

The art of negotiation, or resolving grievances, like many assertiveness skills, is becoming a profession in its own right. We certainly do not need sophisticated training to negotiate solutions to everyday problems, but the following points are worth bearing in mind.

1 Choose the right time and place

Setting time aside to have a joint discussion is preferable to presenting a problem when the other person is busy or preoccupied with other problems.

2 Present the problem in a constructive way

Work out beforehand the points you want to make and how to put them. Write them down. Be specific, don't beat about the bush as this only causes confusion about the issue you are trying to raise. Be tactful; being sarcastic or unpleasant only results in the other person becoming defensive and resistant to change. Keep calm, if possible using relaxation techniques to help you prepare. At the very least take a couple of long, slow, deep breaths before you start.

3 Listen to what the other person has got to say

Concentrate on what is being said and let the other person know you understand what he or she is saying. Summarise the other person's position and feed it back: 'So your view is that . . .' If the other person is showing feelings, acknowledge that you are aware of them, for example, 'I can see that this is difficult for you'. Ask for clarification. Make sure that you fully understand the other person's position, reasoning and needs.

4 Discuss differences

Restate your original case, then present a summary of the other person's position. Discuss the specific areas of difference. Beware of becoming side-tracked; don't fall

for red herrings. Sometimes the broken record technique is useful to bring the discussion back to the central subject (see handout 'Six Assertiveness Skills').

5 Be prepared to offer a compromise

Remember the issue is not about winning or losing, but about reaching a compromise that is acceptable to both parties. Don't be stubborn and wait for the other person to give in first. Make a concession and look for one in return. Emphasise that you both share a common goal and that you are willing to explore how that can be achieved.

Dealing with personal grievances

- a Acknowledge your own feelings to yourself eg, anger, hurt. 'I feel . . .'
- b Write down what it is that you do not like. Separate fact from feeling. 'I don't like you doing . . .'
- c Identify what you would like. 'I would like it if . . .'
- d Arrange a meeting.
- e State your grievance. Feelings first, followed by what you would like. Do not get distracted or use critical words. State what you would like.
- f Listen to the other person.
- g Discuss differences.
- h Reach agreements if possible.