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How to Prepare for Your Negotiations

Most negotiations are not lost at the table. They are lost in the days before, when one side walks in clear about what they want, what they can accept, and what they will do if there is no deal — and the other side walks in hoping to figure it out as they go. Hope is not a plan. Preparation is the quiet work that turns a stressful conversation into a steady one: you decide your goals before anyone pressures you, you learn what matters to the other side before they have to explain it under stress, and you work out your numbers while you still have time to check them.

This set is for anyone who negotiates as part of real work. That includes a team lead asking for budget, a buyer talking price and delivery dates with a supplier, a freelancer setting the terms of a project, a manager discussing a schedule change with an employee, and a small business owner renewing a lease. You do not need a title with the word negotiator in it. If you have ever had to reach an agreement where both sides wanted different things and both sides had to live with the result, you have negotiated. Preparation helps in every one of those rooms, whether the stakes are a few hundred dollars or the shape of next year's work.

Why does preparation matter so much? Because the table is a bad place to do your thinking. At the table there is time pressure, another person's voice, and the pull to say yes just to end the discomfort. Decisions made in that pressure tend to be the ones people regret on the drive home. Preparation moves the hard thinking to a calm place — your desk, with notes, with time to check a figure or call a colleague — so that at the table you are executing a plan you already trust, not inventing one while someone waits for your answer. Prepared people are not rigid. They are the ones who can stay flexible, because they know exactly which parts of their plan can bend and which parts cannot.

A final honest note before the lessons begin. Preparation does not guarantee you will get everything you want. The other side is preparing too, and some deals should not happen at any price. What preparation does guarantee is that you will know the difference between a good deal, an acceptable deal, and a deal you should walk away from — and you will know it before you have to decide. That knowledge is the whole foundation of calm, professional negotiation.

What You Will Learn

- How to turn a vague wish into a clear, ranked set of goals you can actually negotiate toward.
- How to research the other side — their interests, pressures, limits, and decision process — using fair, open sources.
- How to set your walk-away point and build a real alternative so you are never forced to accept a bad deal.
- How to prepare your numbers, facts, and supporting evidence so every claim you make can be checked.
- How to build a question list that draws out information instead of starting arguments.

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- How to plan your opening, your trades, and your concessions in advance instead of improvising them.
- How to rehearse, assign roles if you negotiate as a team, and set the practical stage — time, place, agenda, and paperwork.

Lesson 1 — Know What You Actually Want

Preparation starts with the hardest and most skipped step: deciding, in writing, what you want. Many people enter a negotiation with a feeling instead of a goal. They want a better price, a fairer schedule, more support. Feelings are real, but they cannot guide trade-offs. When the other side offers a lower price but a longer contract, is that good or bad for you? Without written goals, ranked in order, you have no way to judge the offer except by how it feels in the moment — and in the moment, the pressure to finish will make almost any offer feel acceptable.

Start by separating your outcome into three layers. The first layer is your target: the result you would be genuinely pleased with, the one you will open by asking for. A target should be ambitious but defensible — you should be able to explain, with facts, why it is reasonable. The second layer is your acceptable range: results you would accept without celebration but also without regret. Most real agreements land here. The third layer is your limit, covered fully in Lesson 3: the point beyond which no deal is better than this deal. Writing all three layers down before the meeting is what stops the slow slide where each small concession feels harmless until the final agreement is one you would never have accepted at the start.

Next, rank your issues. Almost every negotiation involves more than one thing: price, timing, quality, quantity, payment terms, support, length of agreement, who carries which risk. List every issue, then sort the list into must-haves, important-but-tradable, and nice-to-haves. This ranking is your trading map. When the other side pushes hard on price, you can give ground there if you gain on a must-have elsewhere — but only if you knew in advance which was which. People who skip the ranking end up defending everything equally, which means they defend nothing well, and they give away valuable items cheaply because in the moment they could not tell a nice-to-have from a must-have.

Be specific in a way your future self can use. "Improve delivery terms" is not a goal. "Deliveries on the first Monday of each month, with a two-day grace window, and a written notice rule if a delivery will be late" is a goal. Specific goals let you recognize a good offer when you hear one, draft accurate agreement language later, and brief a colleague or manager in two minutes. They also protect you from a common trap: the other side agreeing warmly to your vague request and then delivering their own interpretation of it.

