



Stanford eCorner

Using Different Elements of Negotiation

Steve Young, *Former NFL Quarterback*

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Steve Young, former quarterback of the San Francisco 49ers, explains how he uses different elements of negotiation throughout his life, whether it is in his marriage or on the field. According to Young, financial returns are not the only incentive in negotiations. He describes one of the negotiation tactics he used with his agent Leigh Steinberg.



Transcript

When you're younger, you don't really realize how much you really are negotiating in your daily life. It really is just a great skill. It's a great skill in my marriage. It's a great skill in football. It's a great skill in business. It's a skill, and it's all about people. It has all kinds of elements to it, too. There are all kinds of angles to negotiation in my mind. There's classic negotiation for contracts between an agent and management. What are the elements of that negotiation? There are elements of subtle negotiation, between me and my teammates.

There are eleven guys on this field together, all of a different race, religion, socioeconomic background, geography, language - everybody's from everywhere. We're all together and there are elements of negotiation in getting everyone across the line, both metaphorically and in reality. To get people across the goal line. As you say that, I think of a story you told me once. One thing that an athlete certainly does is negotiate with their agent and through their agent. Your agent, fairly famous Leigh Steinberg, I think, became really famous because of you. Did you guys always have a good working relationship? How did you negotiate with each other? Tell us a couple of stories about that. He was just a few years older than me when I first came out of college. He was about 28 and I was 21. He had just landed a couple of big quarterbacks and he was starting a business.

It was interesting - he had his own tactics about negotiating with management and they mostly centered on getting people loose with alcohol and then waiting for the middle of the night and then basically working them into submission at about two or three in the morning. "We can't stop until this is over." One of the tactics he used very effectively was he'd call me at four in the morning. "Okay, here's the deal," and then I'd write it down. Then he'd call me at 5:30. "The sun's not up yet," but it had inevitably gone up. I wouldn't say that was a great tactic, but he would use his stamina to negotiate through endless hours. He would just work. He was a bulldog about it. I think he basically worked people down and finally got to a point where they just gave up. He also over-prepared.

He would put a book together, led by another guy named Scott Parker. Scott Parker was a guy who loved the gory details. He was absolutely data-driven, completely engrossed in different ways to look at the same player. He would cut me up in different ways to compare me with Newt Rockney to Dan Marino to Joe Montana and always made it favorable. He would figure out all these angles to how Steve Young really relates in different statistics, so much that he made a book about it, a presentation. General managers would get this presentation. They're used to saying "We want our guy. He's good," and then he'd go "No, he stinks." That was the way they used to negotiate. Here, they were using that moral high ground of logic. "We're

just logically walking through this.

Tell me where this doesn't make sense," and then he would cover up all the loopholes because the other guy wasn't as prepared. Certainly there's another way to cut that same data and make me look bad. If you can make me look good, you can cut it the other way and make me look bad. He'd over-prepare to a point where they weren't ready to cut it the other way. It's tough in a negotiation to suddenly say "Oh, time out. I need some time to go work through this data." We're in the middle of it. We're in the mix. So you get swamped that way. Those are his negotiation tactics. One thing I learned about him over the years is also about negotiating between us.

You want people to do great work for you and sometimes you pay them, but that's not necessarily everybody's most effective way to inspire them to do a great job. Leigh Steinberg loved to be in the limelight. He was the lawyer out of Berkeley that loved to be in the mix.