

***Getting Past No*, by William Ury,**
Reviewed by Lisa Abbott

This book builds upon the framework for principled negotiations introduced in *Getting to Yes*. The author offers a 5-step strategy for dealing with difficult opponents and turning a conflict into a process of mutual problem solving. This process includes:

Go to the balcony: Find the mental discipline to take an objective view of the conflict. Rather than reacting to hostile tactics or positions, step back and reflect on your interests. Keep your eyes on the prize.

Step to their side: For a successful outcome, create a favorable climate. Defuse anger and hostility by listening, acknowledging their points, and agreeing whenever possible.

Reframe: Move the discussion from a disagreement to a mutual search for ways to meet the legitimate interests of both sides. Take their hard-line statements and reframe them by asking open ended questions. “Why is that what you want? Why is that fair? What if we tried XYZ?”

Build them a golden bridge: Make it easy for the other side to say yes. Involve them, incorporate their ideas and words, and make the outcome appear as a victory for them. Find ways for them to “save face” and satisfy their basic need for respect.

Use your power to educate: Make it hard for them to say no. Educate them about the costs of failing to reach an agreement. Warn rather than threaten. Don’t escalate. Emphasize the golden bridge they could choose to cross.

For each of these strategies, Ury suggests ways to improve the quality and outcome of negotiations over complex and difficult issues. His book directly addresses one of the most challenging issues facing emerging grassroots leaders: namely how to identify and control our emotions in order to achieve our larger goals.

As leaders grapple with this book, it is important to emphasize that these strategies are not about being nice, avoiding conflict, or giving in. Rather, they provide an effective way to search for wise, fair and lasting agreements, even with difficult or hostile players. And, since we cannot control the behavior of others, Ury’s approach may not work with some people. At the very least, these steps can make it clear when it is time to walk away from the negotiation.

These skills are relatively easy to understand, but far more difficult to internalize and put into practice. They require a level of self-awareness and discipline that can be learned but is hard to maintain.

“When you find yourself facing a difficult negotiation, you need to step back, collect your wits and see the situation objectively. Imagine you are negotiating on a stage and then imagine yourself climbing onto a balcony overlooking the stage. ‘The balcony’ is a metaphor for a mental attitude of detachment. From the balcony you can calmly evaluate the conflict almost as if you were a third party. You can think constructively for both sides and look for a mutually satisfactory way to resolve the problem.” (page 38)

“You obviously can’t eliminate your feelings, nor do you need to do so. You need only to disconnect the automatic link between emotion and action. Feel the anger, frustration, or fear – but don’t channel your feelings and impulses into action...Follow the Biblical dictum: ‘Be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to act.’” (page 46)

“Instead of getting mad or getting even, concentrate on getting what you want.” (page 51)

“Every human being, no matter how impossible, has a deep need for recognition. By satisfying that need you can help create a climate for agreement.” (page 58)

“Treat your opponent like a partner. Instead of rejecting what your opponent says, accept it – and reframe it as an opportunity to talk about the problem.” (page 78)

“The single most valuable tool in reframing is using problem-solving questions...Here are some of the most useful:

- Ask Why?
- Ask Why not?
- Ask What if?
- Ask “What makes that fair?”
- Ask for their advice.”