

DOUG CONSTABLE

A STRAIGHT-TALKING GUIDE

THE BRIDGE

Negotiation, persuasion and getting what you need — without losing the other person.



DOUG CONSTABLE

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How to use this book. Read it straight through once — it's short by design. Then keep the checklist in Chapter 9 open the next time you're heading into a negotiation, whether that's a client, a supplier, a dispute, or a difficult conversation at home. The same mechanics run underneath all of them.

INTRODUCTION

Nobody Cares About Your Product

Nobody gives a toss about your product or service. Not really. I don't care about mine either, past the point where it gets me from where I am to where I want to be.

That's the whole game. People care about your product, your pitch, your proposal, your point of view — to the exact extent that it moves them away from pain or towards pleasure. Nothing more.

Most people pitching — salespeople, negotiators, partners in an argument, kids asking for something — make the same mistake. They lead with the thing itself: the features, the terms, the facts of the case. And in doing that, they force the other person to think logically.

Logic is not on your side in a negotiation. Logic looks for risk. It looks for reasons to say no. Give someone a list of features and you've handed them a checklist to pick apart.

Here's what actually happens: people decide emotionally, and then build the logical case afterwards to justify what they've already decided. If you want someone to decide faster — to say yes to your offer, your idea, or making up after a fight — you don't win with a better argument. You win by understanding what "pain" and "pleasure" mean to them, connecting your offer to a feeling, and choosing your words so they land as an invitation rather than a demand.

That's what this book covers. Nine short chapters, each one a piece of how negotiation — in business and in life — actually works once you stop treating it as a battle of facts.

CHAPTER 1

The Bridge — From Pain to Pleasure

Every decision a person makes is driven by one of two forces: moving away from pain, or moving towards pleasure. That's it. That's the whole engine.

When you're negotiating — selling something, resolving a dispute, asking for a better deal, convincing your partner to see it your way — you are not the product, the argument, or the position you're holding. You are the bridge. Your job is to carry the other person from where they don't want to be to where they do want to be.

Before you open your mouth, know both ends of that bridge:

- Where are they now, and what does that cost them — in stress, money, time, reputation, sleep?
- Where do they want to be, and what does that feel like once they're there?

Most negotiators only ever describe their side of the bridge — the offer, the terms, the price. They never describe the crossing. Map the "from" and the "to" before you talk terms, and the terms start explaining themselves.

TRY THIS

Before your next negotiation, write one line for each side: "*They're currently living with ____.*" and "*What they actually want to feel is ____.*" If you can't fill both blanks, you're not ready to open the conversation yet.

CHAPTER 2

Sell the Feeling, Not the Feature

People don't buy products. They don't even buy outcomes. They buy feelings.

A car is about as tangible as it gets — steel, an engine, four wheels. You can see it, touch it, drive it around the block. And yet nobody buys a car for the steel. They buy it for the brand and what it says about them — prestige. They buy the colour because of how it makes them feel walking up to it. They buy the safety rating because of the fear it quietens. They buy the fuel type because of what it says about who they are — the environment, or simply not having to think about it.

Every one of those is a feeling first. The spec sheet only shows up afterwards, to justify the decision the feeling already made.

So when you're negotiating, don't stop at what your solution *does*. Follow it through to how it changes the way the other person *feels* once they've said yes — relieved, respected, back in control, proud, safe, free. Connect your solution directly to that feeling, out loud, in the conversation. That's the part most people skip, and it's the part that actually closes things.

CHAPTER 3

Soften Your Language

If you want someone to decide faster, stop using words that trigger logic.

Logic-trigger words put up a wall the moment they're heard, because they sound official, final, and a little threatening. "Payment." "Contract." "Sign here." Every one of those makes a person's guard go up before they've even weighed up your offer.

Soften them, without changing what you're actually asking for:

- Don't ask for "payment" — ask how they'd like to *take care of that*.
- Don't tell them to "sign a contract" — let them know you just need to *take care of some paperwork*.
- Don't "close the deal" — *get everything sorted* or *lock it in*.

None of this is trickery — you're asking for exactly the same thing. But your words are either a door or a wall. Choose the door.

CHAPTER 4

Tangible or Intangible, We All Buy on Feeling

There's a comfortable assumption that tangible products — the ones you can see, hold, test-drive — sell themselves on logic, while intangible ones like insurance, or a belief system, only sell on feeling because there's nothing physical to point to.

I've learnt the trick is the opposite: even the most tangible purchase is sold and bought on feeling. Go back to the car. It's about as tangible as a product gets, and every reason a buyer gives for choosing one is still a feeling wearing a logical coat — brand for prestige, colour for how it makes them feel, safety for the fear it removes, fuel type for the identity it signals.

Insurance and belief systems just skip the disguise. There's nothing to hold, so the feeling is on the table from the start — the relief of being covered, the certainty of belonging to something bigger than yourself.

Once you stop separating "things you can touch" from "things you can't," negotiation gets a lot simpler. You're never really negotiating over the object. You're negotiating over the feeling the object represents — and that's true whether you're selling a car, a service, an idea, or your side of an argument.

