

Rothamsted Repository Download

G - Articles in popular magazines and other technical publications

Whitfield, C. 2018. *Negotiation Skills for Librarians*. UKSG.

The publisher's version can be accessed at:

- <https://www.uksg.org/publications/enews>

The output can be accessed at:

<https://repository.rothamsted.ac.uk/item/84806/negotiation-skills-for-librarians>.

© 6 July 2018, Rothamsted Research

Negotiation Skills for Librarians

03 Jul 2018

Chris Whitfield, Rothamsted Research

This one-day UKSG workshop, led by Sarah Durrant, covered new ground for me, both in terms of what was being taught and the attitudes that were looked at. The course covered: building resilience for confident negotiations, techniques and strategies for negotiation and small groups working through some scenarios and applying what we learnt.

Of the sixteen delegates, nearly all of us had some experience of carrying out negotiation but had no actual training in it. Given its importance to budgets, this is telling. There are stories, which seem very likely, of people saving thousands of pounds from their subscriptions after completing this course.

Negotiation is becoming an important skill for anyone involved in selecting resources. Reasons include an increased emphasis on getting value for money in library resources and the perception that big publishers are able to dictate terms to libraries.

This feeling of weakness in negotiation was one of the first things to be tackled. When dealing with large suppliers it is common to take the view that we are the weaker side, resulting in low expectations of what we can achieve and often in accepting the first offer. We looked at these beliefs, what they are based on and what they lead to. At the beginning of the day most of us agreed with statements to the effect that publishers hold all the cards, that we are not good negotiators and that we have little chance of affecting what is on offer.

The challenge is to change those attitudes to being more open and relaxed. This way we can see negotiations as a challenge from which we may get more than we think. More specifically, useful advice is that any offer from a supplier should be viewed as a chance to start negotiating. Also, to bear in mind that they expect you to come back with a counter offer.

There are different negotiating styles to be prepared for. Firstly, 'playing hardball', which can include aggressive tactics. Secondly, being 'nice', perhaps dealing with the other party as a friend. Thirdly, 'gamesmanship', attempting to outsmart the other side. Lastly 'principled negotiation' – negotiating in good faith to build long-term relationships. We encounter variations on all of these at some time. To illustrate the potential pitfalls of what we think we know about these approaches, Sarah quoted a former rep who told her that the customers who he got on with the best always got the worst deals.

The later part of the morning and the afternoon moved from attitudes to techniques. The four cornerstones of negotiations emphasise preparation for negotiations. They are:

- assembling a team
- identifying your goals

- setting a time frame
- hold an internal meeting before any meeting with the supplier

We also looked at habits of effective negotiators and went through some scenarios to discuss how we could apply what we had learnt.

As librarians, we don't usually see ourselves as negotiators and most of us don't go into the sector to be at the 'hard' end of things. This course was useful because of that and I learnt things that will inform my work. There were also general life skills in this and so I would recommend it for that as well.