

The Most Overlooked Superpower in Salary Negotiations & Collective Agreements

6 POWERFUL INSIGHTS



Smart organisations find negotiating power in enabling demands - not denying them...

Most organisations walk into salary negotiations or collective bargaining thinking power comes from saying “no”. Sometimes they get creative in how they say “no” by trying to substitute cash claims for lower cost-alternatives...

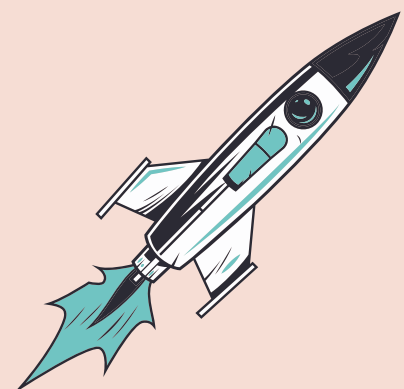
...but if that doesn't work they revert to saying “no”.

They assume their biggest weapon is taking a hard line, a well-rehearsed cost model, or delaying the conversation long enough to wear the other side down.

And when the hard line doesn't work, they lift their offer a little. All the while, trust and discretionary effort is destroyed. Employees and unions pay attention and learn that all they need to do is reject your proposals and then more is offered!

But here's what they've missed: the most powerful organisations aren't the most resistant, they're the most creative in how they say “yes”. They understand that power doesn't come from blocking demands, it comes from finding smart ways to say “yes”. If you can find a way to do that without costing the company money, isn't everyone better off?

This handbook will show you how to achieve that balance.



Chapter 1

The status quo is failing everyone



Most salary and collective agreement negotiations follow the same tired pattern:

- One side opens with a big number
- The other side comes in low
- Both parties circle each other with mistrust
- Even if a deal is struck, everyone walks away frustrated.

Sound familiar? We often ask clients: “What frustrates the other side about how you negotiate?” Answers usually include:

- “We take too long to respond”
- “We lowball our opening offer”
- “We’re cagey about information”

Then we ask, “What frustrates you about them?”

Surprise: it's the same stuff.

Turns out, *nobody's happy with the status quo*. And yet, everyone keeps showing up to the same dance: tentative, reactive, and stuck in a loop of low-ball offers and mutual frustration.

The resentment builds, discretionary effort disappears, and management is left with even less latitude to say “yes” to anything because business starts to suffer.

Chapter 2



The myth of power (It isn't resisting and saying no)

There's a myth we need to bust: power in negotiation doesn't come from holding the line. It comes from negotiating a deal. Your real power often comes from your ability to find a way to say "yes", on terms that work for you.

We aren't saying you should never say "no", indeed sometimes it is the right thing. But great negotiators lean towards trying to find a way to say "yes", instead of relying on "no". Why? Because "no" trashes trust and discretionary effort. "no" is contagious.

Finding a way to say "yes" doesn't mean caving or being soft. It means:

- Being transparent about what's possible and what's not possible, and exploring conditions that make movement feasible
- Negotiating intelligently. A "yes" can't be unilateral, it will come on condition that additional concessions are achieved that more than fund the "yes". This is trading. Simply put: "if you can increase the productivity rate, we can increase the salary."

Power is often simply saying "yes" strategically, by trading the "yes" for concessions in return of even greater value.



Chapter 3

Isn't this interest-based bargaining?

Yes, Scotwork's mutual gain philosophy is at the core of interest-based bargaining (IBB). However, many organisations treat IBB as a process of problem solving instead of trading concessions.

Problem solving is a great strategy for overcoming conflicts in collective agreement negotiations, but if it doesn't work, you should try a negotiating strategy that involves trading concessions.

If this trading process is done well, all parties end up with a better deal than was ever possible through traditional positional haggling. In this take on IBB, all parties need to be comfortable with the idea of making concessions. Because if we can grow the pie, there is more to go around.

If you can help me lift productivity, I can support higher wage growth.



Chapter 4

The playbook - how to negotiate from strength



1. Share more information

Transparency is underrated. If you're profitable, don't pretend you're not. If you're constrained, explain why. Greed begets greed, but honesty builds trust.

2. Be reasonable from the start (even if they aren't)

Lowballing just irritates (even though the psychology shows anchoring works). If Wholesale Price Index is your baseline, say so. If you can't meet WPI, show your working.

3. Try to enable claims, don't just deny them

The real question isn't "How do we avoid this?".
It's: "Under what circumstances could we agree?"

Make a list of variables, things of high value to the company and low cost/difficulty for the employees to concede such as:

- Rostering changes
- Productivity improvements
- Benefit restructures
- Retention strategies
- Flexible leave or hours

Then ask:

- "What could they do differently to make them worth more money?"
- "What could we offer in exchange for flexibility elsewhere?"

This creates multiple pathways to agreement.

Chapter 5

Dance with your counterpart, don't stand on their toes



Your job isn't just to negotiate well, it's to help the other side do the same.

Great negotiators lift the other side's capability by:

- Being clear about boundaries and flexibilities
- Asking smart questions to uncover real needs
- Using "just suppose" hypotheticals to explore new ground: "Just suppose we could pay more, could you help lift picking rates?"
- Introducing variables to keep momentum when things get stuck

This isn't weakness. Coaching your counterparts how to negotiate with you is leadership.



Chapter 6

The one question that changes everything

If you take one thing from this handbook, make it this:

In every negotiation, when you hear a demand:

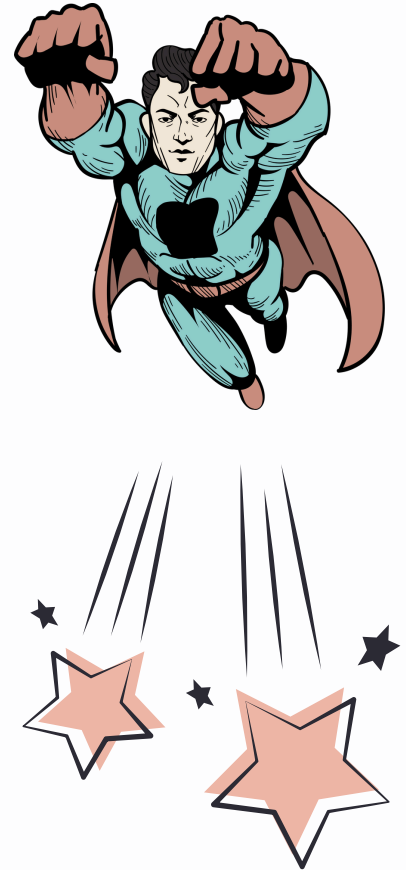
Don't just think "How do I say no?"

Ask: "Under what circumstances could we say YES (and still protect what matters to us)?"

"What would we need to get in return for saying yes?"

That's where your real power lives.

Not in resistance. But in creativity, flexibility, and a well-prepared list of variables ready to trade.



Need help building powerful negotiators?

At Scotwork, we train teams across sectors to navigate collective agreements, salary negotiations, and high-stakes commercial discussions with confidence, clarity, and skill.

If you're tired of the old collective bargaining dance, let's talk.