

# Negotiation skills in the 2012 chicago teachers union strike



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Successful negotiation occurs when conflicting parties come up with a solution that is acceptable to both parties. Whereas, effective negotiation occurs when the parties arrive at a conclusion that is acceptable to all parties. In a negotiation process, parties should exhibit qualities and present their sides of the problem in an organized way for useful analysis and acceptable outcome. This paper seeks to examine the negotiation skills used during the Teachers Strike in Chicago in 2012, before, during, and after the strike. The article discusses the poor negotiation skills exhibited during the initial stages of the strike, as well as the changes made to break the strike successfully.

At the onset of a negotiation process, the conflicting parties should present the problems in contention. The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) placed the contentious issues at the center of their negotiations. The problems at hand included the large class sizes, the deficits in curriculum in subject areas like music and art, and the need to have physical education for all the children (Moran, 2012). Also, CTU wanted the issues of nursing and social services addressed since it was a significant factor affecting the performance of students. The detailed presentation of the issues and an expected outcome was vital in helping the CTU negotiation through the strike. The Mayor, Rahm Emanuel, on his side, prompted the strike by not presenting the terms of negotiation early enough. The Mayor intended to avoid facing the issues at hand and, by doing so, alienated the CTU. The Mayor would have possibly done better by looking at the issues and presenting alternatives to the teachers' union. When a problem between two conflicting parties is well

shown, negotiation becomes more comfortable and swift (Scannell, 2012).

Problem analysis is an effective strategy for negotiation skills.

In addition to the problem analysis, effective negotiation skills require proper presentation of the views by the conflicting parties. The strike could possibly have been avoided by the Mayor presenting his wishes effectively to the CTU. He did not explicitly submit his desire to do away with the public schools and replace the schools with charter schools which would not be unionized. The Mayor attempted to avoid the negotiation altogether by pushing for a bill that would increase the percentage of the union members voting in favor of the strike from 50% to 75%. (Staff (a), 2018) The new law was meant to avoid the teacher's strike and further push for his agenda. Avoiding the opposite party is a poor negotiation skill, so instead, he should have called for a collective agreement on the matter. It is such proposed laws that outraged the union officials and led to the closure of public schools through the teachers' strike. The Mayor would likely have been better served had he met with the CTU officials. Before such a meeting, he and his staff could have prepared the goals and objectives they intended to propose during the negotiation process (Lawrence, 2013). Proper preparation and effective presentation of issues are essential in a negotiation process.

Successful negotiation skills require integrity and openness in the presentation of facts. To be open means having an honest conversation with all the parties involved in the impasse. Any of the parties willing to work toward a successful negotiation should not alienate any of the parties involved in the talks (Merrills, 2017). The negotiations between the CTU and Chicago's Mayor Emanuel were not successful because the Mayor chose to <https://assignbuster.com/negotiation-skills-in-the-2012-chicago-teachers-union-strike/>

divide the CPS teachers, and as such reneged on the 4% pay raise for the teachers. Further, the Mayor made a poor decision to increase salaries of newly installed teachers to sideline the efforts of the mainstream teachers. The Mayor did not negotiate directly with the CTU but invited individual school boards to negotiate with him directly. This action angered the CTU and they overwhelmingly voted for a strike, further creating challenges to the negotiation process. The 90% vote exceeded the new 75% threshold, also indicating that a change in the process would not deter the teachers from seeking the success of their position (Editorial Board, 2016). The alienation process motivated the teachers to push for their demands and called for the Mayor to respond. The activities displayed by Mayor Emanuel demonstrated his efforts to avoid the strike. Avoiding key parties and alienating main stakeholders in a negotiation process is a futile and counterproductive process (Jeong, 2009). Productive mediation to arrive at a solution requires a call for all of the parties involved to understand their position on the question. Again, dodging and alienation of key players is a poor negotiation strategy.

The timing of the negotiation process should be as early as is possible and timed so to avoid the consequences of the conflict. At the onset of a challenge, engaging the opposing party is a show of concern. It is ethical to demonstrate the willingness to solve the problem and present the alternative solutions proposed by both parties together at the early stages of the negotiation process. In this manner, the conflicting parties build rapport and understanding while exploring all the options together (van der Gaast, 2017). This strategy of negotiations expands the areas of discussion to arrive at the

best positions that would satisfy both disputing parties. The Mayor, at the time of the CTU strike, employed tactics aimed at preventing the strike from taking place and delaying the discussion around the concerns of the teachers (Davey, 2012). He failed in this process. The delay tactics made the negotiation process extend through a ten-month period with the strike as an end result. Timing is a critical aspect of negotiation skills. It demonstrates concern and creates confidence between the parties that issues will be solved within the expected timeline.

Negotiation is a reciprocal process which calls for collaboration and teamwork to solve the challenge. Negotiators should have the ability to build a good working environment and foster a way in which all parties can work as a team. Teamwork and collaboration were aspects lacking in both the CTU and Emanuel negotiation teams. While the CTU was committed to the issues that touched the education system, such as adding more resources to the schools and decreasing class size, the Mayor was on the other side, frustrated with the process. He was preoccupied with attempting to prevent the strike, and as a result, he failed, and was committed to enduring the teachers strike. The city had put aside more than \$25 million as a contingency plan in the case of a strike, to provide food and care for the students four hours a day during the strike (Carey, 2012). The Mayor arranged for the facilities to be run by people with no educational background. This was a way of communicating with the teachers on non-commitment to the negotiation process. It is easier to reach the solution when the two parties reconcile their needs and collaboration between the parties. The Chicago teachers' negotiations failed because the Mayor and the

teacher's union did not form a team to collaborate on the issues at hand. Opposing sides should work together to come up with a reasonable solution to a problem.

The poor negotiation skills by the Mayor led to a strike that lasted ten days. The repercussions of the strike forced the Mayor and the CTU to the negotiation table where each party was able to present their issues and effectively apply effective negotiation skills. As a result, a solution that met the needs of each of the conflicting parties and was beneficial to them both was eventually found (Staff (b), 2018). The city was going to spend less as the CTU managed to solve the hiring of teacher's issues, standardized tests problems, and the schools would see more resources pumped into them to help improve student performance.

In conclusion, a negotiation process can be effective when the different factors are put into place by the opposing parties. The Chicago Teachers Union strike in 2012 happened because of poor negotiation skills between Chicago Mayor Emanuel and the CTU. While the teachers' union presented their issues clearly, the Mayor failed to present his side of the bargain which stalled the negotiation process. Clarity in the presentation of each party's ideas is essential for the success of the negotiation process. Additionally, the study notes that lack of openness among the parties in the negotiation table could hurt the process. There should be no alienation of any critical member(s) of the negotiation process. Dodging and alienation derail the negotiation process. Furthermore, the study identifies collaboration and teamwork as striking characteristics in giving a solution to a problem. Finally,

when conflict arises, the parties should try to initiate the negotiation process early enough to avoid experiencing the detrimental effects of the conflict.

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