

“Be SURE” You Are Prepared to Negotiate WELL

This briefing sheet reviews a four-step “Be SURE” framework developed to help you prepare strategically to Negotiate WELL—your **W**ork, **E**ducation, **L**ife, and **L**eadership goals. **Explained below are the four steps of the Be SURE framework:**

Start with Your Goals.

Understand What You’re Negotiating for.

Reduce Ambiguity about What, How, and with Whom to Negotiate.

Enhance Your Negotiation through Relationships and Your Relationships through Negotiation.

See also attached a worksheet with links to short (~3-min.) video explanations of each section.

Start with your career goals. Many people think about career negotiations in terms of the offers presented to them (e.g., a formal job offer) or conventionally available opportunities at work (e.g., a raise or promotion during a formal review process). This reactive stance commonly leads people to think about negotiating for pay or promotions instead of the entire trajectory of their careers. Women especially are strongly encouraged to “close the gender gap” by negotiating for more money, even though their long-term earnings are more likely to be enhanced by sustained employment and occupational advancement than by compensation bumps in a particular position. Evidence suggests that negotiating your role (the scope of your authority and your developmental opportunities) is likely to benefit your career more than negotiating your pay or benefits will. And during times of work-life conflict, negotiating your workload and the conditions that affect it (including your responsibilities, location, and travel requirements) may be critical to moving forward professionally.

The Be SURE approach encourages you to start with *your own aspirations* to avoid being anchored by others’ expectations. Drawing on research on the career advancement of diverse managers, executives, and other professionals, it also suggests thinking broadly about your work and life ambitions, and how you would like to craft the trajectory of your career—in terms of the types of *roles* you would like to play, the *workload* that would enable you to thrive, as well as your desired *pay*.

This issue brief was prepared by Zoe Williams, a research fellow at the HKS Center for Public Leadership, under the supervision of Hannah Riley Bowles, Roy E. Larsen Senior Lecturer in Public Policy and Management at the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS). It is designed to complement educational and resource materials accessible through the HKS SLATE Negotiate WELL Case Collection, including the Strategic Preparation Workbook. It is adapted from the Harvard Business Review article, “Negotiating Your Next Job: Focus on Your Role, Responsibilities, and Career Trajectory, Not Your Salary,” by Hannah Riley Bowles and Bobbi Thomason, and a related HKS SLATE note on “Self-Advocating in Early Career” by Hannah Riley Bowles and Zoe Williams. HKS cases are developed solely as the basis for class discussion. Cases are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data, or illustrations of effective or ineffective management. KS1375

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Understand what you're negotiating for. Before negotiating, be aware of whether you are *asking* for an opportunity, resource, or reward that is typical for people in your position or career stage; *bending* for special privileges that others in your position would not typically receive; or *shaping* a new strategic direction or way of working with others.

To be persuasive these different types of negotiation call for distinct types of arguments and should target different negotiating counterparts. If you are asking, think about what norms or precedent will demonstrate that you are making a standard request. If you are *bending*, prepare to explain why an exception is justified in your case. In addition, *bending* organizational norms likely will require the agreement of multiple parties. If you are *shaping*, you will need to persuade numerous stakeholders that what you are proposing is in the best interests of the group or organization.

Reduce ambiguity about what, how, and with whom to negotiate. In many organizations, ambiguity exists about what is negotiable—from salary and resources to advancement opportunities. It is important to recognize that ambiguity about the potential to negotiate tends to disadvantage people from historically marginalized or underrepresented groups because they are less likely than those from dominant groups to be looped into the informal flow of information and resources. Organizational leaders can reduce ambiguity by making negotiating opportunities and norms more transparent. However, individuals can also take actions to reduce ambiguity.

As you prepare to negotiate, you are likely to find you have many questions: *What* is potentially negotiable? *How* should I negotiate? *Who* will my negotiating counterparts be, and what do they care about? Seek information and advice on these what, how, and who questions. Reducing ambiguity about what is potentially negotiable helps you avoid leaving value on the table, while learning more about *how* to negotiate can reduce the fear and risk of an awkward interaction. Reducing ambiguity about *who* your counterparts are can keep you from making false assumptions and better enable you to propose mutually beneficial solutions. You also want to think about *how* to reduce your counterparts' ambiguity about you and your negotiating aspirations, which could reduce the likelihood that they will make biased or inaccurate assumptions about you or your aspirations.

Enhance your negotiations through relationships... As you aim to reduce ambiguity, try to identify people you might go to for *information* or *advice*. Next, as you develop your negotiation aspirations and proposals, think about who might provide *advocacy* for your ideas or requests. Finally, think about who might provide you with *social support*, such as encouragement and candid feedback about whether your negotiation proposals are realistic or persuasive. These are ways to *enhance your negotiations through relationships*.

...and your relationships through negotiations. To build support for your negotiation proposals and career advancement, the Be SURE approach advises working to *enhance your relationships through negotiations*. Evidence suggests you can do this by helping your counterparts understand why your proposal is legitimate (i.e., appropriate or justified—from *their* perspective, not just yours) and in others' interests (e.g., your counterparts' or the organization's goals or priorities). The most effective negotiators work to generate mutually beneficial agreements by understanding what all parties care about and searching for creative solutions (e.g., value-creating trades), as well as areas for compromise.

Conclusion. The Be SURE steps take time to implement—sometimes weeks or months. Most career negotiations start with preliminary conversations that gradually evolve into more substantive talks, particularly as new information and new players emerge. Remain flexible and prepared so that you continue to pursue your goals as you adapt to compromise or novel solutions.

Start with Your Goals

[Link to Introductory Video](#)

What are your long-term goals? What are some of your immediate objectives to achieve those long-term goals?

Understand What You're Negotiating for.

[Link to Ask-Bend-Shape Video](#)

What would you like to negotiate (e.g., your **role**, **workload**, or **pay**)?

- Asking** *Knowing whether you are "asking" for something standard, "bending" norms, or "shaping" a new way of working will help you approach the right counterparts and be more persuasive.*
- Bending** *Do you know whether you are Asking, Bending, or Shaping? If not, insert the questions you have in the next section.*
- Shaping** *Do you know whether you are Asking, Bending, or Shaping? If not, insert the questions you have in the next section.*

What is your **BATNA** (best alternative to negotiated agreement) (e.g., status quo or a different opportunity)?

Reduce Ambiguity about What, How, and with Whom to Negotiate.

[Link to Ambiguity Video](#)

What would you like to clarify about **what** is potentially negotiable or **how** to negotiate? What would you like to know about **who** your counterparts are? What would you like them to understand about you?

Enhance Your Negotiation through Relationships...

[Link to Relationships Video](#)

What kind of help do you need to prepare for and be effective in this negotiation? To whom might you turn?

- Information
- Advice
- Social Support
- Advocacy

...and Your Relationships through Negotiation.

How will your counterparts recognize that what you are proposing is **legitimate** (i.e., appropriate, justified) and **in their interests** (i.e., consistent with their goals and values and better than their own BATNAs)?

- Asking** *If you are asking, explain why your request is standard or consistent with precedents.*
- Bending** *If you are bending, explain why an exception is justified under the circumstances.*
- Shaping** *If you are shaping, explain the strategic value of the change or innovation you are proposing.*

How will Counterpart 1 see your proposal?

- Why legitimate?**
- Why in their interest?**
- Why better than their BATNA?**

How will Counterpart 2 see your proposal?

- Why legitimate?**
- Why in their interest?**
- Why better than their BATNA?**