



# Do's and Don'ts of Compromise

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**W**hen you are perplexed about how to resolve an impasse with someone, you may be tempted to compromise and give something up in order to move things forward. While the use of compromise is common and definitely has some rewards, beware of some of the pitfalls of this concessionary process.

## Benefits of Compromise

Being the first to compromise can initiate the give and take of collaboration and generally creates an expectation that the other person should give something up as well. Usually a series of concessions occur until you find a middle ground. Hopefully. The middle ground is less polarized and tends to lead to solutions.

Compromise can sometimes be an expression of good will that indicates to others that you are cooperating in moving things forward. It can demonstrate that you value the relationship and that you are willing to be flexible about the outcome. Also, compromise can circumvent a lot of discussion and therefore save time. Perhaps you have heard someone say to you, "Can't you just compromise?" as if that were the most reasonable approach to consider.

## Drawbacks of Compromise

Unfortunately, compromise can also be overused, or misused, creating mediocre results. Misuse occurs when everyone walks away dissatisfied because they gave up too much of what they really wanted. For instance, a couple I know were picking out new dishes. They spent a month searching for something they could agree upon, which was not going to be easy.

After a several rejected suggestions, they settled upon something they could both tolerate. Two years later they broke up and the question came up about what to do with the dishes.

Their conversation went like this, "Do you want the dishes?" "No I hate the dishes." "I thought you loved them. I don't like them either." Too often, people give up what they want in compromise which leaves the resolution somewhat unfulfilling. Besides, mutual dissatisfaction can actually strain relationships.

Another misuse is that many people oversimplify the concept of compromise and think that it means cutting things "down the middle", literally to "cut the baby in half". For instance, if someone asks for a certain amount of money, you counter back for half of what is asked. Too often "going down the middle" becomes a standard compromise approach. The problem is that it does not necessarily reflect fairness nor does it adequately address the true interests of parties. It lacks imagination and bypasses true brainstorming where the best option can emerge.

Compromise is overused when it becomes your first option to problem solving and is your standard negotiation strategy. While it can bypass a lot of discussion, this shortcut also circumvents an important step of exploring options that don't involve giving something up that you want. Hence, compromise can produce sloppy and ill-fitting agreements.

## Improved Compromise

Compromise is best used as a last resort to deal with impasse, after you have brainstormed for options-- a minimum of three options and as many options as ten for important outcomes.

Some of these options may appeal to the other party and it keeps you looking for opportunities

for gain instead of letting go of what you want and incurring losses. Rather than cut things down the middle, think of fairness as a much more complex issue. Keep your interests in mind to guide your give and take process so that you ensure a certain level of satisfaction. Finally, if someone has to compromise about which dishes you end up with, at least one person should love them.

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