

# NORTHSTAR



**STEPHEN DUMPLETON**

**TEACHES NEGOTIATION**

*13 Considerations to a Better Agreement*

# INTRODUCTION

The STAR Framework breaks the negotiation process into four clear and actionable stages, each designed to help you navigate from preparation to reflection with purpose and precision. It begins with **Set the Table**, where you lay the groundwork by defining goals, understanding your counterpart, and preparing strategically. Next is **At the Table**, which focuses on how you communicate, adapt your mindset, and manage emotions during live negotiations. The third stage, **Advance the Table**, emphasises keeping the negotiation moving forward with proposals, building connections, and adjusting strategies as needed. Finally, **Review the Table** is all about reflecting on the outcomes, ensuring follow-ups are in place, and preparing yourself for future negotiations.

Each stage is tailored to address critical elements of successful negotiation in a logical and practical sequence. This free 25-minute module includes five short videos and this accompanying PDF document.

Together, they outline 13 key considerations to help you prepare for an important negotiation. While not exhaustive, these resources provide a solid foundation to guide your planning process. Investing just 25 minutes to watch the videos and complete the checklists will help you focus on the critical factors needed to secure that all-important "Yes." And who knows? That "Yes" might just be closer than you think.

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SET THE TABLE - AT THE TABLE - ADVANCE THE TABLE - REVIEW THE TABLE

## MEET STEPHEN DUMPLETON

NorthStar Negotiation founder Stephen Dumbleton is a negotiation expert with nearly a decade of experience in the field. Stephen has dedicated over 10,000 hours in providing negotiation advisory services in America, Asia, Australia and Europe. He's worked with large, successful companies, like Visa, Asics and Kellanova, across a diverse range of industries, from financial services to consumer goods. While reading for a Masters in Organisational Psychology, Stephen helps clients gain deeper self-awareness and an understanding of human behaviour within work environments.



# SET THE TABLE

Setting the table involves taking deliberate actions to create the most favorable conditions for a successful negotiation. Too often, negotiators jump in unprepared, reacting rather than acting strategically. This step points towards thoughtful preparation, ensuring you're ready to navigate the discussion effectively. While there are many areas to consider within your plan, here we focus on four critical areas: People, Objectives, Control, and Leverage.

## 1. PEOPLE

Understanding who you're negotiating with is a key starting point, but it's not always as simple as it appears. Success often hinges on identifying the right players and their roles.

Reflect on these questions to correctly assess the key players within your negotiation:

- Who holds the authority to say “yes” to this deal? Are you certain of this?
- Are there allies who could support you in reaching an agreement?
- Who might act as barriers to achieving your goals?
- What behavior should you anticipate from the other party, and how can you prepare for it?
- What steps can you take to strengthen relationships with the other party?
- Within your own team, who are the key influencers, and what roles should they play?

## 2. OBJECTIVES

Clear objectives act as your North Star, guiding every move during the negotiation. Misaligned or undefined goals often lead to subpar outcomes. There is a reason why I called my company NorthStar Negotiation as I view objective setting as a crucial initial step in a negotiation.

Define your priorities with these questions:

- What do I want to achieve in this negotiation?
- Have I completed my commercial due diligence?
- What are the other party's objectives? Are you certain, or do you need to confirm them?
- What is my BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement)?
- How will this negotiation impact other agreements or aspects of my portfolio?
- Am I aiming high enough while remaining realistic?

# SET THE TABLE

## 3. CONTROL

Negotiation dynamics are often influenced by controllable factors like location, timing, and agenda. Proactively managing these elements helps set the tone and structure of discussions. Consider:

- How many meetings will be needed, and who should attend?
- Where should each meeting take place? Could a neutral or strategic location influence outcomes?
- How much time will the discussions require? (Most people underestimate this—plan carefully.)
- Should I create an optimal atmosphere in advance by sharing an agenda or organizing an informal pre-meeting?

## 4. LEVERAGE

As Archimedes famously said, “Give me a lever long enough, and I will move the world.” Understanding and building leverage before negotiation begins is critical. Ask yourself:

- What alternatives do I have if this negotiation doesn't succeed?
- What are their alternatives?
- Who is more prepared to walk away?
- Who faces more time pressure?
- Do I have more information about the other party's circumstances?
- Is my relationship with the other party strong enough to influence outcomes?

## ACTION STEP

Based on your answers, create a plan to strengthen your position and leverage well before the negotiation begins.



