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When we think about negotiations, we think about being tough. We charge in like it's a battle, brandishing our influence and our power moves. But a negotiation doesn't have to be a fight with winners and losers. Think of it more like a dance, two or more people moving fluidly in sync.

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[The Way We Work]

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We constantly negotiate at work. We negotiate for higher pay, promotions, vacations and even greater autonomy. In fact, every day we negotiate just to get our job done and to secure resources for ourselves and our teams. And yet when we go in with the wrong mindset, with a fist up ready to fight, we aren't as successful. You know why? Because negotiation is not about dominating. It's about crafting a relationship. And relationships thrive when we find ways to give and to take and move together in unison. And to do that, you have to be well prepared.

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First, do your research. Figure out whether what you're asking for is realistic. What is your aspiration? What do you want, and what will make you walk away from the table? This might seem obvious, but too many people don't think it through. Let's say you're negotiating for a salary in a new job. Some people, they determine they ask based on their past salary. That isn't a good yardstick. You may end up asking for too much or too little. Instead, find out the range of what is possible. Look at industrial reports, websites. Talk to people in your professional network to find out the lowest, average and the highest salary for a similar role, and then make your ask closer to that upper limit. Build a solid rationale for why you are above average and thus deserving of that ask.

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Let's say you're negotiating for something less black and white, like the ability to work from home to care for an aging parent. You need to study your company's policies on remote work. Ask yourself when and why were these policies developed in the first place? Talk to trusted mentors to understand how working from home might affect issues that aren't on your radar. And think about how changing to working from home might actually affect others in your team. In fact, make a table summarizing the parts of your job that can be done remotely and the parts that require face-to-face interaction. This may sound like a lot to do, but when the person you're

negotiating with sees that you've done all this homework, you're more likely to get that "yes." It also helps you avoid being lied to while building the person's respect.

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Second, prepare mentally for the negotiation. Asking for things can get emotional. There are real and complex feelings at play: fear, anxiety, anger, even hurt. It's essential to have strategies in place to manage those feelings. One strategy is to adopt a mindset of defensive pessimism. That just means that you accept obstacles and failures are likely in a negotiation. So it's better to put your energy in imagining the ways to overcome those obstacles. That way, you're ready to respond when you face it. Another strategy is emotional distancing. That is the idea of being less attached to any specific outcome. I know it's easier said than done. We all feel emotions like anger and hurt when our core identities are being threatened. When your manager may be challenging a truth that you hold dear about yourself, like you're a hard worker and you deserve this, try and avoid thinking of negotiations as the ultimate test of your worth. Go in knowing that your request might be met, that it might be denied, and that none of this is a measure of your worth. Also know that if you feel yourself getting upset, hurt during a negotiation, it's OK to step back. You can leave the dance floor and move up to the balcony. Just say, "Let me think about this a little more. Could we press pause and continue this tomorrow?"

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The third and the final way you can prepare for negotiations is by putting yourself in the other person's shoes. Taking the time to anticipate the other's needs and challenges. What pressures may they be under? What risks would they be taking? Do they even have the power to give you what you're asking for? What ripple effects might a "yes" mean? When you make that request, look to balance assertiveness about your own needs with a concern for the other. As you lay out your case, use phrases like, "I'm asking for this because I know it's good for my team. That I want to achieve X and Y goals, and I know this is what will enable it." Arguments like that show that you are ambitious, you know what you want, but you also care for others.

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So many of our negotiation missteps, they don't actually come from disagreements but misunderstanding the other person. So it's important to listen well, to ask why and why not? And you will surely find unexpected opportunities for win-win solutions.