individual Team Members. Also, each Team Member should be trained in the skill of observation.

In addition to Team Members at the negotiating table, it may be necessary to assign other individuals the responsibilities in preparing for negotiations. Preparing for negotiations may involve research, data collection and fact finding, costing/budgeting, and anticipating information (details) needed for negotiations. Your selection of these individuals should be based on their experience in relation to the needs of the project.

To select the best individuals to be members of the team, you should base your choices on:

- **Technical Expertise** – Has the individual had extensive experience and/or advanced education and training in the field? Have they been actively keeping up to date with new advancements in the field through extracting information from professional journals, conferences, workshops and professional gatherings.

- **Observation Skill** – Has the individual developed the art of observation with the ability to detect the slightest change in voice tone or body language?

- **Emotional Maturity** – Can the individual maintain composure even under difficult situations? Can he/she remain calm and exercise good judgment within a stressful environment?

Selecting your team members with these factors in mind will increase the efficiency of the negotiation process and the quality of the negotiated contract.

**All Team Members**

All team members involved in negotiations, including the Chief Negotiator, must be able to maintain confidentiality. Errors made by Team Members who are not discreet and lack good judgment, may be quite detrimental to the agreement. For example, indiscreet Team Members may unwittingly give away important settlement points. This breech in confidentiality is very serious and may be prevented by selecting Team Members with high standards with regard to maintaining confidentiality. Exercise extreme caution when selecting your management negotiating team so as to ensure that the selected members can maintain the utmost confidentiality.
Conclusion

This proposed plan is a recipe for success – selecting individuals to fill roles based on their related experience and strengths will have great benefits to the negotiation process and outcome. Each team member will be able to significantly contribute to the goals of a successfully negotiated contract and with that, gain a sense of accomplishment. Not only will the organization benefit from having good work done by competent professionals but each team member will also have pride in a job well done.

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