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# AT THE TABLE

**N**ow that you're sitting at the negotiation table, it's time to execute your plan effectively. Three key areas will ensure you're at your best: Communication, Mindset, and Emotional Control. Mastering these will keep you focused and prepared to handle whatever comes your way.

## 5. COMMUNICATION

Communication is at the heart of any negotiation. While it's a vast topic, here are a few critical points to guide you:

- Do you truly understand their position?  
Don't just assume you do —you might be wrong. Actively listen, ask clarifying questions, and confirm your understanding to avoid misinterpretations.
- Do they understand your position?  
Again, never assume they do. Take the time to check and ensure clarity.
- What should you share? What should you withhold?  
This is always a challenging question to answer. Ask yourself what's worth revealing and what's better kept private.
- Could face-to-face communication help?  
Whenever possible, meet in person. It's easier to read emotions and intentions through body language and tone.
- What are they not saying? Sometimes silence says it all. Pay attention to what's left unsaid, this might highlight areas they're avoiding or downplaying..

## 6. MINDSET

Negotiation isn't always a zero-sum game where one side's gain equals the other's loss. With the right mindset, you can find opportunities to create value for both sides.

Ask yourself:

- Are there issues that are low value to me but high value to them?
- What about issues that are high value to me but low value to them?
- How can I expand the pie?
- Think about what you could ask for or offer that increases the total value for both parties.

**Tip:** If they make a demand, don't reject it outright. Instead, try making their demand conditional: "If you can do this for me, then I will do this for you."

# AT THE TABLE


## 7. EMOTIONAL CONTROL

Negotiation is emotional—especially when the stakes are high. The best negotiators keep their emotions in check and use them to their advantage.

Ask yourself:

- How well-prepared am I?  
Preparation breeds confidence. Have you practiced key scenarios?
- What emotions might I feel, and how will I manage them?  
Anticipating how you'll react can help you stay calm under pressure.
- How will I respond if the other party is hostile or difficult?  
Stay composed and focus on your goals, no matter how they behave.
- What will I do if emotions escalate?  
Be ready to suggest a time-out to regain composure and focus.
- Have I fostered a positive mood?  
Negotiating with optimism can open doors and lead to better outcomes.
- Is my team on the same page?  
Alignment within your team boosts confidence and ensures you present a united front.

**Tip:** Having a strong fallback position (or BATNA) significantly reduces stress. Knowing you have a solid alternative allows you to negotiate with confidence and stay composed.







# ADVANCE THE TABLE

**R**eaching the finish line in a negotiation takes more than just persistence; it requires maintaining momentum and adapting to challenges along the way. To keep things on track, it's essential to focus on three key areas: Proposals, Connection, and Change It Up. These elements not only help to drive progress but also create opportunities to strengthen relationships, build trust, and explore fresh approaches when discussions stall.

## 8. PROPOSALS

Proposals are the driving force of a negotiation. They move the conversation forward and help shape the path to an agreement. Achieving a mutually beneficial outcome often takes more than one offer, so it's crucial to plan your proposals thoughtfully.

Key questions to guide your proposals:

- What do you think their walk-away position is?
- Where should you open, given your assumptions about their position?
- How will you deliver your proposal (e.g., in person, email, or video call)?
- Should you make the first move, or let them? Why?
- Who is the best person on your team to present the proposal?
- Will you be able to observe their reaction in real time?
- How will you clearly communicate the value of your offer?
- What does your second proposal look like?
- Could you provide multiple options to give them a sense of choice?

**Tip:** Whenever possible, present your proposals face-to-face. This allows you to gauge their genuine reaction and adjust your strategy accordingly.

## 9. CONNECTION

While the numbers in a negotiation are critical, so are the relationships behind them. Building trust, rapport, and a sense of connection with the other party can lead to better outcomes. People are more likely to agree with someone they like and trust.

Key questions to strengthen connection:

- What's the current state of your relationship with the other party?
- Do they trust you? Do you trust them?
- What actions can you take to build more trust?
- Is there someone on your team who could enhance rapport?

# ADVANCE THE TABLE

## 9. CONNECTION CONTINUED

Key questions to guide your proposals:

- Have you researched their personal and professional motivations?
- Could you share something personal or professional to establish a deeper connection?
- How do you want them to feel during the negotiation, and what will you do to achieve that?

**Tip:** Likeability is a subtle yet powerful lever of influence. Don't overlook the personal dynamics in your negotiation strategy.

## 10. CHANGE IT UP

When discussions hit a deadlock or stall, introducing a fresh perspective or approach can reignite momentum. A simple shift in environment, personnel, or strategy can make all the difference.

