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## ESL Podcast 19 – Tough Negotiations

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### GLOSSARY

**what you would call** – what most people would consider; a good example of

\* The food was not what you would call high quality, but it tasted fine.

**tough negotiation** – an intense discussion in which two sides argue for different conditions until they can reach an agreement or compromise

\* It was a tough negotiation, but Mrs. Redrick eventually managed to reach a deal that both sides were happy with.

**to renew** – to make an agreement again, usually with similar terms, after the first agreement is no longer valid

\* When Terrance's contract with the football team expired, he decided not to renew it and joined another team instead.

**lease** – an agreement stating that one is able to use an apartment, house, office, or building owned by someone else for a period of time for a certain payment

\* Evelina signed a lease that would allow her to live in the apartment for two years.

**to be up** – to expire; to stop being valid or in effect

\* The original agreement was up, so Hans needed to make a new agreement with the client.

**landlord** – someone who owns a property that someone else pays to use temporarily

\* The landlord was angry when the person he had rented the apartment to moved away without saying anything and without making the last payment.

**to hammer out the terms** – to determine the conditions or details of an agreement

\* Kamie managed to find an ideal business partner, but she still needed to hammer out the terms of their partnership.

**break** – relief; a condition or quality that makes a situation easier

\* After Stan had a hard day at work, his wife gave him a break and let him relax instead of making him help with the housework as he would normally do.

**in exchange for** – in return for; as a trade for

\* Brenda gave her classmate the candy from her lunchbox in exchange for the cookie from his.



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**win-win** – without any negative results for anyone involved; describing a situation where two opposing sides both win or receive benefits

\* It was a win-win situation: both Kurt and his brother would get to go to the movie, and all Kurt needed to do was agree to watch it together.

**counter-proposal** – an offer made in reply to someone else's offer; a suggested form of an agreement made after someone else stated a different suggestion

\* Masako did not like the original conditions offered to her, so she made a counter-proposal that would be more beneficial to her.

**deal** – an agreement or compromise; a set of conditions in which two opposing sides get some of what they want but not all of what they want

\* Joshua and his parents made a deal that he would be allowed to drive the car on Saturday nights if he washed and cleaned it once a week.

**final offer** – the last set of conditions one is willing to accept when forming an agreement, not being willing to make any more compromises

\* When the seller said that it was his final offer, Inga knew that she either needed to accept it or find someone else to buy the product from.

**to drive a hard bargain** – to make it difficult to oppose; to make it difficult to get a better set of conditions

\* Maximo drove a hard bargain, but his clients always walked away happy.

**to bargain (someone) down** – to talk with someone else until that person agrees to conditions that are better for one; to discuss the price until it is lowered

\* I don't know how Sharlene is able to bargain the seller down to such a low price!

**to sign on the dotted line** – to write one's name on a formal document indicating one's approval or understanding of an agreement

\* Once Dylan signed on the dotted line, the contract was complete.



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### CULTURE NOTE

#### Murphy's Law

Murphy's law is not really a law or a scientific theory. It is an old "adage" (saying) that says: "Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong." It's not clear who "came up with" (started using) the term Murphy's law. Some people claim that it was an "engineer" (a person whose job is to design and build machines and other things), while others say it was a scientist.

Regardless of who came up with Murphy's law, Americans mention it all the time. Here's is a typical "exchange" (conversation):

A: "I can't believe it! This is the third time this month the tire on my bicycle has gone "flat" (with no air in it)."

B: "Murphy's law. I'd walk from now on, if I were you."

People don't usually say, "It's Murphy's law" or "Murphy's law is at work here." They often simply say "Murphy's law" and the other person knows what they mean: if something hasn't gone wrong yet, then at sometime in the future it will. It's "inevitable" (it will happen and it cannot be changed).

Although the original Murphy's law is simple — "Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong" — people have come up with "variations" (different forms) of this saying, often to be funny. Here are few:

- If anything "simply" (absolutely) cannot go wrong, it will anyway.
- The buddy system is essential to your survival; it gives the enemy somebody else to shoot at.  
(“buddy system” – often used at school, in which a person chooses or is “assigned” (given) a partner, and the two people do school tasks together and take care of each other)
- Technology is dominated by those who manage what they do not understand.  
(“dominated” – with the most control or influence over something)
- Tell a man there are 300 billion stars in the universe and he'll believe you. Tell him a bench has wet paint on it and he'll have to touch it to be sure.