Finally, write down why each goal matters — the interest underneath it. You want monthly deliveries not because you love calendars, but because your own production runs out of stock in the third week. Interests matter because when a specific request gets blocked, the interest often opens another door. If the supplier cannot do the first Monday, perhaps they can hold reserve stock for you, which serves the same interest. A negotiator who knows their interests has options. A negotiator who only knows their requests has only arguments.

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The Steps

1. Write the negotiation in one sentence: who it is with, what it is about, and when a decision is needed.
2. List every issue in play — price, timing, quantity, quality, terms, support, duration, risk — without ranking yet.
3. Rank the list into must-haves, important-but-tradable, and nice-to-haves. Be honest; not everything can be a must-have.
4. For each must-have and important item, write your target: the specific result you will ask for first.
5. Write your acceptable range for each item — the results you could live with without regret.
6. Under each major goal, write one line explaining the interest behind it: why it matters to your work.
7. Read the finished page as if you were the other side. Mark anything you could not defend with a straight face, and adjust it now, not at the table.

A Worked Example

Priya manages operations for a small food packaging company and is renewing the contract with their film supplier. In past years she walked in asking for "a better price" and walked out with a small discount and terms she had not examined. This year she prepares. Her issue list has six items: unit price, delivery day, minimum order size, payment window, damaged-goods replacement, and contract length. She ranks them. The must-haves surprise her: the payment window (her cash arrives from customers at 45 days, but the supplier currently demands payment at 30, squeezing her every month) and reliable delivery day matter more than the last cent on price. Price is important-but-tradable. Contract length is a nice-to-have. Her targets become specific: payment at 45 days, delivery on the first Monday monthly, price held flat for twelve months, damaged rolls replaced within five business days. When the supplier later offers a 3 percent discount but insists on 30-day payment, Priya can see instantly that the offer trades her must-have for a tradable — a bad swap — and she counters by accepting a smaller discount in exchange for the 45-day window. She got the deal her business actually needed because she knew, in writing, what that was.

Common Mistakes

- **Preparing a single number instead of a full issue list.** Single-issue preparation turns the negotiation into a tug-of-war over one figure and blinds you to trades that could help both sides.
- **Calling everything a must-have.** If everything is essential, nothing is. Overstated must-haves collapse the first time they are tested, and the other side learns your rankings were theater.
- **Keeping goals in your head.** Unwritten goals drift under pressure. The version you remember at the table is usually softer than the one you set at your desk.

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- **Setting a target you cannot explain.** An ambitious target backed by facts is strength. An ambitious target backed by nothing is an invitation for the other side to dismiss everything else you say.

Lesson 2 — Learn the Other Side

You cannot prepare only your half of the conversation. The other side will arrive with their own goals, pressures, limits, and decision-makers, and the more of that picture you understand in advance, the fewer surprises will find you at the table. Learning the other side does not mean spying or trickery. It means doing the ordinary, fair homework any professional would respect: reading what they publish, remembering what they have told you before, asking colleagues who have worked with them, and thinking carefully about what their job rewards and punishes.

Start with their interests. Ask what a good outcome looks like from their chair. A supplier's salesperson may care less about your unit price than about the length of your commitment, because their own targets reward contract length. A manager in another department may resist your timeline not from stubbornness but because their team is measured on a deadline that collides with yours. When you know what the other side is actually trying to protect, you can shape offers that cost you little and give them much — the raw material of good trades. You also stop wasting arguments. Persuading someone with facts about your needs rarely moves them; showing how an agreement serves their needs often does.

Learn their constraints as well. Every negotiator operates inside limits: a budget ceiling, a policy they cannot break, an approval step above them, a busy season when they cannot deliver no matter what they promise. Constraints discovered in advance save you from demanding the impossible and from accepting excuses you could have tested. A useful habit is to separate, in your notes, what you know from what you are guessing. Write facts in one column and assumptions in another. Then plan questions — Lesson 4 covers this — that will test your most important assumptions early in the conversation, while there is still time to adjust your plan if a guess turns out wrong.

Find out who actually decides. It is common, and costly, to spend an hour persuading someone who must then sell the agreement to a manager, a partner, or a finance team who was never in the room. Ask, politely and early: who else needs to approve this, and what will they care about? Sometimes the answer lets you include the decision-maker, provide a short written summary your counterpart can carry upward, or shape the deal to survive the approval step. Also learn the timeline pressing on them. A side facing a deadline — a quarter ending, a lease expiring, a project start date — negotiates differently from a side with time to spare, and knowing that difference helps you pace your own moves honestly rather than stumbling into leverage you do not understand.

