

Negotiation Phone or E-mail

In our age of ever-expanding communication possibilities, researchers have been drawn to answer the question of which communication mode is most likely to lend itself to successful negotiation. Their answer? It depends. Face-to-face communication is more likely to alleviate any possibility of miscommunication or deception. When you're actually there, in person, you are more apt to pick up all the nuances of the exchange. That way, you will be better able to gauge what the other party is thinking and to determine the direction in which the negotiating is headed.

For the same reasons, it is also easier to create and maintain rapport. If there is already a fair amount of tension in the air, however, negotiating by phone can take the edge off, can provide breathing room and can minimize the effectiveness of any pressure tactics that may have been employed. E-mail's main advantage is that both parties have control over saying exactly what they want to say and how they want to say it. Since there is no ebb and flow to live conversation, the involved parties can keep the floor as long as they want. On the flip side, e-mailing can tend to make the negotiating parties less restrained and more impulsive in their communication. This rashness isn't always a bad thing, but it definitely can be if tensions exist. One study found that abrupt and unmannerly exchanges occurred 102 times when negotiating via e-mail as opposed to only 12 times when negotiating face-to-face.