

# Negotiating with management



**Jamie  
Lumm**

**Y**ou probably don't realize it, but you are negotiating every day. At home, it may be deciding where to go on vacation, what movie you want to see, or it might be talking to your teenage son about when you expect him home.

In the post office, shop stewards negotiate with management when discussing grievance settlements, and negotiations occur during labor-management meetings and local negotiations. But they also occur every day on the workroom floor—for example, when a supervisor and letter carrier are discussing that day's workload and how long it's going to take:

**Carrier:** "Here's my 3996, I'm going to need an hour of help today."

**Supervisor:** "What? No way. My computer says you are going to have a half an hour of undertime, I need you to take a swing from Route 10."

And so it begins. The supervisor has control over something the carrier wants: auxiliary assistance. To get it, the carrier will have to negotiate with the supervisor. This may simply mean that the carrier points out how much mail there really is as opposed to what the computer says, the parcels and accountables received that morning, and oh, there's that full coverage of Red Plums left from yesterday. But often it takes more than that.

Negotiating may also come up in circumstances involving leave. We've all had those times when we needed a day off and the leave calendar was full. Maybe you wanted to attend your child's music recital, or were offered tickets to a college football game, or maybe you were asked to participate in a wedding or attend some other important event. You know that even though the calendar is full, the supervisor has the authority to let you off but the only way that is going to happen is if you can convince him/her to do so.

This does not mean that you ignore the contract or that you shouldn't file a grievance if the supervisor violates it. I'm writing about those times when the supervisor has the contractual authority to do something for you, but doesn't have to. I'm also writing about those times when you are trying to resolve things, like how much assistance you will be given, before they become grievances.

**Understanding the negotiating process and possessing good negotiating skills is something that would benefit each one of us. There are negotiating principles that, once learned, will better equip you to deal with management as well as that pushy teenager at home. For example: This may**

seem counter-intuitive, but there is a negotiating principle that says you should never take the first offer made by the other side, especially if it's exactly what you want. Let me explain.

Suppose you are in the market to buy a nice used car for your daughter who is going away to college. After looking online and in the local newspaper, you find one for sale that matches what you are looking for. The slightly below blue book asking price of \$8,000 is within your price range; it's the make and model you want, and has the approximate mileage and equipment you are looking for. From the photos it appears to be in good condition, so you contact the seller and arrange to meet. When you arrive, the seller explains that it's his wife's car and she wants something newer. You look the car over thoroughly and test-drive it. Everything checks out fine, so you decide to make them an offer.

Being the shrewd negotiator that you are, you want to see if you can move them off the asking price of \$8,000, because only a fool would pay full price, right? So you decide to make them a low-ball offer of \$5,000, thinking you will be happy to settle for \$7,000 or even \$7,500. You tell them that you like the car, but you think it's overpriced and would they take \$5,000 for it? You are prepared for the seller to be insulted and reject the offer, but instead he grins and looks at his wife, who nods and grins back and he says with a great big smile, "It's a deal."

I can say with almost 100 percent certainty that at that moment, two thoughts are going through your head. One thought is: "What's wrong with this car?" Your other thought is: "I could have gotten a better deal." You are very uncomfortable and you no longer feel good about the car. You are going to be worrying about your daughter every time she gets behind the wheel of that car. And, you feel like a schmuck—that you've been cheated or, at best, out-manuevered.

But what if instead of immediately accepting your offer, the seller laughed and said, "Come on, don't try to low-ball me like that; it's almost insulting. I'm prepared to go down in price a little, but not that much. How about \$7,500?" After some back and forth, you agree to \$7,250 and shake on the deal. And guess what? You feel better about the deal and you paid \$2,250 more. You are more confident about the car and you feel like you won something by getting them to come down in price.

And why is that? Because negotiating a deal is not just about getting something for the least cost or the best price. It's also about feeling good about the deal. So remember that when you are negotiating with management, never take the first offer—push back in a pleasant way, and ask for more. Chances are you will get a better deal and they will walk away feeling like they won something.

**This is just one of many negotiating tactics. I'll write about more in future articles. Stay tuned.**