



## The Negotiation Academy - Europe

The Power to Win More

### The Flinch

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Physical reactions, such as sudden gasping for air or visible expressions of surprise and shock, are common examples of flinching. Flinching can be very effective in negotiation as people tend to respond more to what is seen than what is heard. According to the Mehrabian communication principle, when we communicate with others, 55% of our message is transmitted through body language (the remaining 7% through words and 38% through tone of voice). In most cases it is safe to assume that what your counterparty sees will have a stronger impact than what he hears. Expect the other side to open negotiations with a high aspiration base or initial offer. Failure to flinch when such an offer is being made leads the party making the offer to conclude that the counterpart has yet to reach its real base. This could result in further pressure to settle for, by way of example, a lower price. Accepting an offer without flinching could result in missing the opportunity to acquire a better price. It might also make the other party feel that they have not done as well as they could have.

A concession often follows a flinch, especially when silence follows your flinch. People generally feel very uncomfortable with silence and therefore tend to compensate by responding to the issue at hand. Bear in mind, it is important to learn when a tactic such as flinching is appropriate during a negotiation.

#### **Example:**

Sales Negotiator: "So with all the features I showed you the price is £2,000."

Prospective Client: "What! How much? £2,000? That's big money, my friend!"

Sales Negotiator: "That naturally includes an on-site warranty and installation."

Prospective Client: "£2,000 is still big money." (Or silence)

The sales person now often makes a concession: "Naturally we will throw in some software for your new computer as well."

#### **Dealing with the Flinch**

What makes the flinch so dangerous is that it happens in an instant and at a sub-conscious level that most people don't recognise it. Seeing a shocked expression is far more believable than hearing someone say "I'm shocked." To deal with a flinch effectively, you first need to consciously take note of exactly what is happening. After that, think about whether the other party genuinely expected something else, or if he or she is merely deploying a tactic to lower your expectations.

Since a flinch is essentially a display of disappointment, take the time to ask: "I noticed your surprise, what were you expecting?" This puts you in a position to talk about your counterpart's 'unrealistic expectation', rather than your 'unrealistic terms'.

Like most other tactics, if you have noticed it and can examine it objectively, you are unlikely to be influenced by the flinch.

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