

Ask for It

Teaching your Students—and Yourself—to Negotiate

By Linda Babcock

When my daughter was five and finishing kindergarten, we visited a “summer opportunities fair.” While I browsed through the booths for local day camps, she ran straight to the display for a sleepover riding camp for girls. Very excited, she begged me to let her go away for two weeks to ride horses. “Absolutely not!” I said. My daughter is a strong-willed child—very like her mother—and I expected her to put up a fight. Instead, she surprised me. Rather than crying or trying to argue, she said, “I think I know what your concerns are. You think I can’t handle it, don’t you?”

“You’re only five,” I said. I told her I was worried that she’d get homesick. She didn’t know how to bathe herself. She was just too young to go away by herself for that long.

She said she understood my fears and asked what it would take to convince me that she could do it. Together we devised a series of tests, such as sleepovers at the houses of girls she didn’t know well and washing her

own hair. She passed them all with flying colors, sailed off happily to sleepover camp for a week (we compromised on the length of time she would go), and had such a good time that she didn’t want to leave. When she did come home, it was clear the bathing issue had been a real one—she smelled like a horse. Otherwise, the camp negotiation was a complete success.

This got me thinking about the potential benefits of negotiation training for children. I’ve been teaching negotiation to college students and professionals for almost twenty years, and I’ve written (with Sara Laschever) two books specifically aimed at teaching negotiation skills to women. The first, *Women Don’t Ask: The High Cost of Avoiding Negotiation—and Positive Strategies for Change*, showed that women are far less likely than men to negotiate for the things they need. This disparity helps maintain the wage gap between men and women and keeps the glass ceiling firmly in place. Our new book, *Ask For It: How Women Can Use the Power of Negotiation to Get What They Really Want*, presents a four-stage program to help women overcome this block, become comfortable and adept negotiators, and learn to use negotiation strategically and effectively—at work and at home.

Convinced that learning to negotiate was probably like learning a language—the earlier you start the better—I founded a nonprofit organization called PROGRESS, with the goal of teaching young girls to negotiate. The members of my PROGRESS staff—researchers, educators, and social workers—have developed numerous curriculum products, including practice exercises, a computer game that teaches children to negotiate, and role-playing scenarios. One role-playing exercise (appropriate for elementary school children) centers on a conflict about which game to play at recess. The students break into groups, and the members of each group receive separate instructions about how to try to reach an agreement. The members of one group are advised to use





lose/lose tactics (everyone staunchly defends his or her own position—and no one walks away happy), another group receives instructions that will produce a win/lose outcome (some give way while others don't), and a third group is taught how to take a win/win approach, which enables them to work together to find a solution that makes everybody happy. This exercise allows teachers and students to discuss the advantages of using negotiation to uncover options that work well for everyone. Like the role-play scenarios we've developed for every age group, the object is to help kids look for alternative ways of resolving conflicts and peer relationship problems. Although the materials were created with girls in mind, most of them turn out to work well for both boys and girls.

While using these materials and studying their impact, we noticed that developing good negotiation skills doesn't just benefit kids. It can also be a huge boon for people who work with kids because it reduces conflict and promotes cooperation. You may think that children negotiate a lot, especially if you're also a parent, but children typically negotiate in an argumentative and competitive way that prevents real problem solving. The PROGRESS training helps them learn how to take a more constructive approach.

Ayana Ledford, the director of PROGRESS, works with student groups every day, and she hears many stories about how negotiation training helps kids. A middle-school student told Ayana that a teacher had given her detention because she'd skipped class and failed to turn in an assignment. When this had happened before, the student had yelled at her teacher and stormed out of class. This time she decided to ask the teacher how she could avoid going to detention. The teacher talked

to her about the importance of coming to class, helped her think about ways to complete her schoolwork on time, and agreed to cancel the detention and give her a chance to catch up. The student felt proud of the way she handled the situation and told Ayana she was going to try hard not to fall behind in the future.

