

# I FORESAW IT: A Way to Improve Your Preparations for Negotiating

By Seth Freeman\*

“Preparation- Jewel in the crown of negotiation. Get this right (and merely doing it is not enough) and your performance in the negotiation dramatically improves.”

-Gavin Kennedy

How do you prepare for a negotiation? A simple planning tool can help you focus your thinking. The tool is a mnemonic called "I FORESAW IT."

I FORESAW IT sums up many of the key factors which a negotiator needs to consider in preparing for a negotiation. In essence, the mnemonic asks you to do six things: (1) consider what you each really want and why, (2) learn as much as possible about the situation, (3) think creatively, (4) empathize, (5) develop alternatives to agreement, and (6) identify your targets and priorities.

Each letter in the mnemonic follows a loose order, though you can jump around. Students find they can profitably use the mnemonic in as little as ten or fifteen minutes. However, extensive preparation is almost always better; most seasoned negotiators take hours, days or even weeks to prepare for important talks. Regardless, the I FORESAW IT mnemonic can help.

Here's what the letters stand for:

**Interests-** Mine, hers, ours. Beyond our respective demands, why do we each want what we say we want? List several. Rank the answers in order of importance. Include intangible interests such as face-saving. Don't skip on common interests (that is, shared goals you can achieve by working together)-expert negotiators spend far more time on this than average negotiators do. (*Advanced technique:* For major talks with organization(s), it pays to list the interests of each significant player on each side.)

**Factual and Financial Research-** Knowledge counts. What do you need to learn? Many things. Here are a few examples. What are the market prices? What do the relevant documents say? What do industry experts say? What published information is there about the matter? The other person? What is the history of the relationship? What are the cultural norms? The legal constraints? What does spreadsheet analysis reveal? (E.g. your budget, your cashflow, and your balance sheet, and how different outcomes will affect them.) How is the other person's organization set up? Err on the side of learning too much.

**Options-** Brainstorm possible deal terms. That is, think of as many different kinds of negotiable solutions to the problem as possible, even if they seem silly. Don't worry about crafting a complete proposal here- just list different kinds of tradeables and partial deal terms. Think of solutions that might help satisfy each side's interests. Get help from a trusted friend or colleague. Don't critique until you've generated at least six for each topic you wish to negotiate. Excellent negotiators generate twice as many options as average negotiators do. Then review and refine your options and select the one(s) you feel would be your first preference.

**Rapport, Reactions and Responses-** Think about the tone you want to set by noting what you'll say to start the conversation. Seek a constructive, optimistic, genuine approach. You can jot down the gist, or write

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specific words that feel real to you. You also must be ready, though, for resistance. So imagine too the hard things the other negotiator may say. Then, consider how you might respond. In other words, roleplay. Seek responses that channel the conversation toward constructive discussion, not mere argument. You can often find ways to respond by drawing on the rest of your plan. For example, you might appeal to her interests-how will she satisfy them by saying "yes" and hurt them by saying "no"? Is there research that shows your approach makes sense? Roleplaying can produce real surprises and insights and build your confidence.

**Empathy and Ethics-** Put yourself in the other person's shoes. Speak or write a paragraph about the situation in his internal voice. What problem does he have? Why do you seem difficult? What hang-ups are you bringing to the negotiation? How would you like to be treated if you were in his place? If you are working with someone from another culture, try learning about her culture and her history. Empathizing is hard, but it may be the most important task: it can illuminate almost every other part of your plan. It can also help you build trust by seeing her humanity. (*Advanced technique:* for talks with other organization(s), try too to see within the other organization(s) and understand their hawks and doves.) A related concern is the ethical and spiritual dimension. What likely ethical dilemmas will you each face? How will you deal with yours? What ethical limits will you set? It may help (perhaps in ways that have nothing to do with money) to pray for patience, strength, and understanding. It may also help to pray for the other person (especially if relations are strained).

**Setting and Scheduling-** (a) Where will you negotiate? By phone? By letter? By email? In person? Where are you each more comfortable? If you meet, where? Your place? Theirs? A neutral place? Why? Will you meet in private or in public? (Negotiating in the public eye often makes it harder for each negotiator to make concessions without losing face.) Have a change of setting in mind in case you reach an impasse- often this can help change the result. (Phone negotiations tend to end without agreement more than face-to-face do; email negotiations tend reach impasse even more frequently.) Setting can also include any discussion ground rules you'd like to introduce (e.g. 'let's agree that nothing's agreed till everything is agreed.')(b) When will you negotiate? Before something else happens? After? Why? Timing can be crucial. If there are several parties, with whom will you meet first? Then whom? (*Advanced technique:* consider speaking with your most likely allies first.) What time of day will you negotiate? (If possible, avoid negotiating when you are tired.) What, if any, deadline will you set or face?

