

How to Negotiate Like a Child

Unleash the Little Monster Within to
Get Everything You Want

by Bill Adler, Jr.

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THE WORLD'S BEST NEGOTIATORS ARE CHILDREN.
HERE'S HOW THEY DO IT.

Angelic. Sweet. Affectionate. These are the words that come to mind when we think of children. But there's another set of words that applies equally well to children: Stubborn. Determined. Manipulative. And winners.

The truth of the matter is that when it comes to arguing with children, children often win and the parents lose. Many parents have said to themselves, "We might as well walk all the way downstairs and get Betsy's stuffed elephant *now* because we're going to agree to do it eventually."

Children are the best negotiators in the world.

How did this state of affairs—children getting what they want and parents conceding—ever come about? How can a forty-something high-powered lawyer lose to

an inexperienced four-year-old? More importantly, how can adults harness the astonishing negotiating prowess and skills that children have?

There's no one-sentence explanation for why children are such good negotiators. Rather, they draw on a variety of techniques, depending on the particular situation. Each of these techniques—and how you can exploit them in business and other walks of life—will be explained in detail in individual chapters.

The most important point about these skills is that *if you learn how to negotiate like a child you will be able to get nearly whatever you want*. Negotiating like a child may be the most critical skill you can have in business and other walks of life.

What are these techniques? There are fourteen basic child-negotiation skills:

Throw a tantrum

Ask the person who's most inclined to say "yes"

Play one side against the other

Get sympathy

Take your time

Change the rules

Solicit a bribe

Wear the other side down

Turn the negotiations into a game

Act irrationally

Worry the other side that you might be sick

Make weak promises

Win through cuteness

Take your toys and go home

Each of these techniques will comprise a chapter in *How to Negotiate Like a Child*. Each of the chapter will follow the same general pattern: A description of how children use the stratagem to their advantage, followed by how businessmen and businesswomen can use the technique. The chapters will include example of how these techniques will work. Additionally, each chapter will talk about potential pitfalls—that is, when not to use that technique, and what side effects might occur from using it. The chapters will be approximately 3,000 words long each.

You have to be willing to be looked at like a child if you employ these techniques and if you want to win. Children, in dynamic contrast to adults, don't care how they are viewed—at least they don't care if they are perceived as children.

How to Negotiate Like a Child has all the ingredients to become an instant success. People like pithy, clever business books, especially if they are short and offer valuable, unique insights. This describes *How to Negotiate Like a Child* to a T. The business and management books that do best are those that offer straightforward guidance without complicated directions or obscure language. The suggestions in *How to Negotiate Like a Child* are both uncomplicated and easy to implement.

Manuscript Details

We envision this as a short, hardcover or paperback book, similar in size and format to *The One Minute Manager* and *Who Moved My Cheese? How to Negotiate Like a Child* will be approximately 35,000 - 45,000 words and take six months to complete.

Throw a Tantrum

The tantrum is the most basic negotiating skill. Nobody likes to be around somebody who's in a fit of rage, beyond reason. Our natural inclination is to flee from that person as quickly as possible. Of course we can't always do that if the person's who's having a tantrum is our daughter—or a business person that we have no choice but to deal with. Instead, we often give in to the demands the tantrum thrower is making, especially if it's a “little thing.” We rationalize our surrender, thinking that “We're not going lower ourselves to that level and start screaming, too.” And we're right—we look superior, at least to ourselves. We're not the ones performing embarrassing antics. But look at the outcome. The calm person feels as if he or she is the better business person, but the tantrum thrower has walked away with the prize. The tantrum thrower knows that, too, which is what makes this such a powerful bargaining technique: Most of us don't want to be seen throwing tantrums, and so we concede rather than scream, shout and stomp our feet.

The loudest screamers and stompers often get what they want: Just think of Larry Ellison of the Oracle Corporation, or Bill Gates of Microsoft – both legendary for their tantrums. And for getting what they want.

