

Win-win'

By Cecil Johnson
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"Win-win" is a losing proposition, says veteran negotiating coach Jim Camp in "Start With 'No,'" his highly readable and thought-provoking presentation of the unconventional wisdom undergirding his negotiating system.

Camp maintains that "win-win" is often "win-lose" because it is based upon emotion instead of decision. And that, he writes, leads more often than not to unnecessary compromises.

"A win-win negotiation is not controlled in a clear, step-by-step way," he writes. "That's just one reason win-win gets slaughtered in the real business world, again and again and again. I know chief executives who are proud of their deal making, but they have no discipline, no real basis for making their decisions. They're shooting from the hip under the assumption that everyone else is shooting from the hip.

"But some of their adversaries aren't. Some are shooting with a telescopic lens and the unwary win-win adversary is the target. It's not a fair fight."

One of the key elements of Camp's system is the word "no." He believes that assuring the adversary right upfront that he has the option of saying "no" to the deal is the best way to get things rolling because "no" is a decision, unlike "maybe" or "yes," which is meaningless or deceptive.

To illustrate that point, Camp retells Ross Perot's much-repeated story about an American who wanted to buy a camel. He asks the owner about a particular camel among those staked out in front of the tent.

The Bedouin tells the American that he can't sell that animal because it is his son's pet.

"The American looks nonplussed, gets back into his Range Rover, and starts to drive off," Camp writes. "The Bedouin runs after him, shouting, 'I thought you wanted to buy my camel.'"

The point, Camp asserts, is that the camel-buyer, like most Americans, didn't know how to negotiate. He maintains that many CEOs get to the top despite being incompetent negotiators, and the win-win paradigm is partially responsible for the degree of mediocrity that exists in American business.

"So what if the negotiator settled for offering a 27 percent volume discount, while his bosses were hoping for 24," Camp writes. "He tried, and it's only a 3 percent difference, and it was win-win, so break out the bubbly. No one has any idea how much, if any, volume discount should have been offered and would have been accepted."

The author, who has coached negotiators for more than 150 companies, including IBM, Merrill Lynch, Texas Instruments, Prudential Insurance and Motorola, insists that negotiators should concentrate on the things they control, the means, rather than ends of the negotiations.

Barry Bonds and Sammy Sosa, Camp points out, cannot control whether they hit a home run because an outfielder might climb the wall and take it away, or the long fly might confront a breeze that keeps the ball on the warning track.

“A lot of things can happen in the end, so Bonds and Sosa can only focus on the means to the end: putting a pure, sweet swing on the ball,” Camp writes. “They think only in terms of maintaining power and leverage in the process of the swing. If they think only in terms of homers, they lose power and leverage by over-swinging and lunging at bad pitches.”

By the same token, Camp maintains, as a negotiator, you can't control the other party's actions and decisions, but you can control your assessment of the adversary's situation, as well as your own actions, decisions and emotions. That, Camp insists, is a strategy for success, even if success means politely walking away from the negotiating table.

It is important, Camp argues, that you not go into a negotiation believing that you need the deal, because some adversaries can sense that weakness the way sharks can sense blood in the water. You must retain the option of saying “no” and make certain that the adversary is aware of having the same opportunity.

Contrary to most books on negotiation, Camp takes an adamant “no closing” stand. He insists that most large deals and even some smaller ones don't close in common understanding of the term. Instead they “come together” through vision and decisions after weeks, months or years of bargaining.

“Moreover, if closing this deal is your goal, your preoccupation, maybe even your life's dream, then you're concentrating on what you cannot control and forgetting about what you can control,” Camp writes. “When negotiating with real pros, you'll pay the price in the end for such misguided behavior.”

This book should be must reading for executives, managers and all people in sales and purchasing. It also could be helpful for anyone wishing to become more effective in interpersonal relations.

START WITH NO

By Jim Camp

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