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**COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 19: Tough Negotiations.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 19. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

In this episode, we'll try to negotiate or arrange a good deal or bargain. It's a story about my experiences renting an apartment here in Los Angeles. Let's get started!

[start of story]

I'm not what you would call the world's best negotiator, but sometimes it's necessary to engage in a tough negotiation. Take, for instance, the time I had to renew the lease on my apartment. This was back in college, when I was renting a small studio in the Miracle Mile area of Los Angeles. When my lease was up, the landlord and I sat down to hammer out the terms of a new lease.

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do," he said. "I'm going to give you a break on rent if you sign a two-year lease instead of just a one-year lease."

"Well," I said, "I don't know. What sort of break are we talking about here?"

"I'll give you a 5% rent increase instead of a 10% increase in exchange for you signing a two-year lease. It's a win-win situation: you get a cut in rent, and I get the security of a two-year lease."

At this point, I decided to make a counter-proposal. "How about this," I said, "You give me a one year lease with a six percent increase."

"No, I can't make that sort of deal," he said. "But here's what I can do, and it's my final offer: I'll pay for your electricity for the first 6 months of the lease, along with the other terms I mentioned before."

"You drive a hard bargain. Okay, it's a deal," I said. I guess I could have tried to bargain him down a bit more, but I was happy with our agreement. Now all I had to do was sign on the dotted line.



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[end of story]

Today we're talking about negotiations. Negotiations are when you have to try to reach an agreement on something with someone, either in business or in your personal life. Tough negotiations are difficult negotiations, negotiations that require a lot of effort or work.

I started by saying that "I'm not what you would call the world's best negotiator." Someone who negotiates is called a "negotiator" (negotiator). The phrase, "I'm not what you would call," means "No one thinks that I am very good at this" or "I would not be called by someone else (this thing)." We often use it as a way to be humble, to not brag or boast about yourself. So, when I say "I'm not what you would call the world's best negotiator," I'm saying I'm not very good at negotiating.

When you use this phrase about someone else, it is a criticism. If someone is a very bad singer, you could say, "He's not what you would call the world's best singer." People say that about me all the time.

I said in the story that "sometime it's necessary to engage" – to take part – "in a tough negotiation." Then I said, "Take, for instance, the time I had to renew the lease on my apartment." Take, for instance means simply "For example" or "As an example." "The time I had to" here means "When I had to."

I said I had to "renew the lease on my apartment. "To renew some agreement or contract" means to extend it, to make it go longer. So, when you have an agreement and you renew it, you're committing to a longer period of time. You are promising to do what the contract says for a longer time.

I say that I'm trying to renew my lease. A "lease" (lease) is a rental agreement, a contract between two people where one person owns something and the other person pays to use it. A lease is a contract to rent an apartment or some other building. You can also use the term "lease" for a car. If you're leasing a car, you're just paying rent on the car. You are using someone else's car by paying them money.

For an apartment in the United States, typically you sign or agree to a one-year lease. After one year, you can usually renew your lease.

I said that the tough negotiations that I was part of were back in college. We use that expression "back in" to mean "when I was" or "at the time of." For example,



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you could say, “Back in the 1920s, people liked to dance to jazz music.” That means that in the 1920s, people enjoyed dancing to jazz music.

I said “I was renting a small studio in the Miracle Mile area of Los Angeles.” A “studio” apartment is a one-room apartment. Everything is in one room: your bedroom, your bed, your kitchen, your clothes. You just have one room. If you have a separate room for the bedroom, that would be called a “one-bedroom” apartment. But this was just a studio apartment. The “Miracle Mile area” is just a part of Los Angeles, in the middle of the city of Los Angeles.

I said that my lease was up. When a lease is coming to an end, we can use the expression “was up” or “is up.” We also use that with the word “time.” “Time is up” means there’s no more time or the time is over, the time is finished. If you have students who are taking an exam and the teacher says, “Time is up!” she means, “Stop working on your exam, the time is over.”

In the story, my lease was up, so the landlord and I sat down to hammer out the terms of a new lease. A “landlord” (landlord) is someone who owns a building and rents part of the building to someone else. I said I was sitting down or meeting with my landlord “to hammer out the terms of a new lease.” “To hammer out something” or “to hammer something out” means to negotiate, to figure out, to come to a solution. “Terms” (terms) in a negotiation are the specific points that you are negotiating about. So, for a lease on an apartment, the terms would be how long the lease is, how much you pay for rent, whether you pay for gas, electricity, and water, and so forth.