Ask the Person Who's Most Likely to Say "Yes"

All children quickly learn that there is no unified, single mind known as "The Parent." There is Mommy and there is Daddy, and they have different personalities, weaknesses and abilities. Sometimes it's better to ask Mommy something; sometimes it's better to ask Daddy. In our house, I'm the person who's lenient about getting to bed at night; but I'm a terror when it comes to leaving for school on time in the morning. My wife, Peggy, is the opposite. So which parent do you think our children will turn to when they want to play for "just another five minutes" and it's past nine o'clock?

When you negotiate with somebody, it's important to make sure that you're negotiating with the right somebody. Clearly you want to ensure that the person you're negotiating with has the authority—or access to the right authority—to make decisions. (It does no good to ask Grandma if you can have a dog, since Grandma only serves an advisory function.)

You also want to make sure that the person you're negotiating with is inclined to see things your way. Although you can't move into your business colleague's house for a few months to find out what he's really like, you still need to find out as much as you can about the individuals you may be bargaining with. You want to approach the right person at the onset, before the other side picks their negotiator for you. Once you ask Mommy if

you can stay up late, if she says, “no,” you’re out of luck: It won’t do any good even if Daddy says “yes” later because there’s already an official “no” on the table.

Play One Side Off the Other

Closely related to choosing the right person to discuss things with is playing two side off each other. A skillful negotiator—a child—knows how to do this well. Adults – not so well.

My seven-year-old daughter, Claire, wanted to bring two newly hatched chicks home from her classroom for the weekend. This move was fine with me (since I wasn’t going to be the one to clean out the cage) but I knew it was not high on a list of things my wife wanted to do. From a previous experience with a guinea pig brought from her kindergarten class, Claire knew this. So she went first to me to ask if she could take home the chicks: “Please. Please. Please,” she wheedled. “Could you ask Mommy for me?” She figured, cleverly, that I would argue her case for her far better than she could do on her own – and she was right.

Children use this strategy all the time. They know that their parents disagree: Because their parents aren’t in complete harmony about a particular issue, their chances of getting what they want are many times better if both parents argue about it, than if the opposed parent is allowed the first shot at the decision. In the normal course of events, the stronger side is the one that wants the status quo; the weaker, the one that must muster enough support to effect a change. But by exploiting the differences between the parties,

the child tilts the balance in favor of the desired change, and so the formerly weaker side becomes the stronger and therefore can prevail. In other words, children know that they can usually get what they want as soon as they can get one parent to go along.

If there's no natural inclination for one parent to agree, the child must coax one parent to the child's side. What's important to note about this strategy is that the child doesn't have to dilute his energy by trying to get both parents to say yes—one parent, once that parent has been turned into an advocate, will do.

In business, you need to find your campaigner, too. Often there's an individual who will benefit by the deal going through—or who has a lot to lose if the deal doesn't go through. If you start buying a lot of calendars from a company, for example, the person who runs that company's calendar department may get a bigger budget: That is the person you want to approach. Often somebody in the company you're negotiating with can be a stronger booster than you can.

Win Through Sympathy

When your child's been injured, suffered a disappointment, had a bad day at school or on the playground, you do your best to make up for the loss, even if it means saying yes to something that would ordinarily rate a "no." That extra cookie, the ten minutes more of playtime – anything to put a smile back on that sad, sad face. It doesn't take children long to discover how advantageous it can be to have had things go wrong.

The same thing is often true in business, though you have to be a little subtler than children are. You can't walk into a business meetings complaining that Mr. Howell was mean to you or you never got your turn at the Xerox machine. Your tale of woe needs to be well-crafted, something that will elicit genuine nods of understanding. It must rise above the merely whiny, into the truly miserable. Only then will you earn your "sympathy points."

Two caveats: Your sufferings can't be made up. As children quickly discover, wild tales are too easily unraveled, and then you lose credibility. And you can't pull this trick too often. If you're always claiming to be the victim of injustice, your business associates will soon suspect you of being a deserving victim.

Take Your Time

Grownups usually don't remember what it's like to be a child. We don't remember the pure joy of discovery—of watching a caterpillar turn into a butterfly, of discovering that a post-it note will stick to anything, of discovering how many different animals clouds can become. Children pursue many of these discoveries simply by watching and waiting—waiting for the butterfly to emerge from the cocoon, pasting the post-it note on every surface in the house, staring at the clouds for hours. Children can do this because their sense of time is completely different from an adults' sense of time.

