

**NEVER SPLIT
THE DIFFERENCE**
by Chris Voss

Summary & Worksheet

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The Book In Three Or More Sentences:

The ability to get inside the head of the person in front of you, and alter his beliefs to fit yours is a subtle art. In *Never Split The Difference*, Chriss Voss, the author, who has more than two decades of experience in the Federal Bureau of Investigation, shares the principles and the tactics he used in hostage situations that can be helpful in any form of negotiation in our normal daily lives. This book will help you become a decision architect - an agile negotiator who adequately uses the verbal and nonverbal elements in a conversation to get to what you want.

The Core Idea:

Deriving from the fact that we're all crazy and irrational, the author helps create a revolutionary negotiation script for the FBI back in the days. This manuscript is both useful to deal with bank robbers with hostages and money-driven CEOs who are trying to manipulate the board of directors. The author argues that the foundation of every successful bargain starts with intense listening and sincere empathy. According to Chriss Voss, only when you establish rapport and gain the trust of the other party, you can get the most out of any situation.

Highlights:

- *Negotiations start with active listening and improve by understanding the core desires of others.*
- *Make others think they are in control by asking them open-ended questions that steer the conversation towards your goal.*
- *Compromising is common because we want to avoid confrontation. That's why you need to stick to what you want and rarely settle for less.*

7 Key Lessons from Never Split the Difference:

- Lesson #1: Life is Negotiation
- Lesson #2: Become Acute Listener
- Lesson #3: Understand the Feelings of the Counterpart
- Lesson #4: Don't Undervalue the Power of No
- Lesson #5: Give The Illusion of Control
- Lesson #6: Prepare a One Sheet for Negotiations
- Lesson #7: Never Compromise

Lesson #1: Life is Negotiation

Whether you're trying to convince your kid to clean his room, your boss to raise your salary, or if you happen to be the person calling the shots in a hostage situation, negotiations are everywhere in our daily lives.

We're constantly in the process of convincing someone else to adopt our world view or offer. The sooner we realize this fact, the better we'll become at playing this game of high stakes.

But how do you get what you want from others without sounding like a jerk and without inflicting damage to the other parties?

To answer this, I'll borrow the following passage from the book, "Negotiating does not mean browbeating or grinding someone down. It simply means playing the emotional game that human society is set up for. In this world, you get what you ask for; you just have to ask correctly. So claim your prerogative to ask for what you think is right."

The first thing we need to embrace in order to become great negotiators is that we're all irrational. We're emotionally driven, and we don't clearly express what we actually want.

If you successfully identify the real needs of the person in front of you – usually not directly shared by him – and make him feel comfortable with your persona, you'll get what you want.

But it won't be easy. You need to consider everything – from the body language down to the nonverbal cues the other person is projecting. And to read others successfully, you need to start with deep focused listening.

"It all starts with the universally applicable premise that people want to be understood and accepted. Listening is the

cheapest, yet most effective concession we can make to get there. By listening intensely, a negotiator demonstrates empathy and shows a sincere desire to better understand what the other side is experiencing.” Chris Voss

Lesson #2: Become Acute Listener

People don't think alike. Everyone has his own goals and ambitions. That's why we often fail to realize and successfully identify the needs of the other party.

We're so prone to what we want, that we don't understand what's inside the head of the person in front of us.

To get better at convincing others. To become an experienced communicator, you need to first listen.

It sounds easy. It sounds even stupid. But active listening is the most underused, yet most powerful tool you can use to demonstrate empathy and show sincere desire to understand, and help, the other party.

Chriss Voss explains:

“For those people who view negotiation as a battle of arguments, it's the voices in their own head that are overwhelming them. When they're not talking, they're thinking about their arguments, and when they are talking, they're making their arguments.” Chris Voss

That's why, when dealing with hostage situations, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has a dedicated team of listeners who pay attention to what the kidnappers are saying and after that, they exchange notes. FBI knows that the person actually negotiating with the robber can miss something. And by plugging other people in the conversation, they reduce the chances of something like this happening.

