

The skill of negotiation.

Here's a few ways to handle negotiation.

1. Listen, really listen to what the other person needs.

Negotiation is not about winning or losing. No one likes to lose, and those that continually lose can be disillusioned and demotivated.

That said, the best result is not always a compromise. Compromise can be a lazy solution where neither side gets what they need.

Here's a classic tale in negotiation:

Two sisters argue over who would get an orange. They compromised and split it in half. One sister ate her half and threw away the peel; the other, who was cooking, grated the peel on her half and threw away the rest of the orange.

Successful negotiation is really understanding what everyone needs.

2. Practice to avoid anxiety.

All research and practice says the same thing: try your utmost to avoid feeling anxious while negotiating. One way to manage that is to relax, and that comes from practicing and rehearsing to keep your negotiating skills sharp.

Anxiety is often a response to being unfamiliar with surroundings and the process. The more comfortable you are, the less anxious you will feel.

3. Don't ever get angry.

Anger is like throwing a bomb into the negotiation, it rarely works. Diffuse your anger by being empathetic to the other side. Put yourself in their shoes.

Start with summarising the situation and making it clear that you're aiming for a win:win solution. If the other party does get angry, seek to soothe. Tactically, you will be in a better position if you can reduce hostility.

4. Don't get personal.

Negotiate on the basis that everyone in the studio wants to do a good job. Understand that no one wants

to let the team down. Use those thoughts to argue on the objective rather than subjective. For example:

How can we work this design to meet the brief? not
You haven't read the client brief.

How can we meet deadline and still get the outcome the client needs? not

No way, there's no time, we need this finished by 4pm.

5. Avoid an ambush.

No one likes being blindsided. If it's a difficult, ongoing dispute, suggest that you meet to talk about it at a later stage. Don't make a big deal out of it, say that there's a couple of things about xxx that you'd like to talk about and would it be OK if you met at such and such a time to discuss them. Don't make it sound like a confrontation but give enough detail that the person enough time to do their own preparation.

Similarly, if there's a specific comment that it relevant to only one person, take them to one side rather than announce it across the studio.

5. Be confident

Exude confidence but not arrogance. Successful management is leading by authority. Ultimately, the responsibility (and final decision) may be yours but studios are not dictatorships. There's no need to overcompensate or intimidate.

Always be empathetic and put yourself in the others shoes to image their stance.

Critiquing a designer's work.

A design manager's role is not a creative role, but you may need to critique a designer's work in respect to meeting the brief.

Here's a few ways specific ways handle that situation:

1. Listen. Really listen so you know what information is being presented and you can form a relevant argument.
2. Start positive. There's plenty of time to explain what you would like changed/amended/done but start by saying what is working.
3. Be constructive, specific and give actionable criticism. Avoid broad sweeping subjective statements and refer back to the project goals.