CHAPTER 5

Sell the Sizzle, Not the Steak

You'll have heard the line — sell the sizzle, not the steak. Here's what it actually means in practice.

A feature is a fact about what you're offering: "*This account pays interest fortnightly.*" A benefit is what that fact does for the person in front of you — and the benefit only lands if you finish the sentence with pain or gain: "*...so you're never caught short between pay cycles*" (pain relieved) or "*...so your money's working harder without you doing anything*" (gain).

Most pitches stop at the feature and expect the listener to do the pain/gain translation themselves. They won't. Do it for them, every time. State the fact, then finish it: "**...which means for you...**" Say what that fact does to their pain or their gain, out loud, every single time.

CHAPTER 6

The Donkey and the Cart

There's an old story about motivating a donkey to pull a cart, and it's the clearest picture I know of what actually creates lasting effort — in a business, in a negotiation, in a relationship.

Option one: beat him with a stick. He moves, for a while. But he gets used to the stick, so the next one has to be bigger and harder. Eventually he's beaten down and discouraged, and he does the least he can get away with. Fear stops working the moment it stops escalating.

Option two: tie a carrot to a stick, just out of reach. He chases it, for a while. But sooner or later he works out he's never actually getting the carrot, and he gives up. Incentive without delivery breeds cynicism, not effort.

Option three: he pulls the cart because he enjoys the work. That's the only one that's permanent. He's not doing it for you — he's doing it for himself, because it makes him feel good.

Every negotiation is an attempt to move someone. You can threaten. You can dangle. Or you can connect what you're asking to something they'll genuinely want to keep doing — because of how it makes them feel. Only the third one lasts once you've left the room.

CHAPTER 7

Negotiating With People You Love (or Live With)

Everything so far works in a boardroom. It works exactly the same at your own kitchen table — and this is the chapter most negotiation books skip.

You know the old approach — he licked my ice cream, so I'll take a bite out of his. Or its quieter cousin: *I'm not speaking to him because he did ____*. Most of us have been on the receiving end of that one, and most of the time we haven't had the faintest idea what we actually did. Everything any of us does, we do believing it's in the best interests of the moment. If we got it wrong, it was a mistake — not an act of malice. So why does a mistake get punished with silence?

If someone isn't speaking to me and I respond by not speaking to them, who wins? Nobody. More often than not, what's actually happening in that silence isn't hurt — it's control, or an inability to say the hurt or disappointment out loud any other way.

There's a distinction I come back to a lot: people do things to make a gain, or to avoid a pain. Next time you're mid-conversation — or mid-argument — ask yourself honestly which one you're actually talking about. And if you catch yourself gossiping about someone, ask the harder question: is this making me feel good at their expense? That's a gain too. It's just not one you'd want to admit to.

The art of negotiating with people close to you is the same art as negotiating with a client: getting your own needs met while the other person still gets to feel good about the outcome. Punishment doesn't do that. Silence doesn't do that. Naming what you actually need, in a way that lets the other person keep their dignity, does.

CHAPTER 8

Gain or Pain? The Question Behind Every Conversation

By now you've seen the same two words come up in every chapter — pain and gain. That's deliberate, because it's the one question worth asking before, during and after every negotiation you're in:

Right now, in this conversation, which one am I actually talking about?

Am I trying to help someone avoid a pain — a cost, a risk, an embarrassment, a loss? Or am I trying to help them towards a gain — a feeling, a status, a result they want? Get clear on which one you're working with, and your language, your pace and your offer all fall into place around it. Mix the two up, or lead with the wrong one for that person, and you'll talk past them no matter how good your argument is.

A Simple Checklist for Your Next Negotiation

Before you walk into the next one — a client call, a supplier renegotiation, a hard conversation at home — run through this:

1. **Map the bridge.** Where are they now (pain), and where do they want to be (pleasure)? Write one line for each.
2. **Name the feeling.** What will they feel once they've said yes? Say it out loud in the conversation — don't leave it implied.
3. **Soften your language.** Check your key phrases for logic-triggers — payment, contract, sign — and swap them for the softer equivalent.
4. **Finish every feature with "...which means for you..."** Don't leave the pain/gain translation to them.
5. **Ask which motivator you're using.** Stick, carrot, or genuine want? Only the third one lasts.
6. **Check your own motive.** Are you trying to win, or trying to get your needs met while the other person still feels good about the outcome? They're not the same goal.
7. **If it's personal, not commercial — drop the score-keeping.** Ask what you actually need, and say it plainly, instead of going quiet and hoping they guess.

ABOUT

Doug Constable

I didn't learn any of this in a classroom. I learnt it the hard way, in 1988, when my own business collapsed and I had to negotiate my way through it — with creditors, with the people I owed, with myself. Since then I've spent close to four decades coordinating and advising business owners and directors through the same kind of conversations: the ones where the numbers matter, but the outcome is decided by how people feel about what's being offered to them.

That's the whole idea behind this book. Whether you're negotiating a deal, a dispute, or a difference with someone you love, the mechanics are the same. Find the bridge. Sell the feeling. Meet your own needs without leaving the other person defeated.

— *Doug Constable*