Finally, study their history and alternatives. Have they honored past agreements? Do they negotiate hard on price but generously on service? And what will they do if they do not reach agreement with you? Their alternative might be another supplier, another candidate, or simply doing nothing. If their alternative is strong, expect firmness and prepare better trades. If it is weak, expect flexibility — but do not mistake a weak alternative for a duty to squeeze. Deals that

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humiliate the other side tend to be repaid in poor delivery, quiet non-cooperation, and a counterpart who never works with you again. Professional preparation aims for an agreement the other side can defend and deliver.

The Steps

1. Write one paragraph describing a good outcome from the other side's chair, in their words as best you can imagine them.
2. List their likely interests: what their role, team, or business rewards, and what it punishes.
3. List their likely constraints: budget, policy, approvals, seasons, capacity. Mark each as known fact or guess.
4. Identify the real decision-maker and anyone who can block the deal. Note what each of them will care about.
5. Note their deadline and yours. Write down who feels time pressure more, and why.
6. Research their alternatives: what they will most likely do if this negotiation fails.
7. Review your own goals from Lesson 1 and mark where their interests and yours overlap — those overlaps are where agreement will be built.

A Worked Example

Marcus is a freelance trainer preparing to negotiate a six-month program with a regional logistics company. His first instinct is to prepare his day rate and defend it. Instead he does his homework. From the company's public posts he learns they just won a large contract that starts in ten weeks and requires forty newly trained warehouse leads. From a former colleague he learns the operations director — his contact — cannot approve spending above a set threshold alone; the finance director joins above it. He reasons that the company's real interest is certainty: trainers booked, dates locked, no scramble in week nine. Their constraint is the approval threshold and a training budget set before the new contract was won. Marcus reshapes his proposal before the meeting: he keeps his rate, but offers a fixed schedule of dates held exclusively for them, a replacement guarantee if a session must move, and a total price structured just under the threshold that would trigger a second approval — not by hiding anything, but by phasing the program into two clear stages, each honestly priced. At the table, the operations director relaxes visibly: Marcus has answered the worries she actually had, which were never mainly about the day rate. The negotiation shortens by half because the preparation did the persuading.

Common Mistakes

- **Assuming the other side wants only money.** Price is visible, so people over-focus on it. Certainty, timing, reputation, workload, and approval safety often matter as much or more.
- **Treating guesses as facts.** Acting on an untested assumption about their budget or deadline can collapse your whole plan mid-meeting. Label guesses, then test them with questions.

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- **Ignoring the person not in the room.** An agreement your counterpart cannot get approved is not an agreement. Prepare for the approver from the start.
- **Researching to ambush instead of to understand.** Using homework to spring traps may win a moment and lose the relationship. The goal is offers that fit their reality, not gotchas.

Lesson 3 — Find Your Walk-Away Point and Your Alternatives

The most important number in any negotiation is the one most people never set: the point at which you will politely end the conversation and use your alternative instead. This is your walk-away point, sometimes called your reservation point or limit. It is not a threat and it is not a bluff. It is a private decision, made calmly in advance, that below a certain result the deal costs you more than no deal does. People who set this point beforehand rarely cross it in the room. People who do not set it discover, too late, that they crossed it somewhere around the third concession.

Your walk-away point only has strength if you have somewhere to walk to. That somewhere is your best alternative to a negotiated agreement — what you will actually do if this deal fails. If you are buying, your alternative might be a second supplier's quote, repairing what you have, delaying the purchase, or bringing the work in-house. If you are negotiating a role or a project, your alternative might be another client, another candidate, or the current arrangement continuing. Take time to make your alternative real, not imaginary. Get the second quote. Have the honest conversation with the other client. A real alternative changes how you sit in the chair: you can listen patiently, ask genuine questions, and say no without fear, because no is a workable outcome for you.

Work out the value of your alternative in the same terms as the deal. If the negotiation is about a contract worth a certain amount over twelve months, price your alternative over the same twelve months, including the hidden costs people forget: switching time, training, risk of an untested supplier, your own hours. Then set your walk-away point slightly better than the alternative, to account for the effort and risk of changing course. Writing this arithmetic down matters. Under pressure, humans compare an offer against their hopes. Prepared negotiators compare it against their alternative, which is the only comparison that tells the truth.

Handle your limit with discipline at the table. Do not announce it early; a stated limit invites the other side to push you to exactly that line and ask for a little more. Do not bluff a walk-away you will not perform — if you say you will leave and then stay, every later statement you make loses weight. And do not let the limit drift in the room. If new information genuinely changes the picture — you learn your alternative supplier has closed, or the deal includes something valuable you had not known about — pause the negotiation, leave the table if needed, and recalculate in private. Changing your limit because of new facts is wisdom. Changing it because the moment is uncomfortable is how bad deals are signed.