As any parent knows, children don't comprehend the importance of the word "hurry." They understand "hurry," but the word is just so much nonsense to them. Hurry has no meaning for children because for children time is limitless. There are no schedules—at least none that they set themselves. No deadlines—and even if there were deadlines, the consequences of missing a deadline are irrelevant.

Children often win simply by ignoring time. If a child's not particularly interested in going to a museum, he may take an incredibly long time to get ready. Or he may decide that now's a good moment to start rearranging his room (something he'd never thought of doing before.) "I just need to move this one last thing over there," he says, as you're anxiously tapping your feet.

Adults can only envy a child's approach to time. "If only I had the time..." is something we say to ourselves all too often.

But just as your time is limited, so is your negotiating partner's time. Sometimes winning is just a matter of outlasting your opponent. But because you don't know how long the other side can hold out, it's worthwhile finding out. Ask, "When's your flight

back?” or “What’s next on your agenda after our negotiations are over?” If you can get an inkling of your opponent’s deadlines, you can turn that into a considerable advantage. One way to make use of this knowledge is to not get down to serious negotiations until it is close to the time for the other side to go home. Wine them, dine them—do everything except discuss business. Then with only a few hours remaining, they may have to concede important points because they have no time left to argue.

Change the Rules

Children are notorious for ignoring “the rules.” They talk loudly in restaurants. They treat works of art as though they were toys. They like to run up and down airplane aisles.

Children may know the rules of the adult world—because you’ve told them the rules—but that doesn’t mean that those are the rules they have to play by. “Keep your voice down, we’re in a restaurant,” often changes to, “Keep your voice down and I’ll take you to the toy store after the restaurant.” See what’s happened? By not abiding by the adult rules, a child won something that child didn’t have before. Children *know* that *you* have to obey the rules, and they know that you hate seeing them disobey the rules.

Negotiations often succeed when you change the rules. For example, if you’re called by somebody’s lawyer over a contract issue, you *might* win by fighting over the technical points of the contract that is in dispute. Are you in breach of contract? Their

lawyer says, yes, you say no. It can be expensive to find out. Rather than spending thousands of dollars on attorney's fees, change the rules of the game: Bring up a long-forgotten problem between your company and their company, so that all of a sudden there is a whole different sort of problem that the other side needs to address. And that might get expensive to pursue. Or say that you'd like to let the media know about the issue because you have nothing to hide. These are all ways to change the rules—and they can get the other side to quickly back down.

I was once involved in a contract dispute with a former employee. The former employee had her husband, a lawyer, to call us to argue in her behalf. It so happened that her husband worked for the government, and he had called us from his office. Once I told him that I would make an issue of his improper use of his office (I made it sound as if he had threatened to bring the weight of the United States Government to bear on a private matter), he had to worry that I was going to report his actions to his supervisor. Although I knew full well that he had not been speaking as a government employee, what mattered is that to his superiors it would seem as if he had. I had *changed the rules*: We were no longer arguing over the former employee; now the argument had shifted to something I knew I could win.

We're often told to "think outside the box." Even better is making your own box.

Solicit a Bribe

Early on, children learn that if they stand their ground they'll often be offered something to do what the parent wants. This something is what parents call "a bribe," and what businesses call "consideration." Raise your hand, parents, if you've ever given your child a reward during potty training. Okay, you can *all* put your hands down, now. Children catch on quickly: All they have to do is hold out for what they want and they might be offered a little something extra for doing what they knew they'd have to do in the end. And if their parents don't offer a bribe, the child can always say, "Last time I went pee-pee in the potty you give me a sticker."

The same system works in business: Why settle for a little something, when you can have more? If you're buying widgets for cash, wouldn't it be nice to have a "sample" of that company's new super-widget, too? Soliciting bribes works especially well when you're close to closing a deal: Keep those pants up and refuse to go near that potty, until you see that sticker.

