

Negotiating? 7 words to put on your 'don't say' list

If you're ready to become a better negotiator, choose one word from this list, and work on eliminating it from your negotiation vocabulary

BY [BERNICE ROSS](#)

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Have you ever been in a [negotiation](#) where everything seemed to be going well, and it fell apart for no apparent reason? Although there are thousands of reasons deals go wrong, there are seven seemingly innocuous words that often cause negotiations to fall apart.

Eliminating these words from your negotiation vocabulary will help you be stronger and more confident at the negotiation table.

The list below might surprise you because we use these words constantly. The examples highlight negotiation instances as well as client interactions — because clients want to see your negotiation prowess all the time. When you're negotiating, however, these words make you sound weak, indecisive and unsure of yourself. Here are the words to avoid and what to say instead.

1. But

The word “but” negates whatever comes before it. For example, let's say you're at a listing appointment, and the [comparable sales](#) show the maximum price for a property is \$275,000, but your sellers are

convinced their property is worth at least \$300,000. Many agents will use the word “but” to respond:

Agent: *I appreciate that you believe your house is worth \$300,000, but the comparable sales show the most you will be able to get is \$275,000.*

The word “but” negates your comment about appreciating their opinion. It also says, “I’m right — you’re wrong.” When you make yourself right and the sellers wrong, chances are you won’t get the listing.

A simple way to avoid “but” is to substitute the word “and.”

Agent: *I appreciate your opinion that your house is worth \$300,000, **and** the comparable sales show a maximum value of \$275,000. Would you mind sharing how you came up with \$300,000 — is there a comparable sale or something I missed?*

You can use this same script and substitute the word “however” for “and.”

By using “and” or “however” combined with a question, you avoid making the sellers wrong while also finding out how they reached their price.

2. Can’t

“Can’t” is ambiguous. For example, when an agent says, “I can’t go door-knocking,” do they mean, “I am physically unable to go door-knocking,” “It’s illegal in my area to go door-knocking,” or “I don’t want to go door-knocking”?

When most people use “can’t,” they’re really saying, “I choose not to engage in this behavior.” They often use “can’t” to cover up their real intention.

Henry Ford summed this up best when he said, “Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t — you’re right.”

Rather than being ambiguous by using “can’t” when you’re negotiating, lay out clear options and choices. For example, instead of telling buyers they can’t expect the sellers to fix every little thing covered in the [physical inspection report](#), respond by saying:

Agent: *What are the most important items you would like repaired from the inspection report?*

Here’s a slightly different approach:

Agent: *Sometimes sellers would prefer to give buyers a credit for the repairs. If the seller were to offer a credit, what number would you be willing to consider?*

Both questions have the buyers considering additional alternatives to having the sellers do all the repairs. When the sellers come back with what they are willing to do, reaching an agreement will be easier because you have already had the buyers consider other possibilities.

3. Hope

The word “hope” makes you sound weak.

Agent: *I **hope** we can get your house sold as quickly as possible.*

Now compare that statement to this one from Terry McDaniel (Greg McDaniel’s father), who has been in the business for almost 50 years.

Agent: *Mr. and Mrs. Seller, this is what I’m going to do. I’m going to put on my battle armor and go to war for you. We’re going to go out there and find the best buyer who is willing to pay the best price — is that OK with you?*

Clearly state what you will do rather than “hoping” things will work out the way you want.

4. If

“If” also makes you sound weak and less confident. Instead, substitute the word “when.”

Agent: *If we get an offer ...*

Agent: *When we get an offer, here are the next steps we will take.*

In the following example, the buyer seems to give up before even presenting the offer.

Agent: *Your offer is so low that I don't know if the sellers will even consider it.*

Agent: *Even though you're making a low offer, I'm going to do everything I can to persuade the sellers to take it.*

Again, stating what you will do is much more powerful than being negative about the outcome from the start. Sometimes sellers do take [low offers](#).

5. No / not

The Ritz Carlton has a policy their staff never tells a guest “no” or they are “not” able to do something.

Although there are times when you absolutely [must say “no”](#) to violating the law or doing something unethical, most situations can be addressed without using “no” or “not.”

Agent: *Last week, the sellers turned down an offer higher than what you are offering. There's **no** way they will agree to your price.*

Agent: *Last week the sellers turned down an offer higher than what you are offering. Let put on my battle armor and see if I can make your price happen for you.*

Here's another example when you know the sellers definitely will be taking the dining room fixture because it's a family heirloom, and the buyers want it:

Agent: *The dining room fixture is an heirloom. In case the sellers still want to take it with them, is there something else we could ask for instead?*

In both cases, you're providing alternatives. The answer may still be "no," but your buyers know you did your best to help them get what they want.

6. Should

Have you ever noticed how often people use the word "should"? Most people use the word "should" to get what they want, rather than listening to what matters most to the other person. We also use "should" as a way to make ourselves feel guilty about our choices, e.g., "I should go on a diet."

To see how prevalent "should" is in your life, go on a "should" diet for a week. Notice how you and others use "should." In most cases, the manipulation ploy is obvious. Once you realize this, do your best to avoid using "should" in any situation, but especially when you negotiate.

Agent: *That house has been listed for almost a year. The sellers **should** be thankful to get an offer.*

Agent: *That house has been listed for almost a year. Let's see how much they are willing to take given how long they have been on the market.*

7. Try

People use the word "try" when they're uncertain as to whether they can do something. For example, if you tell a seller,

Agent: *I'll **try** to have your CMA done by 5 p.m.*

What the seller hears is, "I will have your CMA done by 5 p.m."

The secret here is to say what you can definitely get done, not what you will “try” to do.

Agent: *I will have the CMA to you by tomorrow at 5 p.m.*

If one of your clients uses “try,” be direct.

Client: *I’ll **try** to meet with you on Wednesday to review your CMA.*

Agent: *Would Wednesday at 3 p.m. or 7:30 p.m. be best for us to meet?*

The example above contains “an alternative choice close,” which provides two options and asks the client to commit to one of them. If the seller is unable to meet at those times, follow up by asking for a specific time they can meet. If they continue to be evasive, they might not be serious about selling.

If you’re ready to [become a better negotiator](#), choose one word from the list above, and work on eliminating it from your negotiation vocabulary. You can then move on to eliminate the next word. The more of these words you eliminate, the more successful your negotiations will be.

Bernice Ross, President and CEO

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