One more protection: decide in advance who must approve any exception. If you are negotiating for a team or a business, agree beforehand that crossing the limit requires a call to a named person. That single rule has saved more organizations from bad agreements than any clever

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tactic, because it inserts a calm second mind between table pressure and a signature.

The Steps

1. Write down what you will do if this negotiation produces no agreement. Be concrete: names, dates, and first actions.
2. Strengthen that alternative before the meeting where you can — obtain the second quote, confirm the other option is genuinely available.
3. Price your alternative honestly over the same period as the deal, including switching costs, your time, and risk.
4. Set your walk-away point: the result at which the deal becomes worse than your alternative. Write it for each must-have issue, not just price.
5. Decide who, if anyone, must approve crossing the limit, and tell that person the plan before the meeting.
6. Plan your closing words for a walk-away: polite, brief, and leaving the door open unless there is a reason to close it.
7. During the negotiation, compare every serious offer against your written alternative — never against your hopes.

A Worked Example

Denise owns a small bakery and is renegotiating rent on her shop with the property's management company. Her current rent is manageable; the company proposes a steep increase with a five-year lock-in. Before the meeting, Denise does the work she hopes she will not need. She tours two other suitable shops, gets written rent figures for both, and prices the move: new signage, a weekend of lost trade, refitting costs. Spread over five years, moving is expensive but survivable — and one of the new locations sits on a busier corner. Her arithmetic gives her a clear limit: she can accept a moderate increase for stability, but the proposed increase, once the five-year lock is counted, costs more than moving. At the table she negotiates calmly, trades a longer notice period and prompt-payment history for a smaller increase, and never mentions her tours. When the manager pushes once more toward the original figure, Denise says, evenly, that she cannot make the numbers work at that level and would have to make other plans — and because it is true, she sounds like someone stating a fact, not performing a threat. The manager finds room to meet her figure. Denise's alternative never appeared in the conversation, yet it shaped every minute of it.

Common Mistakes

- **Setting a limit but no alternative.** A walk-away point with nowhere to go is a bluff you are playing on yourself. Build the alternative first.
- **Comparing offers to your target instead of your alternative.** Falling short of your target is normal. Falling below your alternative is the true failure — and the two feel similar in the room unless your numbers are written.

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- **Announcing your limit as an ultimatum early on.** Early ultimatums harden positions and invite testing. Your limit works best as private knowledge that guides your decisions quietly.
- **Letting sunk effort move the line.** Having spent three meetings on a deal does not make a bad deal good. The hours are gone either way; the signature is not.

Lesson 4 — Prepare Your Numbers, Facts, and Questions

Negotiations run on information, and preparation is where you gather yours. The goal is simple: every important claim you make at the table should be one you can support, and every important claim the other side makes should be one you know how to check. This does not require a research department. It requires gathering, before the meeting, the handful of facts this particular negotiation turns on — market prices, your own costs and history, relevant standards, dates, and quantities — and organizing them so you can find any of them in seconds while someone watches.

Start with your own numbers, because they are the ones you will be asked about first. Know your costs, your margins, your current volumes, your payment history, and the real effect of the terms being discussed. If you are negotiating a discount, know what that discount costs you over a full year, not just on one order. If you are asking for a raise in budget, know what the money buys, item by item, and what happens without it. Negotiators lose credibility fastest not by asking for too much, but by being unable to explain their own figures. A pause to check a note is professional. Guessing at your own costs is not.

Then gather fair outside standards. Many negotiations have reference points both sides can respect: published prices, industry surveys, union or association scales, government statistics, the terms of your previous agreement, or what comparable organizations pay. A standard does two jobs. It supports your proposal, and it gives the other side a way to say yes without feeling they surrendered — they agreed to the standard, not to your pressure. Choose standards honestly. A cherry-picked figure the other side can demolish in one search will damage every true thing you say afterward.

Prepare your questions with the same care as your facts. Questions are how you test assumptions from Lesson 2, uncover the interests behind positions, and slow the conversation down when it moves too fast. Good preparation produces three kinds of questions. Opening questions establish the picture: how does their timeline look, what does success mean for them this quarter? Exploring questions dig beneath positions: what makes that date difficult, what would they need in order to move on this point? Checking questions confirm understanding before agreement: if we settled the delivery day, would the payment window still be a problem? Write your questions down and order them. In the room, you will not remember the clever question you invented in the shower — unless it is on your page.