Wear the Other Side Down

Children just never give up. They don't quit arguing. Never. Ever. Not on Monday, not on Sunday. Nag, nag, nag. That's why so many families end up with puppies: Children are relentless about asking and asking and asking. They wear you down.

The same thing works in business. As long as you maintain a professional demeanor and you have something of substance to offer, by asking and asking again, you can often get what you want. Sometimes businesses appreciate that you're persistent because if you pursue them so doggedly, that shows how effective you'll be as a partner, collaborator, or advocate.

Often it's impossible to tell when is the best time to strike a deal. You can't know the internal budget or priorities of the company you want to do business with: So by asking on a regular basis, you increase your chance of hitting that company at the right moment.

Turn the Negotiations Into a Game

"Give me the remote," you say to little Oliver. "No," little Oliver says as he runs around the room with the remote control. The remote is important to you, because without it either you or your spouse has to become the live stand-in for the remote control. But to your child, whether or not the remote is dropped or drowned in a sea of saliva isn't important at all. It's just a game.

So all of a sudden you have to treat this like a game, too. You have to either chase Oliver around the house (and hope that he doesn't decide that part of the game involves

seeing whether the clicker can fly out the window), or you have to offer something in trade – say, that new stuffed animal you were keeping in a closet for emergencies.

In business you're almost always at a disadvantage when the deal is more important to you than to the other side. They can treat it like a game. Showing how needy you are is never a good game-plan. In order to win you either have to be the one who turns the process into a game, or you have to give the impression that the outcome hardly matters to you at all. It's possible to help give this impression by spending time showing off your company's wonderful office, or your office toys, for example, rather than appearing anxious.

Be Irrational

You can never tell what a child's going to do next. Most of the time, the next thing they do is adorable, but sometimes it's not. Your child might become a real bother on an airplane trip, so it's wise to bring along a suitcase full of toys for the ride, because you don't want to spend three hours playing peek-a-boo. Your child might do anything at the doctor's office, so it's a smart idea to promise a visit to the toy store after the visit. Or so many parents think. All because children are so unpredictable.

Being rational isn't necessarily rational business behavior. You *want* your business partners to think you're a bit kooky (kooky and brilliant, of course.) If people

think you're litigious, they're often likely to give you what you want without your having to ask twice. If people think you might walk out in the middle of a project, then there's a good chance you'll get that extra money you wanted, to keep you on board.

You never want your counterparts at a rival business to think they know you well. That allows them to plan countermoves that give them the edge. When somebody knows how you are going to react to a particular situation or proposal—or even if they *think* they know—they can keep one step ahead of you – or two or three steps ahead. But when they had no idea which direction you'll take, they have no choice but to sit back and wait for you to pounce.

Worry the Other Side that You Might be Sick

“I don't feel so good, Mommy.” With those words many a child has stayed home from school or missed a piano lesson.

If they can't fake being sick, they can hold their breath until you worry that they'll faint. Anything to get their way.

And let's not forget being sick as method of accumulating toys.

The same technique can succeed in business, too: When you get down to the nitty gritty of business, you have to deal with individuals, not companies. People get sick all the time, so why not use that to your advantage? In the book publishing business—my

line of work—authors routinely say that they can't complete a manuscript on time because they've suffered a broken wrist, had back surgery, or their spouse is in the hospital (they conveniently omit the fact that it's for a tummy-tuck). Do writers have more illnesses than other people? Probably not. Do writers claim to get sick more than others. Probably not, either.

As with the sympathy-for-being-a-victim maneuver, you need to play the sick card sparingly. Overuse it and you'll be tagged as a malingerer. Make sure no one's going to see you at the golf course on the day you've said you were laid low with the worst flu ever. You're generally better off going for a little-understood syndrome, one that can come and go mysteriously. That way, you can have to fly home to see your specialist the day your negotiations reach the critical point, forcing the other side to accede to your demands or lose the deal.

Make Weak Promises

“If we get a dog, I promise to walk it.” Thousands of parents recall their child's voice saying those exact words—as the parent walks the dog at 6:30 a.m. in the rain.

But it's not the child's fault, entirely: You knew, of course, that this was a false promise the moment you heard it. But hope nearly always triumphs over experience.