Key questions to consider when switching gears:

- Would a different location inspire more productive discussions?
- What kind of setting would work best for the next meeting?
- Who on your team could bring a fresh perspective or new approach?
- How can you frame these changes positively to the other party?
- Could altering your strategy or tactics move the deal closer to completion?

**Tip:** Don't be afraid to experiment. A well-timed change in approach can break through barriers and reveal new paths to agreement.



# REVIEW THE TABLE

Getting to an agreement is of course the idea here. But its not the end of the process. If you want to improve as a negotiator and negotiate better future agreements, consider the following three steps: Reflect, Follow Up and Take a Break.

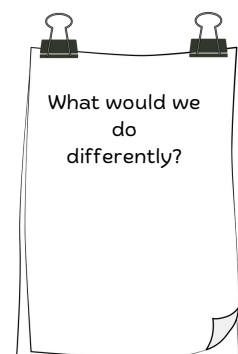
## 11. REFLECT

Reflecting after an experience such as an all-important negotiation allows you to learn and develop as a negotiator. While many understand the significance of preparing, few know how important a negotiation review is to their future deals. High performing athletes would never fail to reflect and review a performance so why should commercial negotiators? The “Winning Cycle” follows three simple phases: Prepare, Execute and Review. Its incredibly simple, yet poorly followed. If you want a competitive edge, stick to these 3 phases for those key negotiations.

Here are some key considerations when focusing on workplace negotiation reviews:

- Plan for a review meeting early in your planning process. The meeting wont happen before the deal concludes, but having it noted in the diary ensures it's a viewed by all as a priority.
- Decide who you want at the review meeting. Don't forget that there will be stakeholders within your business who while not very involved, may still benefit from understanding how things played out in the deal.
- Ensure the meeting environment encourages transparency and honesty. Its not about negatively critique your team's performance, but rather assessing what went well and what didn't. You won't achieve this if people are not being honest in their assessment.
- Make the meeting nonnegotiable. This means that those invited must turn up.
- Capture key learning, takeaways and notes and ensure these are utilised in whatever way moving forward.

**Tip:** When running a review meeting, ask yourself and your team: What went well? What didn't go well? And what did we learn about ourselves and the other party?



# REVIEW THE TABLE

## 12. FOLLOW UP

There may be important next steps that will need to be acted upon. Be careful not to rush toward the finish line, without ensuring clarity and alignment on what needs to happen and by when. Taking the time to confirm, document, and act on these steps is an important factor for long-term success.

Key questions to consider:

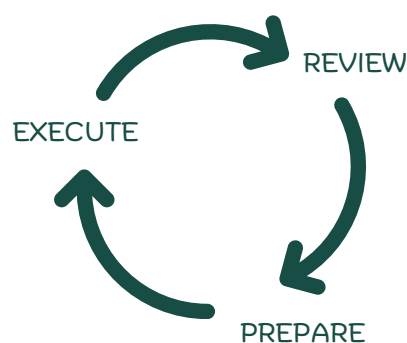
- Have all agreed terms been clearly documented and shared with all parties?
- Are deadlines, deliverables, and responsibilities clearly defined?
- Who will be accountable for each action item, and how will progress be tracked?
- Are there any additional approvals or sign-offs required?
- What communication channels will be used to stay aligned post-negotiation?
- Have you scheduled follow-up meetings or check-ins to ensure everything stays on track?
- How will you handle any unforeseen issues or misunderstandings that arise?

## 13. TAKE A BREAK

Negotiating high-stakes deals can be emotionally and mentally exhausting. Intense discussions, potential conflict, and the weight of workplace pressures can take their toll. Taking time to recalibrate and close off the last deal is essential to recharge, reflect, and ensure you're fresh and ready for the next negotiation.

Key questions to consider:

- How can you celebrate the successes, big or small, from the last deal?
- Are you giving yourself and your team time to decompress and process the experience?
- What steps can you take to recharge your energy—individually and collectively?
- How can you ensure a positive mindset and readiness for the challenges ahead?



# DO YOU WANT TO RADICALLY IMPROVE YOUR SKILLS?

If you want to understand how Stephen and NorthStar Negotiation can help you and your team deliver stronger negotiated outcomes, please get in touch and schedule a call at [www.northstarnegotiation.com](http://www.northstarnegotiation.com).

To further improve your negotiation skills, deepen your understanding of the some of the key concepts we've discussed, and learn a little more about taking control, here are some books recommended books.