People want to be understood and accepted. They want their opinion and character to matter. By actively listening, you can get to their core desires. You can get to people and understand what they are actually experiencing.

Lesson #3: Understand the Feelings of the Counterpart

In a traditional bargaining scene, we're often told that we need to sound logical and also try to reason the other party. To give concrete data and to avoid emotions at all costs.

Well, that doesn't work. Especially if you're negotiating with terrorists or hostage-takers.

As the author perfectly outlines in the book, "How can you separate people from the problem when their emotions are the problem? Especially when they are scared people with guns. Emotions are one of the main things that derail communication. Once people get upset at one another, rational thinking goes out the window."

Sure, the nearest everyday people like you and me will ever get to a terrorist negotiation (hopefully) is through our TV screen. However, emotions govern us all. It's not only people with guns. It's people with authority – our boss. People in school – our teacher. People who sell goods – the salesperson who's trying to sell you something at a high-price.

To win an argument. To get a promotion. Even if you simply want to convince your friend of something, you need to correctly spot their emotions and influence them.

And how can you do this?

By labeling them.

Chris Voss calls this tactical empathy.

This is the ability to understand the point of view of the other party and soundly say it aloud.

Once the emotion is spotted, you can use the following structure of phrasing to express it to the person in front of you:

"It seems like...

It sounds like...

It looks like...

Notice we said "It sounds like . . ." and not "I'm hearing that . . ." That's because the word "I" gets people's guard up. When you say "I," it says you're more interested in yourself than the other person..." Chris Voss

The following example will make things clearer:

"It sounds like you think we are the big, bad prime contractor trying to push out the small business," Anna said, heading off

the accusation before it could be made.

“No, no, we don’t think that,” Angela said, conditioned by the acknowledgment to look for common ground.

With the negatives labeled and the worst accusations laid bare, Anna and Mark were able to turn the conversation to signing the contract.” Chris Voss

We all desire, secretly hope, to be understood. By putting a label on the emotions of others, you’re getting closer to what they are feeling. Thus, you increase your chances of winning the deal.

Lesson #4: Don’t Undervalue the Power of No

Old-school salespeople will tell you that you need to force the other person to respond with yes to all of your “smart” questions.

That’s why telemarketers who spam your phone often start with bizarre questions like, “Do you enjoy drinking water?”

They want to make you start saying yes right from the start. The underlying logic here is that if someone responds to all of your questions with yes they’ll, statistically speaking, also say yes to what you’re offering at the end of the interrogation fiasco.

But that’s harassment. And, more importantly, doesn’t work that well compared to the alternative method proposed by the author – get them to say “No.”

“Great negotiators seek “No” because they know that’s often when the real negotiation begins.” Chris Voss

Why no is “pure gold” as Chris Voss claims?

Simply put, when you get someone to respond with no you’re getting closer to what they really want.

After all, you want others to commit to a certain deal. You don’t want them to fool you with fake yeses.

The idea is to tailor your questions in such a way that the real issues they have will be brought to light.

For example, if you’re selling eco-friendly goods, instead of asking customers, “Do you think that we need to do something about the

environment?”, to which they’ll most probably respond with yes but won’t actually act. We can say something like, “Are you going to sit and watch how our planet dies?”

The latter is more likely to trigger an emotional, “No, I want to do something about this!”

“It comes down to the deep and universal human need for autonomy. People need to feel in control. When you preserve a person’s autonomy by clearly giving them permission to say “No” to your ideas, the emotions calm, the effectiveness of the decisions go up, and the other party can really look at your proposal.” Chris Voss

Lesson #5: Give The Illusion of Control

What if you’re dealing with a stubborn boss? An uncompromising, highly demanding party who is willing to fight for what he wants?

Confronting him will most probably make things worse. Should you then do everything he/she wants?

Not at all.

After dealing with kidnappings for years, some successful some not so much, Chris Voss come up with a tool that can eliminate the aggression from a conversation and give a false sense of superiority to the other party.