“I will clean up my room right after supper. I promise.” And so you let your kids play outside for another half an hour. And the room never gets cleaned. But you knew that, too.

In the book business, publishers are always making promises that they’re not going to keep: We will promote this book like crazy! And authors, too, make their fair share of false promises: I will get a foreword from a former United States President.

The side that makes the most credible false promises often is at an advantage in negotiations. You don’t want to promise something that’s impossible or impractical, because you run the risk of being branded a liar. But you can promise something that you might reasonably expect to be able to do, especially if later on it’s turns out that you can blame somebody else for the thing not having been done: “We were going to promote your book heavily, until we learned that a similar book had come out the week before, and that author has already been booked on all the major talk shows,” or “I know we said we would distribute your widgets in Brazil, but our Brazilian distributor is no longer carrying any American products.”

Win Through Cuteness

When you look into a child's face you *have* to say yes. When they blink their wide eyes, you have to say okay to everything. Children were designed to cause parents to become weak at the knees. From the moment they're born, to their first smile, to when they say "Ma-ma and Da-da" for the first time—they're adorable. Even when children do things like spill a glass of milk on the floor or knock over your antique vase, they're awfully endearing. And they know that, too.

How can you translate that into business practices?

It sounds glib to suggest that you send in your most physically attractive negotiators, but that's exactly what can help. People react well to "beautiful" individuals, especially if they're smart and well-informed. Men are often more vulnerable to this strategy than women.

Anybody can be made to look appealing. While physically attractive men and women enjoy certain advantages, there are lots of ways to make somebody appear attractive, interesting, attention-grabbing, desirable or popular. Turn your negotiators into *winning-looking* negotiators.

Obviously brains and beauty are the best combination. Sometimes companies don't send either on a mission—a sure recipe for losing the negotiation.

Take Your Toys and Go Home

Not everyone comes to a business meeting well prepared. Or to a play date. Children who aren't having a good time with their friends or their siblings often say something like, "I'm going to take my toys and go into my room." So they pack up the Monopoly set, their Lincoln Logs or Gameboy and vanish behind closed doors. When this happens, and the toy clearly belongs to one child, most parents side with the child who owns the toy, even though they may also chide that child for being selfish, rude, inconsiderate—whatever. But this doesn't matter to the child who's taken the toy away, because that child controls the game. It's not fair, nobody likes it (and the kid who does that too often will alienate his friends) but in the short term it's an effective strategy.

Later—when the environment is better—the youngster may bring back the toy and the game will resume. But the game is now being played according to the child's terms because everyone knows that the toy can be taken away again.

The utility of this technique in business is readily apparent: The more of the physical plant you control, the more you can control the negotiations or the meeting. That's what sportscasters mean when they talk about "the home field advantage." Of course, the home team can't take their basketball into their locker room and refuse to come out if the game isn't going their way – but their fans can and do scream so loud sometimes during an opposing player's free throw that he can't concentrate and will miss.

If the negotiations are being held in your office, you can, of course, control the timing of when people eat, when and where people view various presentations, how and what kind of materials are distributed, and more. Control over the timing, format and

presentation of information and discussions can have an immense, but often subtle, impact on how negotiations proceed.

Even if you're not the host, you can exert influence over the timing and format of the negotiations. Bring materials—distribute them when the timing is right for you. Make reservations in advance at a restaurant. Create a web site to help present the information—web sites are the ultimate portable information.

You can use your control over the “toys” to control the flow of information, among other things, in a meeting.

About the Author

Bill Adler, Jr. is the president of Adler & Robin Books, Inc. a book packaging company. He is the author of over a dozen books including *365 Things to Do With Your Kids Before They're Too Old to Enjoy Them* (Contemporary Books), *Outwitting Squirrels: 101 Cunning Stratagems to Reduce Dramatically the Egregious Misappropriation of Seed From Your Bird Feeder by Squirrels* (Chicago Review Press), *The Home Remodeler's Combat Manual* (HarperCollins), *Ask Me Something I Don't Know* (Avon), *The Weather Sourcebook* (Globe Pequot), and *The Non-Smoker's Bill of Rights* (William Morrow, with Steve Allen), *Baby-English: A Dictionary for Interpreting the Secret Language of Infants* (Pocket Books, with Karen Adler, age two), *Tell Me a Fairy Tale* (Dutton), *Outwitting Critters*, (HarperCollins), and *Outwitting the Neighbors* (Fireside). *Outwitting Critters* was a Literary Guild selection and a Book of the Month Club, Gardening selection.