**Alternatives to Agreement-** If there's no deal, what will you do instead? What will she? List the different possible alternatives to agreement separately for each side. For example, if you're negotiating to buy my car and we can't agree, what exactly will you do instead? Take the bus? Buy a new car you saw at the local dealership yesterday? Try to improve your alternatives to agreement with research and creativity; doing that can reveal surprising sources of power. Rank your alternatives; which is your best? Your worst? Which is her best? Her worst? (If she says "no," she risks winding up with her worst alternative. Tactfully noting this risk may encourage her to say yes.) Knowing the alternatives you each have reveals who has leverage- something that can strongly influence the talks. (What if you're weak? Work hard on every other part of the mnemonic. More on that later.)

**Who-** Who can influence the outcome of the talks, besides the one(s) you will negotiate with? Is there someone else who would be better to deal with instead? Is there someone you might deal with if you reach an impasse? (e.g. managers often have much more latitude than clerks). Who do you each answer to? Who are the hawks and doves? Who else should you involve in the process? Should you use agents? Mediators? Who else may influence the negotiations? Spouses? Customers? Name them. Learn as much as you appropriately can about them. Also, are there allies you can form coalitions with? Other coalitions you need to block? Who are your likely allies? One other thing: will your negotiation have a good or bad impact on other stakeholders? If so, list them here too- they may have added resources to bring to the bargaining table. Think about inviting them.

**Independent Criteria**- What objective standards can you appeal to so the other person sees your offer is fair and reasonable? Look for something the other person is likely to trust that's out of your control. (Some examples: e.g., blue book estimates of fair market value, Consumer Reports ratings, a jointly chosen accountant's appraisal, industry statements about standards and practices, verifiable precedent, existing contract terms, or a fair decision rule such as 'I cut/you choose'.) Independent criteria let you say, in effect, "don't take my word for it; let's turn to something we both trust." They are far more persuasive than saying, "well, I think I'm making you a very fair offer."

**Topics, Targets, and Tradeoffs**- This last letter is where you turn your preparation work into a focused one-page guide to the talks. In essence, you set an agenda, develop goals for each agenda item, prioritize, and add some promising creative options. Here's how:

(a) **Topics**. Write down the agenda items you'll talk about (such as salary, hours, vacation time). Look beyond the obvious for hidden topics worth discussing (such as start date).

(b) **Targets**. For each topic, set two targets- the outcome you'd like best (your best target) and least (your walkaway target). (For example- "Salary: 50,000 - 40,000"). Your best target should be ambitious but realistic, based on your factual research into market values and the other person's alternatives to agreement. Your walkaway target should be fairly firm and roughly equal to the value of your best alternative to a negotiated agreement.

(c) **Tradeoffs**. (1) Look for tradeoffs between topics by ranking topics. Which matters most to you? Would you give up lots of X (say, salary) if you could have lots of Y (say, vacation time)? Ranking topics is particularly valuable when there are lots of them. (2) Look for tradeoffs *within* a single topic- that is, look for creative options that would really satisfy you both for that topic. Review the list of Options you created earlier and select the options you'd most like to accept (say, salary plus a loan) or offer (say, regular hours plus a monthly business trip).

Now put together three possible agreements. (1) First, design an opening offer. Do this by jotting down the best possible deal you can realistically imagine by listing your upper Target for each Topic. Then add to that deal a reasonable cushion (especially on your favorite Topic(s)) so you can make concessions. Write down the cushioned proposal. (2) Second, write down the worst possible deal you will accept by writing down the best deal you have been offered elsewhere, or, if you have none, by listing the lower Target for each Topic. (Later, compare any tentative deal to this one to make sure you're not accepting a bad one.) (3) Lastly, write down at least one other possible deal- preferably a creative solution. You might describe a deal that gives you lots of your favorite Topic and less of your least favorite; or a deal that uses Tradeoffs within Topics. (Have such deal(s) ready in case an impasse arises during talks.)

Don't feel these agreements are the only three you can accept. Treat them as a ballpark to play in. If you hit an impasse, review your Options, Interests, etc. Are there other proposals that might work?

See Appendix A for a sample Topics, Targets and Tradeoffs Worksheet.

One of the virtues of I FORESAW IT is that it serves as a checklist, reminding negotiators of many things they want to think about. It is not a complete list, though. There are several other things a negotiator may want to consider which may be pivotal, including psychological dynamics, tone and manner, key words and gestures, specific approaches to use at the table, and media relations. While no planning tool can be completely comprehensive, the mnemonic makes it easy for negotiators to get into the habit of preparing extensively and opens the door for further preparations.

