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BOOK REVIEW:

# The Power of Nice, by Ron Shapiro

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I'm cynical of many books that offer advice on improving your "business" skills. In my experience, few offer anything helpful that the reader hasn't already thought of (or tried) themselves. One exception to the rule is *The Power of Nice* by Ron Shapiro. A well-known entertainment and sports agent whose clients have included Cal Ripken, Jr. and Oprah Winfrey, Shapiro offers advice that is beneficial to anyone commencing a job search, requesting a promotion or looking to negotiate any fine point in their daily corporate life.

**Shapiro's thesis is simple:** Successful negotiators identify what the person across the table from them really wants and then helps them to get it. Too often we enter negotiations with neither a strategy nor defined goals. Utilizing examples, both from his own experience and that of others, he demonstrates how one can be so much more effective utilizing the "Three P's: And the Big L." Prepare ... Probe ... Propose ... and don't forget to Listen!

**Prepare**—In negotiations, the advantage goes to whomever has the better stockpile of information. Yes, you can find out information on the go (and you may have to), but there is no substitution for proper and thorough preparation.

**Probe**—"Ask questions, and an amazing thing happens: You get answers," notes Shapiro. Too often we shy away from asking questions. We see it as an acknowledgment that we don't know everything and, by extension, a sign of our weakness. To the contrary, asking questions is an opportunity to gain additional information and open new avenues to consensus that may have been less than apparent beforehand.

**Propose**—It's not just about when you ask or what you ask for ... how you ask matters as well. The key to the first offer (or response) is to keep the conversation going.

And perhaps most importantly ...

**Listen**—This is important for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that it's often very difficult!

As humans we love to talk, especially about ourselves. "Did you ever notice how often the party opposite you thinks what he or she has to say is more important than what you have to say?" asks Shapiro. "That's okay. Give them a chance to talk and they'll tell you everything you need to know.... The best negotiators aren't smooth talkers; they're smooth listeners."

Negotiating can be intimidating and unpleasant, but it is often necessary if you want to receive what you feel you justly deserve. After reading *The Power of Nice*, I would personally recommend practicing some of his tactics with trustworthy friends/colleagues and soliciting feedback. Negotiating is a learned skill but, like many others, one that can definitely be mastered with practice. ●



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