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Using Tenacity and Good People Skills in Negotiations

Steve Young, *Former NFL Quarterback*

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Young talks about his first negotiation experiences with a team called the LA express. He learned that negotiation is about being tenacious, even when the deal may look to be called off or takes a long time to discuss. Negotiation is also about exercising good people skills, he adds.



Transcript

Your very first negotiation was with the team in a different league, the LA Express. You had quite a negotiation with that owner. Tell that story and what lessons you learned from it. It was an awesome, awesome negotiation. There was a time over twenty years ago, which is really amazing. Wait 'till you guys are forty. "What the crap happened?" It happens. When it happens to you, you're like "What in the world?" In 1984, I was a rookie and there was a new league. It was in the Spring - you guys probably don't even realize this - and it was really big. There was big money in it.

Donald Trump owned a team. There were a lot of people getting paid. Rookies were coming out and getting paid a lot of money. I was one of them. I got to go to the LA Express when the team went out of Los Angeles. The guy who owned them was Bill Oldenberg. I would call him a financial manipulator. He had made tons of money and loves to show it. He was in TransAmerica building downtown San Francisco even though he ran the LA team. The negotiation was going on and they thought they made a deal with my agent.

It was his birthday. He said "This is perfect. I'll fly him out in my jet, I'll pick him up in my Bentley at SFO, I'll drive to the TransAmerica building, we'll bring him up while there's a big hoopla in the building. There'll be "Steve Young, welcome to the team," and then I'll have a big thing and I'll go to my birthday party. It'll be a big thing. I flew out in his jet, got in the Bentley, drove over there - remember, I was just out of college like you and I had maybe twenty bucks in my pocket - and I was like "Yeah, whatever." I'd never been to San Francisco in my life. I landed at SFO, the Bentley picks me up at the private jet, I go to the TransAmerica building, I go up, I get out of the elevator and into opulent offices. My name is up there and these lights are coming across with streamers. "Steve Young!" We were going to finish the negotiation and sign it that night at his birthday. That was the plan.

My dad, as a lawyer, wanted to have it all read to him in Greenwich, Connecticut over the phone. As they finished the negotiation, Leigh Steinberg excused himself. "I've got to call his dad." My dad wasn't like "What's the gist?" He was like "Paragraph A " go ahead." It was taking a long time. Bill Oldenberg - it was his birthday, he was getting more motive and there was the frustration and "What's going on?" I was sitting - and this is one of the nice points of negotiation sometimes - and I just did nothing. As the night's going on, he gets more and more frustrated. At least it wasn't the case with my dad. Finally, he comes in and says "What's the problem? Why can we not finish this? Let's finish this! Is it money? Is it more money you want?"

I was like "No, I'm just telling my dad." He was like "Is it more money?" He took his wad of hundreds - this huge, thick wad - and threw it at me - boom - right there and it hits me on the chest. "Is it money you want?" I'm like "No?" I didn't say anything. He said "Do you want my money?" and then he storms out, and I'm like this. Holy crap, I had never seen so much money.

I told Leigh "Let's sign now. I've got more money than I've ever seen!" My dad never gave in. What happened was that it went on and I never got it quite done. At 6:00, I arrive with lights and everything. At 12:30, we get escorted out of the building. The whole thing's off. It's broken down because my dad had found something that Leigh had to go negotiate again. He was mad about it. "I thought we were done," blah, blah, blah. We are escorted by security.

At 12:45AM, I'm down outside on the street. Leigh Steinberg and I, we were just sitting on the street. "What do we do? I was like "I don't know, but I've got about \$15,000 in my pocket! I don't know what you're going to do but I'm going out!" Oh, wow. That was awesome. I was 21. You can just imagine. It was awesome. We ended up getting it done four or five days later, but for a few days it looked like it was off. Negotiation is just about sticking with it. Leigh was great at getting people back.

That was one of his real talents. That's a people skill. I would say this " try to make a judgment for yourself. Am I a people skill person" That's a natural skill. We all have different skills. Some of us have people skills. If you are, then you're on your way to becoming a natural negotiator. If that's not one of your talents, that doesn't mean you can't be a great negotiator, but recognize that people skills is one of the big elements. You can learn a lot of those skills by watching and stepping back and being an observer and picking up things, and then finding that it's all these soft skills that I talked about. No one can't be a great negotiator but some people have a leg up.

To me, people that have those special skills or that are blessed with them, if they don't use it as a weapon and use it as a tool, it could be very effective.