Namely, a set of calibrated questions that aim to set the scene right and remove the unbelief from the situation.

Or in the words printed in the book, “It’s not to get others believing what we say. It’s just to stop them unbelieving. Once we achieve that, the game’s half-won. “Unbelief is the friction that keeps persuasion in check,” Dutton says. “Without it, there’d be no limits.”

Essentially, you’re asking the other party for help. Underneath that, you’re setting the scene and making him think that he’s in control.

Here’s an example: When someone is asking you for a lower price, instead of saying things like, “This is not possible!”; “We can’t get that low.” You can ask, “How am I supposed to do that?”

It’s an open-ended question that forces the other party to understand your side. To stop, and for them to consider your part of the story. The answer they’ll provide will make them believe that they’re in con-

trol. While in reality, they're getting closer to what works for you best.

Here are a couple of questions you can use to move negotiation in the right direction for you:

“Here are some other great standbys that I use in almost every negotiation, depending on the situation:

What about this is important to you?

How can I help to make this better for us?

How would you like me to proceed?

What is it that brought us into this situation?

How can we solve this problem?

What's the objective? / What are we trying to accomplish here?

How am I supposed to do that?” Chris Voss

Lesson #6: Prepare a One Sheet for Negotiations

Winning or losing largely depends on how well you prepare.

After all, you can't expect to get what you want out of a deal, out of life even, if you don't take some time to develop a strategy.

The book ends with a short action-oriented appendix that can help you plan your next negotiation.

It's awesome!

The goal is to write down what tools you're going to use in order to achieve in the upcoming deal.

Here's the process in short:

- **The goal:** Think about the “outcome extremes”, as the author calls them. The best and the worst-case scenario in a deal. Keep in mind that you need to be flexible. As new information is yet to be discovered, when you begin the negotiations, you need to be flexible and even consider a better deal from what you originally planned. Expect more, and you'll get more.
- **Summary:** Write down the needs and the wants – both yours and those of the other party. Clearly understanding what the other party wants will help you get them to say, “That's right. That's what I want!” If you're able to do that, you have them where you want.
- **Audit and label:** Think about how the other party feels about what they want. By labeling their emotions, you can defuse the situation

and establish a rapport based on empathy. Use one of those fill-in-the-blank label examples: “It seems like (fill in the blank) is valuable to you; It seems like you don’t like (fill in the blank); It seems like you value (fill in the blank).” If you’re selling security services, for example, you can start the conversation with: “Since you’re here, it seems like you want a sense of security in your life...”

- Ask calibrated questions: To be an effective negotiator you need to anticipate potential deal killers. You need to figure out what worries the other party. What can crush the deal and most importantly, what you can do about it. To do so, you can ask questions starting with “What” and “How.” Here are a couple of those questions mentioned in the book: “What are we trying to accomplish?”; “How is that worthwhile?”; “What’s the core issue here?”; “How does that affect things?”
 - Spot potential deal killers: You need to be sure that you’re dealing with the decision-maker. To do so, you can ask: “How does this affect the rest of the people in your team?”
 - Uncover issues that can sabotage the deal: It’s important to look at the situation from different angles. You can force a 360-degree observation by asking something like: “What is the biggest challenge you face?”
- Noncash offers: What the other party can give you that’s not costly for them but valuable for you? Probably they can mention your company in their publication. Or, present your products to their partners. A lot of times, noncash offers can be more worthy than asking for a higher price.

Lesson #7: Never Compromise

The book is called never split the difference for a reason.

After all, if you’re dealing with hostage negotiations, compromising will mean rescuing half of the captives – something unacceptable! You want to save everyone and you want to do it fast.

Often people settle, though. They compromise. And they do it because it’s easy. It’s easy to shake hands for 80% of the asked price because it will save you some additional verbal judo. But that’s the wrong approach. If you want to be a successful negotiator, don’t settle for half of the money. Pursue your goal like your life depends on it.

