

Preface

THE CONCEPT OF “WIN-WIN” HAS BEEN AROUND FOR DEC-ades. It sounds good. Sounds fair. Sounds like good business. Sounds good for relationships. Actually, it sounds like a no-brainer! But does it work? Do people actually reach “win-win” outcomes in business and in personal life?

Unfortunately, the answer is most often “no.” My research has revealed that people routinely fail to capture maximum potential gains in their personal and workplace negotiations. For example, my simulation studies show that, on average, talented managers leave about 20 percent of potential mutual gains untapped. That’s akin to taking 20 percent of the value of every business deal and dumping it into the trash. So, in a typical \$100,000 business deal, about \$20,000 goes down the drain.

Negotiating the Sweet Spot

My next question to the managers in my studies is about how often they negotiate. The most typical response is once-a-week or once-per-month. If we figure that in, we are now up to \$200,000 a year in waste, or even more! And if we think about ten years of a career, a conservative estimate of the lost value associated with failure to reach win-win is about \$2 million! Now, if you are a leader or manager and have, say, ten direct reports, we are now approaching \$20 million of lost value when you include their failures to achieve win-wins! You can see where this is going. What may seem like a drop in the bucket is actually an ocean of losses!

We can calculate the same lost value when partners, friends, or family members consistently fail to satisfy one another's needs and end up disappointing themselves and hurting people they care about. Indeed, when it comes to our personal relationships, the stakes involved with maximizing the value of any kind of interaction are often much higher than in our professional lives. When we leave value on the table, the relationship can sour and, sometimes, dissolve altogether.

Learning how to get to that maximum value can mean the difference between successful and failed relationships, along with the ability or inability to actually enjoy our leisure time or balance our work and personal lives. Remember: Many people are conflict-avoidant when it comes to their personal relationships; unwilling to rock the boat, they keep the peace, often by second-guessing what their partners and loved ones want. In the meantime, the other partner is doing the exact same thing, resulting in suboptimal outcomes on multiple di-

Preface

mensions. The good news is that you don't have to be a licensed clinician to learn the strategies in this book and use them to maximize the value of your relationships—something I call finding the “sweet spot.”

Traditionally, “win-win” negotiation has focused nearly exclusively on money and other economic resources, like services, products, market share, and financial returns. In this book, the term “sweet spot” expands the scope to reflect all the things that people care about in business and life, *which are not always measured in dollars*. Thus, the sweet spot refers to money as well as to intangible but infinitely valuable non-financial resources. When people find the sweet spot, they maximize value however they may define it: happiness, peace of mind, contentment, satisfaction, relationship stability, and trust in their personal relationships and business dealings. So, let's set aside “win-lose” framing and instead focus on the sweet spot.

In this book I refer to situations in which people fail to maximize the value in their business and personal relationships as “missing the sweet spot.” Conversely, when they leverage their interests, needs, and desires in a way that creates value for themselves and their business partners, spouses, and friends, they are finding the sweet spot.

So, what's the problem? As we shall see, it's astounding how often people miss sweet spot deals, including those right in front of their faces. Why does this happen? It's not for lack of trying. It's not because people's hearts and heads are in the wrong place. It's because the sweet spot is *elusive*. Many people fall into “traps” that pull them away from the sweet spot and

Negotiating the Sweet Spot

toward a sour-lemon outcome! Indeed, most of us have been taught to avoid conflict, divide things down the middle, or, in some cases, pound our fists on the table to get what we want. None of these tactics is effective in personal or business life.

Finding the sweet spot is a *skill*; like any skill, it takes practice. Most of us have not been taught this capability. Indeed, expecting people to find sweet spots without any training, practice, feedback, or experience is like shoving them onto a tennis court for the first time, with no coaching or instruction, and expecting them to just “pick it up.”

Fortunately, there are surefire methods to get out of the quagmire and create meaningful, lasting value in relationships and business. Until now, these methods have been developed primarily for and offered to business students and executives in advanced management courses. I’ve devoted my career to studying how managers and executives negotiate; my resulting research has yielded a set of powerful techniques that can be used not only in the boardroom and conference room, but across the kitchen table. Prior to studying business negotiations, I earned a master’s degree in Counseling Psychology. My experience in the counseling clinic gave me deep appreciation for how poor conflict resolution prevents people from reaching their own sweet spot outcomes with partners, spouses, children, and parents.

Here, I translate these surefire, research-backed best practices into life tools to use in daily negotiations and conflict situations. These tools can be useful in our personal relationships, at the workplace, and in virtual life. I call these tools “hacks”



Preface

because they work well but don't require a lot of financial investment, training, or time. You don't have to be a CEO, senior VP, or regional brand manager to learn how to find the sweet spot in life's negotiations. You just have to be open to learning.

During the time I was writing this book, the world was shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic, the rapid spread of illness associated with the novel coronavirus discovered in late 2019. Literally overnight, the healthcare crisis and widespread stay-at-home orders led to the most radical restructuring of interactions and expectations most organizations and people had ever faced, catapulting personal, work, and community life into disarray. Businesses, communities, couples, and families underwent profound upheaval that affected personal relationships, the workplace, and virtual communication.

One of the most profound changes associated with the pandemic was the transition from the ease and comfort of face-to-face business meetings and interactions to virtual teams and work, including formal and informal negotiations. There was no memo. No training plan. No "onboarding" to the new reality. It just happened, and everyone had to adapt. That meant people had to quickly rethink and reengineer their personal and professional relationships and interactions while gaining or sharpening virtual collaboration skills. These dramatic events have profound implications for the ideas and tools in this book.

In the wake of a global "new normal," it is important not to blindly assume that the skills that worked in the conference

Negotiating the Sweet Spot

room transfer seamlessly to a conference *call*—or that what’s effective in person will continue to serve you well on-screen. Many families and couples had to “re-negotiate” their work and family life as they literally brought their workplace into their living rooms. Whether it is negotiating who gets the home office and who is stuck in a closet or how best to home-school children, the ability to look for a “sweet spot” amid the loss of relationships, jobs, and people in our lives has never been so important.

As people rebuild their lives, businesses, families, and communities, the ideas and tools you’ll learn here should prove valuable. For example, chapter 7, “Sweet Spot Hacks for Virtual Life,” offers key hacks and tips for getting the most out of virtual interactions, which represented a rising share of work and home life even before the COVID crisis. Overall, I present a full set of strategies for dealing with conflict in personal, business, and virtual life, whether associated with times of great change and stress or with life and business as usual. I’m confident what you gain will help you to find the sweet spot in the new lives that each of us is rebuilding post-COVID and well beyond. In general, I’m excited to teach you the sweet spot-finding skills I’ve learned over decades, so you can reap their many rewards. Finding the sweet spot not only feels good, but it preserves and enhances relationships, ensuring their long-term success, whether in personal, business, or virtual life.