

## Ep #55: Successful Negotiation: A Quick Guide for Clinicians



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Heather Branscombe**

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Welcome to *Clinicians Creating Impact*, a show for physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists looking to take the next step in their careers and make a real difference in the lives of their clients. If you're looking to improve the lives of neurodiverse children and families with neurological-based challenges, grow your own business, or simply show up to help clients, this is the show for you.

I'm Heather Branscombe, Therapist, Certified Coach, Clinical Director, and Owner of Abilities Neurological Rehabilitation. I have over 25 years of experience in both the public and private sectors, and I'm here to help you become the therapist you want to be, supporting people to work towards their dreams and live their best lives. You ready to dive in? Let's go.

Hi there, friend. I've been thinking a lot recently about how to give you value to really help you at work. And as I did, I thought about an area where I see some of my colleagues struggling, and maybe you're struggling here as well. One of the areas that I see so many of us struggle, and I include myself in this, is in this area of negotiation.

Now, it makes sense. So many of us that become clinicians are inherently relationship-focused. We care so much about others, as well as we often think of ourselves as inexperienced at negotiating. And then we do decide, or when we do decide that we're worth negotiating for, we often come across as aggressive, deciding that negotiation needs to be some kind of win/lose game where we finally aren't going to be the loser of the game.

Now, I'm here to say, I get it. I have been there myself. Even the term negotiation can sound a little intimidating. And maybe to you, like it did to me, it might sound like some kind of business skill that they teach in MBA school and maybe not in our clinical education. Fun fact, while I'm sure there are many MBA schools who do have maybe even complete courses in negotiation, I, who actually have my MBA, I didn't learn a single thing about negotiation when I completed my MBA.

## **Ep #55: Successful Negotiation: A Quick Guide for Clinicians**

So, today I wanted to help you and give you some quick tips and things to think about so that next time you negotiate, it can feel a lot easier and definitely a lot more fun.

Before I do that, I wanted to highlight that this podcast is a passion project of mine. And I do this because I want all clinicians, even if I never work with them or have them work with us at Abilities, I want all clinicians the ability to use this tool set as a way to magnify their impact.

And I know that one way to do that is to spread the message of this podcast. You can help me to do that in a couple of ways. One, this time if you please follow, rate and review this podcast wherever you receive it to help feed that algorithm. So then when there is a clinician just like you searching for something just like that, this podcast will come up so much more easily.

Secondly, if you could share this podcast, or better yet a favorite episode, with a colleague that you like sharing things with. You can consider it an early birthday gift because, fun fact, it is a milestone birthday for me coming up in the first week of February. So consider it an early birthday gift to me if you like, because I would be eternally grateful for you if you would do any and all of the above.

Again, thank you so much in advance for your help. And with that, let's get back to improving your skill set as a negotiator.

Many of us think of things like wages and working conditions when we think of negotiation. And depending on where you work, you may or may not even have the ability to negotiate those specific terms in your specific workplace. Now, I would not be who I am if I don't say if you don't have that, and the ability to negotiate those things sound amazing, maybe we need to talk. But I digress.

My main point here is that we actually use or don't use our skills as negotiating many times in our role as a clinician. There are lots of times where I think the often dictionary terms aren't really helpful, but in this case, it actually might be helpful to understand the basic meaning of negotiation.

## **Ep #55: Successful Negotiation: A Quick Guide for Clinicians**

So I did a little Google search and dictionary.com simply defines the word negotiate as to obtain or bring about by discussion. Isn't that interesting? So by that definition, I'm pretty sure you can start to think of many situations where you use this skill currently at work. The actual foundation of the work that we do with our clients or patients really is a negotiation.

We bring about our service through assessment, which involves a discussion with the people we are serving. And then a treatment plan, which is also a discussion. We talk about shared clients with other clinical professionals also to bring about a higher quality of care and a better result. And even as a collective in our industry or in our individual profession, we talk to other shareholders to, again, bring about a higher quality of care and a better result for both clinicians and for our clients or patients.

And yet all this being said, I don't know about you, but there are times where this kind of negotiation feels natural and easy and other times where it feels minimally less natural, but sometimes a lot more awkward and even scary. And I'd offer that a lot of that is really around our own thoughts and our own skill level of negotiation. And other times it might even be as simple as what your thoughts are about a perceived or a real power dynamic and where you are in that dynamic, but not always.

As an example, I just want to share that I used to hate negotiating my own salary as a clinician, which is pretty funny because I negotiate salaries all the time now. And it's really one of the reasons that I took jobs with other people, is that I thought they would mostly set the compensation for me, especially when I worked in areas such as public practice.

And then when I became my own boss and started to employ others, you might think it becomes easier as the boss, but I don't know if you are a boss, but I'm here to tell you if you aren't, from the other side it really isn't that much easier. It would make sense if you thought it would be easier because as an employer, of course, it looks like I may have some perceived power. But the truth was my negotiation skills and my thoughts about negotiation made it so I would often be as nervous as the people who were sitting across from me.

## **Ep #55: Successful Negotiation: A Quick Guide for Clinicians**

Isn't that wild to think about? The result of that lack of negotiating for myself and for the person that I was trying to employ is that I think for both of us it actually felt harder and heavier than it actually needed to be. Now that I've actually worked on both my skill as a negotiator and my thoughts about my skill, negotiation feels so much lighter and so much easier.

Now, the truth is I'm still working on this skill on bigger levels and on bigger scenes because I really want to bring this lightness and ease to every conversation. And like any other skill, there really isn't a finish line. So let me give you three quick tips today that can help you in your next negotiation so that hopefully it feels less heavy and less hard than it might right now.