Of all his books, Adler's favorite is *Outwitting Squirrels*, not just because it was a treat to write but because it became such a success even after twenty publishers turned the proposal down. While reviewing this book *USA Today* called Adler, "A trendspotter." *The Wall Street Journal* called the book "A masterpiece." The book was twice enthusiastically reviewed in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. *Outwitting Squirrels* is not only a testament to the cunning and perseverance of squirrels, it is a testament to Bill Adler's creative insight into the book business. The book has gone into printing after printing, and now over 300,000 copies have been sold. *Regardie's*

magazine had this to say about the book: “Adler still feeds the birds, but now he also squirrels away royalties.”

Here are what some reviewers have said about some of Adler’s books:

Outwitting Squirrels

Bill Adler, Jr. is my hero. I love this book. Go buy this book. —Rosie O’Donnell

What the birdfeeders of America long have needed is a guru...I'm pleased to announce there's a new voice on the front lines of birdfeeding. His name is Bill Adler, Jr. ...Adler assembled his findings into a nifty volume entitled *Outwitting Squirrels*.
—*Minneapolis Star Tribune*

Outwitting Squirrels...ingenious tricks to keep squirrels from eating all the seed when the feeders fail. —*The Washington Post*

Bill Adler, Jr., a writer in Washington, has just published a treatise titled, *Outwitting Squirrels*...[His stratagems are] particularly appealing. —*The New York Times*

At last! A book that addresses life's really important issue, or in any case, the issue most crucial to people who like to feed birds. —*The Detroit Free Press*

A masterpiece of squirrel stratagems. —*The Wall Street Journal*

An excellent book...both entertainingly witty and extremely helpful.
A must. —*The Ottawa Citizen*

Now, for the first time, the sum of human knowledge about squirrels and the strategies to defeat them are available in one place. —*Booklist*

Impeccable Birdfeeding

The author of “Outwitting Squirrels” strikes again. —*The Milwaukee Journal*

The most entertaining backyard birding book we know! Bill Adler, Jr., author of “Outwitting Squirrels,” needs no introduction to bird lovers. He's simply the funniest, most practical writer on birdfeeding. —The Nature Company

Perspective makes this book different: Mr. Adler puts the needs of the hobbyist before those of the birds. —*The Dallas Morning News*

The advice he delivers is supremely practical, his style spare and straightforward and his sense of humor is enlivening throughout the book. This is an eminently readable book, perhaps the only one the amateur bird-feeding hobbyist needs on his shelf.
—*The Washington Post*

This book will add greatly to a person's enjoyment of birdfeeding. —*The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

Outwitting Critters

Adler tells engaging stories, many bordering on suburban legend. *Outwitting Critters* surfeits with interesting facts and horse-sense hints. —*The Village Voice*

Adler has the answers, and they are creative as well as nontoxic. —*Chicago Tribune*

He offers...comprehensive treatment of the subject, and provides recommendations that are grounded in common sense. —*Library Journal*

Outwitting the Neighbors

“A witty paperback.”—*Indianapolis Star*

“Worth reading.” —*Arizona Republic*

Adler has appeared on *The Rosie O'Donnell Show*, *Rolanda*, *The Maury Povich Show*, *Hard Copy*, *A Current Affair*, *The Gordon Elliot Show*, NPR, and several network news programs.

Adler is a licensed pilot, and an accomplished aerobatic pilot.

He lives in Washington, D.C. with his wife and sometime co-author, Peggy Robin. Their daughter, Karen Adler, had her first book, *Baby-English: A Dictionary for Interpreting the Secret Language of Infants*, published by Simon & Schuster before she turned three. Their second daughter, Claire, has not yet written a book.