Environmental, health, and safety (EH&S) project managers, we find ourselves involved in a range of informal and formal negotiations. Our informal negotiations might be handled by a phone call or e-mail to arrange a low consequence event like a shift in sampling event or report submission date. On the other hand, negotiating a high consequence outcome like a service contract or operating permit can be a highly structured process involving multiple parties. In either case, three steps—varying in complexity and depth to match the impact of the negotiation—will lead to a mutually beneficial outcome.

Step 1: Prepare for the Negotiation
Effective negotiation preparation includes four tasks: setting goals; understanding the value of your position; understanding the needs of counterparts; and rehearsing the negotiation.

- Set goals for the negotiation. It is important to clearly understand what we want to achieve in the negotiation. If we don’t have clear goals, we may find ourselves advancing an unreasonable position or we may end up with an agreement that proves unsatisfactory.
- Understand the value of your position. We enter into negotiations with another party
because we both believe we offer something that is valuable to the other. When we have a clear understanding of the value we bring to the relationship, we are better able to communicate that value as the negotiation proceeds.

- **Understand the needs of your counterpart.** Our counterparts also have negotiation goals and value positions. By working to understand these goals and positions in advance of the negotiation, we are better able to frame our position and response in terms that resonate with our counterparts.

- **Rehearse the negotiation.** At the elementary level, rehearsing the negotiation might be as simple as anticipating the response of our counterparts and planning our response. Alternatively, the rehearsal can be a structured event involving role playing.

**Step 2: Negotiate with Integrity**

Integrity means more than honesty. We negotiate with integrity when we:

- **Define the negotiation process at the outset.** Defining the negotiation process, along with identifying the parties involved and their duties, builds trust and leads to efficient negotiations.

- **Identify the range of issues the negotiation will cover.** If we have properly prepared for the negotiation, we will know the issues that we want to discuss. Presenting the range of issues allows your counterpart to have a broader understanding of your position before the discussion turns to the details of individual items. If your counterpart is leading the negotiation and attempts to negotiate item-by-item without providing a broad view of the issues, encourage s/he to share the broad view of issues first. If s/he will not share the broad view of issues before discussing details, withhold final agreement on individual issues until all issues have been discussed.

- **Ask open-ended questions.** Open-ended questions allow our counterpart to discuss issues, allowing us insight into their needs or concerns. In short, open-ended questions communicate that we care about the needs of our counterpart. This real-time exchange allows us to continually refine and frame our position in terms that meet their needs.

- **Summarize positions, agreements, and understandings regularly.** Each time you and your counterpart come to an agreement or understanding, take the time to summarize it. Similarly, each time your counterpart defines a position, summarize your understanding of the position. Establishing clarity incrementally builds trust and respect.

- **Remember that although people are involved, it isn’t personal.** Remain emotionally distant from the outcome and do not take the discussions as personal criticisms. Don’t become angry or intimidating. If your counterpart becomes angry or intimidating, take a break.

- **Act within the bounds of your authority.** In many cases, we may find ourselves negotiating a matter that we don’t have full authority to authorize. We simply need to be clear about the limits of our authority and explain how we will address the issue.

**Step 3: Honor the Terms of the Agreement**

Negotiations are typically the basis for an ongoing relationship. Ongoing relationships are easily built when both parties honor the terms of a mutually beneficial agreement.

Negotiations are an important part of the EH&S project manager’s job. Following these three steps will reduce the stress associated with negotiations and lead to more favorable outcomes. **em**