Here’s what you can do:

- Use the word “fair” properly: The f-word is thrown around a lot when it comes down to bargaining. But stating that your price is fair can trigger people. It can be fair for you, but this doesn’t mean that it will be fair for everyone else. To set the scene right, use the

word fair like Chris Voss suggests: “Here’s how I use it: Early on in a negotiation, I say, “I want you to feel like you are being treated fairly at all times. So please stop me at any time if you feel I’m being unfair, and we’ll address it.” Right from the start, you look like an honest dealer.

- Frame your benefits: People don’t buy a big-screen TV just because it’s Saturday evening. They do it because they want to be entertained. And, they’re willing to pay more if what you’re offering can satisfy their vision of a perfect TV night. So, what are you selling? You’re not selling a flat-screen with an antenna. You’re selling a relaxed highly entertaining evening. How can you best communicate it?
- Prepare them for a loss: People prefer avoiding losses more than acquiring equivalent gains. The amount of satisfaction you’ll gain if you win \$100 won’t be enough to compensate you for the dissatisfaction of losing the same amount of money. Use this human flaw to convince others. Start the negotiation with what they can potentially lose. Start off by saying something like: “I got a lousy proposition for you. You’ll probably think that I’m all-talk-and-no-action kind of guy. Still, I wanted to propose this before I took it to someone else. For project X, instead of your normal price (\$2,000), I can offer \$500.” Right from the start, people are prepared. They know what to expect. You turn the conversation from them getting \$2,000 to not losing \$500.

And lastly, keep in mind that sometimes, a lot of times actually, no deal is better than a bad deal.

Keep this in mind when you’re about to agree on something that’s not even close to what you really want.

“I’m here to call bullshit on compromise right now. We don’t compromise because it’s right; we compromise because it is easy and because it saves face. We compromise in order to say that at least we got half the pie. Distilled to its essence, we compromise to be safe. Most people in a negotiation are driven by fear or by the desire to avoid pain. Too few are driven by their actual goals.” Chris Voss

Actionable Notes:

- Label the emotions of others: Above all, we want to be understood. When trying to win an argument, calm yourself, and observe the other party. See behind the scenes. Try to position yourself in their shoes. Notice the gestures, the voice, the language they use. Once you spot the real problem, label it. Labeling is simply your ability to understand other people and verbally express their emotions. Use

the following framework, “It seems like (fill in the blank) is valuable to you.” Or, “It seems like you’re reluctant to (fill in the blank).”

- There are three kinds of “Yes”: Yes sounds positive. It sounds reassuring. It sounds like you got the deal. And yet, how many times you have heard people respond with yes to what you offer, but later didn’t make a move? A lot, I guess. People tend to say yes because they know that this will excuse them. Understanding the three kinds of yes will help you negotiate better. Here they are: 1) A counterfeit “yes” is basically “no” in disguise. 2) A confirmation “yes” is a generic confirmation with no actual promise of action. 3) A commitment “yes” is what you’re aiming for. You need the last type of yes to sign the contract. But you also need to understand the other side in order to know when to push and/or when to ask for more clarifying questions.
- Negotiate a better salary: Want to get a raise? Use the following framework presented in the book: First, ask for nonsalary perks added as compensation. You can, for example, propose to the HR department to allow people access to a membership site of some sort. Some companies might give access to the proposed site, others can simply compensate you with more money if you continuously ask. Second, talk with your boss and define success metrics for your position. Frame it in such a way, that a reward should be added to your salary if you’re able to cover the metrics. Third, ask: “What does it take to be successful here?” Every manager will be delighted to hear something like this because few people ask such questions. Additionally, you’ll motivate your boss to mentor you and inspire him to track your progress.
- The 7-38-55 percent rule: How often people agree with what you’re offering but don’t move forward to close the deal? A lot of times, right? That’s because people will say anything to avoid confrontation. To get better at reading others, use the 7-38-55 rule. Coined by Albert Mehrabian, UCLA psychology professor, the rule states that only 7 percent of a message is based on the words while 38 percent comes from the tone of voice and 55 percent from the speaker’s body language and face. The proportion is not always 100% correct but that’s not the important thing. By paying close attention to the tone of voice and the body language, we can understand others better and even ask things like, “I heard what you say, but I sense hesitation in your voice. Is there something bothering you?”
- Understand their religion: It has been mentioned countless times in the book - your objective is to understand others and what they care most about. Declaring that “they’re crazy!” and not reasonable is wrongheaded. Everyone thinks he’s right. When you get people, when you get why they’re doing/wanting something, you’ll have the upper hand. You can voice their passion, show them that you care about their dreams so you can successfully position your demands in

