

## Phrases in negotiations (North America)

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### Communication

*What is the best way to convey dissatisfaction with an offer? What is the best way to give criticism? What is the best way to express your frustration?* There is no one best way. The results of a given way of communication depend on the situation, culture, age, relationship between the negotiators, and so on. One way of speaking may be perfect with one person and disastrous with someone else. Noting this, there are phrases that can be considered more provocative than other.

Below is a brief list of expressions used in bargaining. Note that the classification into gentle, middle of the road and aggressive is only tentative. Use only at your own risk ☺

### Sweet gentle phrases

- What do you think about our proposal?
- Where do we go from here?
- What are we really talking about here...
- What can we do about this?
- This doesn't work for us.
- I've got a problem with this.
- Where can you help me cut this?
- That really isn't what I expected.
- Don't you think this is fair?
- I know we can do better.
- Take another look at the numbers.
- Budgets are tight.
- That would be really tough for us.
- I hope we have room to negotiate.
- Can we talk?
- Work with me on this ...

### Middle of the road phrases

- You've got to do better on this.
- That's not acceptable.
- I'm a bit disappointed in your offer.
- You're too expensive.
- Run that by me again.
- I can't afford that.
- That won't do.
- Pass, No sale.
- That's a pretty big bite.
- Be reasonable.
- I don't think we're communicating.
- I don't think this is possible.
- You're not giving me anything on this.
- That doesn't turn me on.
- Perhaps we have a misunderstanding here.
- I'm looking for a much better number.
- They'll never buy that.
- We're still not there.
- Sorry cannot do it.
- You're not speaking my language.
- It'll never fly.
- How much???? What???

### Regional and ethnic phrases

(Heard in New York City)

- Talk to me.
- You're bustin my chops.
- I can't hear you.
- You're killin me.
- Do you want my children to starve?

(Heard in the South of the U.S.A.)

- There's not enough juice in that for us;
- That's not a big enough work.
- That bug won't boil.
- That dog won't hunt/pig won't fly.
- You're in the right church but the wrong pew.
- We're within hugging distance, but we're not ready to kiss yet;
- Which end of the horse do you think you're talking to?

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### More aggressive phrases

- Ouch; Yeah right; Time out
- That's below my cost
- Do you want my business or what?
- You want me to lose my job?
- No way!
- I thought we were friends.
- I'm not a tourist; I live here.
- We're not the Salvation Army.
- We must have a bad connection
- What's your real offer; that really hurts.
- I don't want the gold plating.
- Would you like my arm and leg too?
- Gimme a break
- You're not even close
- I've got a family to feed
- The decimal point must be off
- I love your humour;
- Be serious. Let's be serious.
- At that price, we can't even talk
- You're gonna kill us
- You're really squeezing me
- Where's the fat
- What's the bottom line?
- Is that your target or bottom line?

### Inflammatory phrases (be sure to smile)

- You're insulting my intelligence.
- I was born at night, not last night.
- Over my dead body!
- Who do you think you are?
- Do you have a bridge you'd like to sell me?
- Is that in dollars or pesos?
- Are we in Oz?
- Is this April Fools Day?
- You ought to be in comedy.
- 50,000 comedians out of work and you're trying to be funny.
- Go ahead and shoot me.
- Go ahead and call 911.
- Get outta here!
- Go rub a lamp
- You're dreaming
- Is this a negotiation or a burial.
- I didn't know it was part-time (for a job offer)
- When donkeys fly.
- What planet are you from?
- My mama didn't raise no fool.
- Not in my lifetime!
- You call that an offer?
- Did you drink your lunch?
- I thought I had a drinking problem.
- What are you smoking?
- Did you take your medication?
- Let's wait till your 'ludes wear off
- Don't let the door slam on the way out.
- Have a nice flight home.
- That's your competition in the lobby.

### Nonverbal messages

- feigned heart attack
- choking
- rolling eyes
- looking at ceiling
- pulling necktie over head (noose)
- shrugging shoulders

### Responses to phrases

- Make me an offer.
- What are you looking for?
- What could you live with?
- What do you need?
- Do you have a figure in mind?
- Give me a number?
- What's your budget?
- What is fair?
- What is the problem?
- What were you thinking about?
- If you were in my shoes what would you do?

If you know good bargaining expressions send an email to: [inspire@business.carleton.ca](mailto:inspire@business.carleton.ca).

Adapted from E. Wertheim, College of Business Administration, Northeastern University  
[http://interneg.org/interneg/training/conflict\\_overview.html](http://interneg.org/interneg/training/conflict_overview.html)