Finally, organize the physical preparation. Bring your goals sheet, your walk-away figures, your evidence, your question list, and a clean page for notes, arranged in the order you expect to use them. Decide what you will share in writing and what stays private: sharing your cost breakdown may build trust in one negotiation and surrender leverage in another, so decide in advance

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rather than in the moment. If others on your side will attend, brief them with these same pages so nobody improvises a conflicting number. Preparation you cannot find, or a teammate has never seen, is preparation that does not exist.

The Steps

1. List the five to eight facts this negotiation turns on. Gather each from a source you trust, and note the source beside the figure.
2. Work out your own key numbers in advance: costs, volumes, history, and the yearly effect of any term likely to be discussed.
3. Find at least one fair outside standard — a market price, a published scale, or your previous agreement — that supports your main proposal.
4. Write ten to fifteen questions in three groups: opening, exploring, and checking. Put the most important assumption-tests early.
5. Decide what you will show in writing, what you will say but not hand over, and what stays private. Mark your pages accordingly.
6. Assemble one folder or file in order: goals, limits, evidence, questions, blank notes. Test that you can find any page in under ten seconds.
7. Brief anyone attending with you, using the same pages, and agree who answers which kind of question.

A Worked Example

Tom leads a maintenance team and must negotiate next year's service contract with the cleaning company his site has used for three years. The company's account manager has proposed a 9 percent increase, citing rising costs. Tom prepares. From his own records he pulls the actual service history: visit counts, missed visits (eleven in the year, logged by his team), and response times to call-outs. From two competing firms he obtains written quotes for the same specification — both below the proposed increase, one roughly at the current price. From a published facilities index he notes the general rise in cleaning costs for the year, which is real but smaller than 9 percent. His question list leads with exploration, not accusation: help me understand how the increase breaks down; which parts reflect wages, which reflect supplies? At the table, the conversation stays factual. Tom acknowledges the genuine cost rise, shares the missed-visit log as a shared problem to fix rather than a weapon, and observes that the market quotes suggest a smaller increase paired with a reliability clause. They settle on a modest increase, a credit rule for missed visits, and a quarterly review. Tom's preparation did not make him aggressive. It made the discussion about evidence both sides could examine, which is where fair agreements come from.

Common Mistakes

- **Bringing opinions where facts were needed.** "Your price is too high" starts an argument. "Two written quotes for this specification are lower, and here is the cost index for the year" starts a discussion.

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- **Preparing only your opening speech.** Facts and questions matter more than a polished first five minutes. Most of a negotiation is response, not presentation.
- **Asking questions you have not prepared.** Under pressure, people default to challenging questions that put the other side on the defensive. Prepared questions explore; improvised ones often accuse.
- **Carrying disorganized paper.** Fumbling for a figure while the other side waits reads as not knowing it. Organization is part of credibility.

Lesson 5 — Rehearse and Set the Table

The last stage of preparation is turning your pages into performance. Professionals in every field rehearse: pilots use simulators, lawyers practice arguments, and negotiators who role-play their meeting — even briefly, even with a colleague reading the other side's lines from your Lesson 2 notes — discover problems while they are still free to fix. Rehearsal reveals the question you cannot answer, the figure you do not actually understand, and the moment your voice tightens. Thirty minutes of practice routinely saves hours of difficulty in the real room.

Rehearse three specific moments. First, your opening: how you will frame the purpose of the meeting, state your main proposal, and invite their view — calmly, in under two minutes. Openings set tone; a prepared opening that names the shared goal ("we both want a contract that keeps deliveries reliable and costs predictable") steers the whole conversation toward problem-solving. Second, rehearse your responses to the two or three hardest things the other side might say: the flat refusal, the much-higher price, the deadline threat. Decide now what you will say and, just as important, what you will not say. Third, rehearse your close: how you will summarize agreement, confirm who does what by when, and put it in writing. Deals most often unravel not over the big terms but over fuzzy endings, where each side leaves with a different memory of what was decided.

Plan your concessions before anyone asks for them. List, in order, the things you can give, what each costs you, and what you will ask in return for each. Concessions made from a prepared list look deliberate and buy value. Concessions invented under pressure tend to be too large, given too fast, and traded for nothing — and they teach the other side that pressure works, inviting more of it. A useful rule for the room: never give without asking, even if the ask is small. "I can move on the start date if we can settle the payment window" keeps the exchange balanced and the relationship professional.