their world. How can you do this? By not only listening, but also by hearing what others want. You don't have to think alike, you simply have to show them that you understand.

Commentary and My Personal Takeaway

Should you read *Never Split The Difference*? After all, you're (probably) not dealing with hostage-takers during your normal day.

The quick answer: You should.

Our everyday lives – though it doesn't look like that on the surface – are full of discussions about getting something. Much of our lives are spent convincing a set of people (your wife, kids, boss, friends) to agree with you and another group of people (sellers, clients) to get you a better deal.

In this book, Chris Voss, an FBI lead international kidnapping negotiator, shares his approach when dealing with life-or-death situations.

It was kind of hard to summarize this book – there are so many tips and how-to strategies mentioned that it's awfully difficult to figure out what's essential when it comes down to getting to what you want. You need to pay attention to everything. What the other party is saying, what he's not, what he is thinking, what he believes is true for him, etc.

In addition to the verbal maneuvers and the action-based manuals, the book also offers a well-written set of (quite awesome) stories from the life of the author. A detailed examination of real events and hostage situations that the author dealt with.

So, yes, I think you should read it.

Read it if you want to get better at understanding people. And most importantly, read it if you want to improve at convincing others that you're right in a smart, gentle, absolutely no-harming way.

The key takeaway?

It basically comes down to asking this: "How can I do this?" When someone is asking for a higher price. When someone is asking for too much in an arrogant way, keep calm, and respond by asking them open-ended how questions that will force them to consider your perspective.

Notable Quotes:

“So don’t settle and—here’s a simple rule— never split the difference. Creative solutions are almost always preceded by some degree of risk, annoyance, confusion, and conflict. Accommodation and compromise produce none of that. You’ve got to embrace the hard stuff. That’s where the great deals are. And that’s what great negotiators do.” Chris Voss

“If I just ask for a volunteer, my students sit on their hands and look away... Instead, I say, “In case you’re worried about volunteering to role-play with me in front of the class, I want to tell you in advance... it’s going to be horrible.” After the laughter dies down, I then say, “And those of you who do volunteer will probably get more out of this than anyone else.” I always end up with more volunteers than I need.” Chris Voss

“Who has control in a conversation, the guy listening or the guy talking? The listener, of course. That’s because the talker is revealing information while the listener, if he’s trained well, is directing the conversation toward his own goals. He’s harnessing the talker’s energy for his own ends.” Chris Voss

What to read next:

- Actionable [Book Summary: Toward a Psychology of Being](#) by Abraham H. Maslow
- Actionable [Book Summary: Mindset: The New Psychology of Success](#) by Carol S. Dweck
- Actionable [Book Summary: Fooled by Randomness](#) by Nassim Nicholas Taleb

INTERACTIVE SHEET FOR NOTE-TAKING

Reading alone won't help you understand the actionable notes. You need to engage with the content. Answer the question below (just type inside the boxes) to outline your future steps:

- 1. Think of ways to label other people's emotions:*
- 2. Describe situations from your life with the 3 kinds of Yes to find ways to improve:*
- 3. Ask yourself, and your manager, "What does it take to be successful here?"*
- 4. Consider the nonverbal cues and ask: "Is there something bothering you?"*
- 5. To get people, think about their religion. What do they truly value?*

Don't forget to save your changes.