Another girl, after joining one of Ayana's groups, reported that she'd solved a problem that had dogged her throughout high school. She'd always loathed gym class, she said. She hated changing in front of the other girls, especially for swimming, and so she routinely skipped gym. Then she learned that her school wanted her to repeat gym class over the summer. She needed to work during the summer and planned to skip the class again until she discovered that this could prevent her from graduating. Instead, she decided to ask her gym instructor if there were any other way for her to make up the credit. Her gym teacher agreed to let her write a report on health and nutrition and present it to the class. Problem solved.

The PROGRESS training materials, including an instruction manual for teachers, are available for use or free download on our site (www.heinz.cmu.edu/progress). There's also another great way for teachers to impart good negotiating skills to their students, and that's by the time-tested way of modeling them yourself—demonstrating the power of a good negotiator in action. Getting permission to use school space for an impromptu performance, finding funds to pay for special teaching materials, making sure a talented student gets the support she needs, or arguing for the value of an unscheduled field trip—every day probably presents you with situations that involve negotiating. By learning to be an adroit negotiator, you can show your students the

benefits of making negotiation part of their social toolkit, a skill they can regularly employ to make good things happen, improve difficult situations, and push events in the direction they want them to go.

Learning to be a better negotiator at school, and on behalf of your students, can produce huge benefits for you personally as well. Suppose that you're starting out as a teacher and receive a job offer for \$40,000. Instead of accepting it, you negotiate and get the offer raised to \$44,000—in essence earning yourself a “negotiation bonus” of \$4000. If you receive 3 percent raises every year until you're 65, that annual “negotiation bonus” will grow to \$14,258 by the year you retire because your 3 percent increase each year will be calculated on a higher base salary. If you save your “negotiation bonus” every year in a savings account earning 3 percent annually, by the time you reach 65 that savings account will contain \$627,354—a nice addition to your retirement nest egg.

Not all teachers can negotiate their salaries, how-

ever, because they belong to unions that do it for them. Still, if you change jobs and school districts, you may need to negotiate the experience “step” on which you're placed at your new school—your years of service may not automatically transfer to a new district. Outside the workplace, you may want to negotiate for a lower interest rate on your home equity loan, negotiate a good price with contractors who work on your house, or negotiate with your spouse, partner, or housemates over how to split up household chores. An article in the *New York Times* recently reported that major retail chains such as Best Buy, The Home Depot, and Circuit City are quietly encouraging their sales forces to negotiate with customers who try to bargain for their products. The opportunities to benefit from effective negotiation skills are practically limitless. They can improve your life, make you a better teacher, and provide your students with a skill that will serve them well long after they've left your classroom. ■

About the Writer

LINDA BABCOCK is the coauthor, with Sara Laschever, of *Ask For It: How Women Can Use the Power of Negotiation to Get What They Really Want* and *Women Don't Ask: The High Cost of Avoiding Negotiation—and Positive Strategies for Change*. Author Website: <http://www.womendontask.com/>



Books By Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever



Women Don't Ask

The High Cost of Avoiding Negotiation—and Positive Strategies for Change
 “A highly readable, thoroughly researched and important book. *Women Don't Ask* should be read by anyone with a fear of negotiating, male or female, and by managers who want a better understanding of how 47 percent of the work force confronts the workplace. The book [also] has a more revolutionary goal: to change the social context in which bargaining takes place, so the world becomes accepting of women who ask.”
 —Alan Krueger, *The New York Times*

Bantam, TR, 978-0-553-38387-4, 272pp., \$14.00

Ask For It

How Women Can Use the Power of Negotiation to Get What They Really Want
 Drawing from the stories of real women, the authors present an innovative approach to negotiation that explains how women can identify important goals, takes them step by step through the entire planning and preparation process, and offers strategic advice on the negotiation stage, with tips on managing emotions, confidence-building techniques, and the implementation of an effective collaborative style.

Bantam, HC, 978-0-553-38375-1, 336pp., \$25.00