Set the practical stage with the same care. Agree the time, place, length, and attendees in advance, and propose a short agenda — naming the topics in a sensible order signals seriousness and prevents the meeting from being consumed by the easiest item. Choose timing thoughtfully where you have a choice: avoid negotiating when you are rushed, exhausted, or straight out of another difficult meeting, because preparation cannot fully protect a depleted mind. Decide your note-taking plan — who records figures and agreements as they are made — and your break plan: agreeing in advance that either side can call a short pause is not weakness, it is the mechanism that lets you check numbers and consult colleagues instead of improvising answers you will regret.

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End preparation with a one-page summary you can glance at in the corridor: your ranked goals, your walk-away points, your opening line, your first three questions, your concession list, and your alternative in one sentence. If your preparation cannot fit on one page for quick reference, it is not finished — the thick folder supports you, but the single page is what you will actually use when the conversation is moving.

The Steps

1. Find a colleague or friend to role-play the other side using your Lesson 2 notes. Run the meeting once, including their hardest likely objection.
2. Write and practice a two-minute opening that names the shared goal and your main proposal.
3. Script your responses to the two or three toughest things they might say. Note what you will deliberately not say.
4. Build your concession list in order: what you can give, its cost to you, and what you will request in return for each item.
5. Agree the logistics in advance: time, place, length, attendees, agenda order, and who takes notes.
6. Set your break rule: either side may call a short pause to check figures or consult. Decide how you will signal your own team.
7. Condense everything onto a one-page reference: goals, limits, opening, first questions, concessions, and your alternative in one sentence.

A Worked Example

Aisha coordinates volunteers for a community health charity and must negotiate shared use of a hall with the neighborhood association, whose chair, Mr. Bell, is known to be blunt and protective of the hall's schedule. Aisha prepares her pages, then asks a fellow coordinator to play Mr. Bell at full bluntness. The rehearsal is uncomfortable and invaluable. She discovers her opening rambles for five minutes before reaching her actual request; she cuts it to ninety seconds. She discovers she has no answer when "Mr. Bell" demands the charity pay the full commercial rate; she works out her real figures — the charity can pay a community rate, offer volunteer help with hall maintenance, and bring regular weekday bookings the hall currently lacks — and turns them into an ordered concession list. She also rehearses her close, because a previous agreement with another group had unraveled over who held the keys. In the real meeting, the chair is indeed blunt, and the rate demand arrives in the first ten minutes. Aisha answers from her preparation without heat, trades maintenance help and weekday bookings for the community rate, and closes by confirming key-holding, cleaning, and cancellation rules aloud while her colleague writes them down. Walking home, she reflects that the meeting felt almost easy — because the hard version of it had already happened, in rehearsal, where difficulty was free.

Common Mistakes

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- **Rehearsing only in your head.** Silent rehearsal skips the moments where your voice, temper, or wording actually fail. Speaking the words aloud, even once, exposes what thought conceals.
- **Planning your case but not your concessions.** The middle of a negotiation is trading. Arriving with nothing prepared to trade means trading whatever comes to mind — usually too much.
- **Leaving logistics to chance.** No agenda, no note-taker, no agreed end time: these small gaps are where misunderstandings and marathon pressure sessions grow.
- **Skipping the one-page summary.** A thick folder you cannot navigate under pressure is a comfort object, not a tool. The single page is the tool.

Try It

Choose a real negotiation coming up in your work or life in the next month — a supplier renewal, a project scope, a schedule change, a purchase. If none is scheduled, use a past negotiation you expect to face again. Complete the full preparation in this set, on paper, in order. First, write your one-sentence description and your ranked issue list with targets and acceptable ranges. Second, write your paragraph describing a good outcome from the other side's chair, and mark your facts and guesses in separate columns. Third, write your alternative in concrete terms, price it honestly, and set your walk-away point for each must-have. Fourth, gather your five to eight key facts with sources, and write twelve questions across the three groups. Fifth, rehearse aloud with another person for at least twenty minutes, including the hardest objection you can imagine, and finish by condensing everything onto one page.

Then check your work against this standard: could a colleague pick up your one page and negotiate in your place without calling you? If yes, you are prepared. If no, the gaps in their understanding are the gaps in your preparation — fill them now, while filling them is still free. Keep the pages after the negotiation and score them honestly: which assumptions were right, which numbers mattered, where did the plan bend? That review, done once, makes every future preparation faster and sharper.

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