So the first quick tip I want to share is preparation is key. Now, preparation can mean a lot of things and there are a lot of individual ideas and facts to a given situation. But just the fact that you take any amount of time to prepare for any kind of negotiation will help the negotiation feel easier and lighter. There is no right or wrong way to prepare. So let that go aside.

Some of the things that I like to think about in a general sense are things like where do we, meaning myself and the person I'm negotiating, have shared goals? Where are our shared values? How does my proposal align with the other person's objectives? And if you don't know what that other person's objectives are, finding those out can be an amazing way to prepare. They might not even be what you expect.

Many people expect that I, as an employer, want to hire people for as cheap as possible, but that factually isn't true. Now, of course, maintaining healthy financials in a company is important. Of course it's important. And I've noticed that if a clinician actually wants to make a certain amount, but asks for less because they think I won't go for more, it might create a short-term win, but it actually prevents longer-term happiness for both of us, as well as the clients that they could be serving.

In the short term, the clinician may feel happy because they think I'm happy. But I actually value co-creating a compensation plan that works for both of us way

## **Ep #55: Successful Negotiation: A Quick Guide for Clinicians**

more than saving a few dollars. Now, again, not every employer is going to be the same way, but knowing that, knowing what the values are of the person that you're negotiating with can help you to prepare to make things so much easier and lighter.

My objective when I am doing some kind of salary negotiation or compensation negotiation is to actually co-create a sustainable compensation plan for both sides. That's the goal that I'm looking for, no matter what the clinician is actually asking for per hour or per year. I'm less concerned about that and more concerned about, again, creating that sustainable compensation plan. I know lots of possible ways to get them there, and I value those that are really willing to ask for what they want.

So as you prepare and think about ways that you are aligned with those that you're negotiating with, no matter who is the perceived one to have the power, it will ultimately feel much lighter and much easier than if you don't prepare in advance.

So the second tip that I have is to use all of the communication and collaboration skills that I already know that you've gained as a clinician. Often in a clinical setting, we will call this something like the therapeutic relationship, developing rapport, collaborative skills. But when I say those things, you know what they look like, and I know that you use them every day with your clients or patients.

I think it's easier when we call them the same terms that we use with our clients, because when we are in our best clinician energy, and to me that feels the same as like leadership energy, which isn't bossy energy, but it's that energy of setting and keeping strong boundaries, getting curious about the other person, offering possible solutions, and letting the other person decide what feels best for them. That's the energy that's going to feel pretty familiar to you.

If you use those same skills, even if you perceive the other person as having more power than you, you are bringing that same leadership energy to the negotiation. And I'm here to tell you that will only help you. It's why I love, for



## Ep #55: Successful Negotiation: A Quick Guide for Clinicians

example, offering three compensation options to my clinical team, because I know not every clinician is going to value the same thing at the same time.

So for me, individualizing compensation has been super helpful to be more collaborative in our compensation plan. So that's something that you want to think about, use that collaboration and communication skills that you use every day as a clinician in your negotiation.

And then third, I'd say be willing to overcome challenges with flexible solutions. Doesn't that sound easy? But let's talk about what that actually means. When you have a clear understanding of where you and the other person align, and then you use your communication skills that you've gained as a clinician to bring that leadership energy to the conversation, I'm here to tell you that the third way is going to reveal itself much more easily. I find the number one way to find those more flexible solutions is often as easy as giving time and space.

Now, I know that's not always totally possible, but even adding time and space as part of the negotiation can be helpful to finding solutions to bigger challenges. Maybe some of that negotiation, for example, or maybe some of that flexible solution is we're deciding for a certain period of time, and then we're going to renegotiate in the future.

One of our core values at Abilities is to find a better way. And the way I negotiate compensation now, I have to tell you, is 100% different than the way that I did five years ago. And one of the many reasons, other than my skill set as a negotiator, is because of the formal and informal feedback from the clinical team that I work with.

So that ability to make incremental changes over time means that we probably don't have everything right now in terms of how we negotiate, and how do I set the structure and the strategy to co-create a sustainable compensation plan, but I know that we are miles ahead of where we were. And together with those that I negotiate with, we will be much closer to our shared ideals, not only now, but even more so five years from now.

## Ep #55: Successful Negotiation: A Quick Guide for Clinicians

So try preparing, using your collaborative skills, and stay flexible when you're negotiating. Give it a try and let me know how it goes. I get it, yes, I am busy, but I'm here to say I am never too busy to talk to you. Feel free to email me at [heather@abilitiesrehabilitation.com](mailto:heather@abilitiesrehabilitation.com), because yes, I do have the time and I do want to help you. This is my passion project and it includes helping you. With that, have an amazing week, and I'll talk to you soon.

If you enjoyed today's show and don't want to worry about missing an episode, you can follow the show wherever you listen to your podcasts. And if you haven't already, I would really appreciate it if you could leave a rating and review to let me know what you think and to help others find *Clinicians Creating Impact*.

It doesn't have to be a five-star rating, although I sure hope you love the show. I'd really want your honest feedback so I can create an awesome podcast that provides tons of value. To learn more about me and the work that I do, visit my website at [www.abilitiesrehabilitation.com/clinicianscorner](http://www.abilitiesrehabilitation.com/clinicianscorner) to download your free Getting it All Done at Work process and to see what I'm up to. Thanks so much.

Thanks for joining me this week on the *Clinicians Creating Impact* podcast. Want to learn more about the work I'm doing with Abilities Rehabilitation? Head on over to [abilitiesrehabilitation.com](http://abilitiesrehabilitation.com). See you next week.