

## 4 Steps to Establish Control in a Negotiation

Chris Voss

The secret to gaining the upper hand in negotiation is to give the other side the illusion of control. If knowledge is power, what you really want to gain is knowledge in the interaction without really giving much information away. ]

Here's how to flip the control dynamic on its head and enjoy the process.

1. Labels
2. Effective Pauses
3. Calibrated Questions
4. Tone of Voice

Please consider that if you're worried about control in a negotiation, you do two things primarily: you ask closed-ended questions you already know the answer to (almost always the answer is "yes") and you fear shutting up. You feel whoever is talking has control and you're horrified at the prospect of letting the other person say anything other than "yes" or "you're right".

If you deviate from the simple closed-ended question you've probably found the alternate choice question method. This method is all about getting them to make one of two choices which often sounds something like "We have a 60-page document that supports our position. Would you like me to review the complete document with you, or would you prefer to see the two-page summary?" This alternate choice method is then used to lead them to where you want them to go (or so you feel).

This "control" oriented approach often leaves you frustrated with people for not sticking to what they've agreed to. You also feel that most of the people you encounter don't listen well.

Here's the flip that lets you establish true control in the negotiation where you are gathering information to help you make the best deal!

---

### Step 1: Labels

"It seems like..." "It sounds like..." "It looks like..."

As a response to the ever deadly "Have you got a few minutes to talk?" (We never know what they really want to talk about or how long they intend to trap us.) You might respond with a **label** like "It sound like you got something important on your mind."

As a response to the above alternative choice trap "It seems like there is a lot of valuable information you want to point me towards."

### Step 2: Effective Pauses

After any great question or great label you've got to go silent. "Shut the front door" as we say. Let them answer. Be cool. 90% of the time they will. Especially if they fear silence.

Still nothing? Move on to step 3.

### Step 3: Calibrated Questions

At The Black Swan Group we don't use the term open-ended question because it's a little too general. All questions have an emotional impact based on the structure, the context, and whom you're asking. The most approachable and least threatening are the "What?" and "How?" questions. "What's the biggest challenge you face?" is one of my favorites and one you'll find appropriate for almost every interaction you're in.

It's a staple from a list of questions I learned are favorites of Jim Camp's from quite a few years ago. Jim and his guys referred to these as interrogative-led questions. It's a great "What?" question and will yield an absolute treasure trove of information.

While you will **never** ask three different calibrated questions in a row, an advanced technique is to ask the same question three different ways:

*"What's the biggest challenge you face? What are you up against here? What causes the most frequent breakdowns?"*

This method actually helps your counterpart think, makes the issues more three-dimensional, and gets you better answers.

For the occasional negotiator who is absolutely addicted to the alternate choice method the absolute killer of that method is "How am I supposed to answer that?" You're going to love how much that throws this guy off his game.

Again follow this with golden silence. Don't squash your great question!

#### Step 4: Tone of Voice

Lastly, tone of voice is the artist's touch to negotiation. The smile on your face when you speak not only instills encouragement in them to respond, there's data now that suggests our brains work up to 31% more effectively in a positive frame of mind. This means they give you good answers and like doing it! People are **six times** more likely to make a deal with someone they like. This should be your default voice 95% of the time.

The other 5% of the time you need the downward inflecting "late-night FM DJ voice". This is the voice of complete calm and complete authority. You don't have to talk over people with it. You can wait for your moment to calmly state whatever you have to say that must be written in stone without inflaming the situation. It just is.

If they struggle against this, just repeat it again, only with a bit of encouragement in your voice so they don't see you as an adversary, they see the dilemma as the adversary. You'll also need the "smile" in your voice to bring them out of their initial reaction to the voice of authority and encourage them back into collaboration.

---

"Control" doesn't make rain. Collaboration does. Guide them from needing control (while you retain the upper hand) and you will make rain.

To summarize:

1. Labels
2. Effective Pauses
3. Calibrated Questions
4. Tone of Voice

Steer the ship! Make it rain!