

How do Swiss executives negotiate?

This question is the subject of a recently published study. In an interview, the authors and negotiation experts from BGP Partner Attorneys-at-Law explain the results and where there is room for improvement.

What made you decide to conduct a study on Swiss negotiation practice?

Gnehm: The concept for the study was born out of a desire to learn more about how executives in the Swiss business world actually negotiate, what significance negotiations have in their daily work, and to what extent they adapt their behavior accordingly. To date, there has been no scientifically based study that has examined these questions. As a law firm that deals intensively with the topic of negotiation, we at BGP Partner decided to conduct the study ourselves in cooperation with the Negotiation Academy Potsdam. The result is the first representative, practice-oriented study on the topic of «How do Swiss executives negotiate?».

What were the results of the study?

Mégevand: There are many very interesting results. For example, more than 90 % of the respondents are convinced that negotiation skills are an important career success factor. At the same time, however, training in this area is lagging behind, and the respondents would like their companies to provide more support in the area of negotiation.

Furthermore, the importance of good preparation for successful negotiations seems to be undisputed. More than 65 % of respondents even stated that more time should be spent on preparation than on the negotiation itself to ensure a successful outcome. In reality, however, the amount of the time spent on preparation is roughly equal to the amount of the time spent on negotiation. To put it bluntly: Executives know they should spend more time preparing for negotiations than they do negotiating, but they still do not walk the talk.

Gnehm: It is gratifying to see that setting negotiation goals is a basic component of Swiss negotiation practice. Both minimum and desired goals are formulated. It has been proven that such goal settings leads to better negotiation results.

According to the survey, about 77 % of Swiss executives discuss the negotiation experience and results with colleagues and superiors after a negotiation; in Germany, by contrast, about 87 % of negotiators do so. So there is room for improvement in this respect for Swiss negotiators, as this exchange is crucial for future negotiation success.

How successful are Swiss executives in their negotiations?

Mégevand: The majority of Swiss executives are quite confident and convinced of their own negotiation skills. They believe they can

negotiate successfully. At the same time, however, more than 50 % of the respondents believe that most negotiators overestimate their negotiation skills. This is an interesting discrepancy.

EVERY COMPANY SHOULD FOCUS ON FURTHER DEVELOPING NEGOTIATION SKILLS.

What can be improved in Swiss negotiation practice?

Gnehm: Negotiation training could become a more consistent topic in companies. Negotiation skills can be learned, and it has been scientifically proven that trained negotiators achieve significantly better results. However, only 47 % of respondents actually enjoyed negotiation training as part of their education. In Germany, the figure is nearly 70 %. There is clearly a need to catch up.

Mégevand: The study found that even after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of Swiss executives still prefer to negotiate face-to-face. This is because they expect better results from face-to-face negotiations, but also because they admit to being less proficient in digital negotiations. Digital negotiation support systems are also not widely used in Swiss negotiation practice. Swiss executives should therefore

learn more about digital negotiation in the future.

What else can we expect on this topic - do you have any further research planned?

Gnehm: Absolutely; negotiation is a diverse and important topic. Among other things, we are working on a follow-up study on international negotiation behavior and want to promote negotiation education, especially among the younger generations.

A free copy of the study can be obtained by emailing to: negotiation@bgpartner.ch.



IN INTERVIEW

Elena Mégevand and Oliver Gnehm are partners at BGP Partner Ltd, a leading national and international Swiss law firm specialising in business law and negotiation.

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Do you believe that negotiation skills can enhance careers in companies in general and in your company in particular?