I then used a couple of expressions that are very common in negotiations, whether it’s a personal or business negotiation. One of them was, “I’ll tell you what I’m going to do.” This is an expression that we would use before we give someone our proposal, our ideas for an agreement we are negotiating. The idea here is that we are going to give the person a good deal, a bargain, perhaps a low price.

I said that the landlord told me he would give me a break on rent. A “break” (break) here means a reduction, when you make something less. The expression is “a break *on* something.” “I’m going to give you a break on the price of a new car” means “I’m going to reduce or lower the price for you.” The landlord said he would give me a break on rent if I signed or agreed to a two-year lease instead of just a one year lease.

I responded to the first proposal by my landlord by saying, “What sort of break are we talking about here?” The expression, “What sort of (something) are we



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talking about?” means “What exactly are the details?” For example, my friend wants to go on a trip, and he wants to go camping in a tent out in the middle of the desert. So I say, “Well, what kind of tent are we talking about here?” meaning “Give me more information about it.” By the way, I would never go tenting or camping in the desert. In fact, I’d never go tenting anywhere. I’m not a camper.

Anyway, back to – let’s return to – our story: I said that the landlord proposed only increasing my rent 5% instead of, or in place of 10% in exchange for signing a two-year lease. “In exchange for” is a common negotiating term. It means: You give me something, I give you something. We exchange or give each other something of value.

My landlord says this is a “win-win situation.” “Win-win” means “You win *and* I win” – we both benefit or gain something from the negotiation. The landlord said I would get a cut in rent. A “cut in rent” is the same as a “break on the rent,” a reduction in the rent.

Now, I wasn’t happy with the landlord’s first proposal, so I made a counterproposal. A “counterproposal” means after someone proposes or give his ideas, you reply with or give your own ideas. We even use that word “counter” as a verb: “He countered my proposal with another proposal.” Instead of counterproposal you can also say “counteroffer.”

I introduced it by saying, “How about this?” and then I gave him my idea. That expression “How about this?” is used before we are about to give someone our views or ideas about how the contract or the negotiation should be. You can use this expression when you’re trying to come to an agreement with someone about what to do about any situation. For example, you could say, “You want to go to the movies. I want to go to the beach. How about this? We go to the movies first, and then the beach.” That is how we use “How about this?”

I said, “How about this?” and then gave my counterproposal: “You give me a one-year lease with a six percent increase.” He responded by saying, “No, I can’t make that sort of deal.” A deal is an agreement.

He then said to me, “But here’s what I can do, and it’s my final offer.” There are two expressions here: “Here’s what I can do” and “final offer.” “Here’s what I can do” is what you would say in a negotiation when you are not agreeing completely with the other person, but you’re willing to compromise in the negotiation. To compromise means you give up something and the other person gives up something.



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The other term my landlord used was final offer. When someone says, “It’s my final offer,” they mean “That’s all I’m willing to do or to give.” The person is not going to compromise anymore.

My landlord’s final offer was that he would pay for my electricity – my electrical bill – for the first six months of the lease, “along with,” or in addition to, the other terms he already mentioned.

I ended by saying to my landlord, “You drive a hard bargain.” A “hard bargain” is a difficult bargain or difficult agreement. The expression “to drive a hard bargain” means that the other person is a very tough negotiator, that the negotiations are very difficult. I then say, “It’s a deal,” meaning “I agree to your terms.” I accept your proposal.

I say that “I could have tried to bargain him down a bit more.” “To bargain someone down” means to get them to reduce their price or to compromise more. I did not try to bargain my landlord down because I was happy with or satisfied with the agreement.

After I agreed to my landlord’s terms, I said that “All I had to do was sign on the dotted line.” “All I had to do” means “The only thing I had to do.” The “dotted line” in a contract, is where you put your signature indicating you agree to the contract. This is a common expression in English, “to sign on the dotted line.” It means you are going to sign a contract agreeing to something.

Now let’s listen to our story this time at a normal speed.

[start of story]

I’m not what you would call the world’s best negotiator, but sometimes it’s necessary to engage in a tough negotiation. Take, for instance, the time I had to renew the lease on my apartment. This was back in college, when I was renting a small studio in the Miracle Mile area of Los Angeles. When my lease was up, the landlord and I sat down to hammer out the terms of a new lease.

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[end of story]

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From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan, thanks for listening. Come back and listen to us again here on ESL Podcast.

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