The I FORESAW IT is not a script; it does not tell you what to say. That's because scripts don't work in negotiation; the process is too dynamic for that. Rather, the I FORESAW IT is like a map, showing you the

destination and much of the terrain before it, so that whatever the other side does, you'll be ready to steer toward your goal. (That said, how should you start? One frequently wise approach: get (re)acquainted, spend time on personal matters, ask some simple questions, and listen. For major talks, it may also be wise at some point to suggest a simple agenda and some simple discussion rules.)

The I FORESAW IT can help you level the playing field when you feel weak. What should you do if you have no alternatives to agreement and the other side is big and powerful? Seek good answers to each of the other parts of the mnemonic. Doing so can reveal hidden ways to craft a satisfying deal with the other side. For example, imagine your big future employer tells you that most of the terms are fixed, and you know you don't have any other prospects. Good preparation may reveal other Topics that are negotiable, Options that would help you a lot at little cost to them, advocates Who can help you, little-known firm policies that create an exception in your case (nice Factual research!)- and so on. (*Advanced technique*: Good preparation may also reveal moves you can make away from the table that strengthen your position at the table. For example, what if, by negotiating with others, you can offer your prospective employer three promising new clients?)

Many negotiators feel more confident in negotiations once they've gone through the I FORESAW IT mnemonic. They are more willing to listen to their counterparts because they have less reason to feel threatened; they've done their homework. This confidence and openness can make a difference in their ability to deal with intimidation, to respond effectively to claiming tactics and threats, to listen for hidden agreements, to disarm, to relate with compassion and creativity, to learn something, to know when to walk away, and to craft surprisingly satisfying agreements. It also helps them avoid the mistake of revealing too much or too little out of ignorance or fear. Often, it helps negotiators demonstrate poise and creativity that transform a mess into a remarkable solution. It doesn't always go so well, but luck favors the prepared.

Once you know the I FORESAW IT, you can use it as a versatile tool. Some examples:

*Counseling.* Need to counsel a friend who's worried about a conflict? Start by asking her about her Interests. Then the other person's. Then common interests. Then ask her about the Facts of the situation. Then offer to explore a few creative Options with her. And so on.

*Sharp Tactics.* Need to cope with ethically questionable, aggressive ploys that negotiators sometimes throw at you? The I FORESAW IT can serve as a first aid kit, suggesting effective responses. (For example, if the other person says, "I have no authority to make any of the concessions you've asked me for," the I FORESAW IT can help you discover several responses. "I see," you might reply. "I wonder what other Options would serve my Interests that you do have authority to give. Also, I wonder Who in the organization might be willing to authorize my idea if you agree it's attractive...")

*Team Negotiation and Team Decision Making.* Need to help your group get on the same page to manage a conflict, ready for a transaction, or make a decision? The I FORESAW IT can often help you and your team walk around the problem constructively. (You may want to invite them to read this essay beforehand, or teach the mnemonic to them in a special session.) Some teams find it helps to have each member create a draft I FORESAW IT plan and then meet to discuss it. Others like to assign sections to specific team members to prepare and share with the group. Or you can simply explore answers to the problem by discussing the I FORESAW IT questions together.

By the way, it's wise to keep detailed notes during negotiations. It's wise too to review your work and update your plan after each session. In other words, leave room to learn something.

A simple form covering the entire I FORESAW IT mnemonic appears at the very end. Try filling it out before your next important negotiation and see what a difference it can make for you.

## Appendix A - Sample Topics, Targets, and Tradeoffs Worksheet

<i>Topics</i>	<i>Targets</i> (Best - Least)	<i>Tradeoffs</i> <i>Between</i> <i>Topics*</i>	<i>Tradeoffs</i> <i>Within</i> <i>Topics**</i>
Salary	50,000 – 40,000	1	Stock options Bonus Tuition reimbursement
Hours	42 hours- 50 hours	3	Office hours Business trips
Vacation	2 weeks - 1 week	2	Personal days
Start Date	4 weeks - 2 weeks	4	Telecommute initially Part-time initially

### *Three Possible Proposals*

1. ***Opening Offer*** (first figure out your best likely deal by listing your top Target in each Topic and then add cushion(s) to it so you can make concessions, especially to your favorite topics):  
55K salary, 40 hours, 3 weeks vacation, start in 4 weeks.
2. ***Worst Acceptable Deal*** (list your the best deal you have been offered elsewhere, or, if you don't have one, list the lower Target for each Topic):  
40K Salary, 50 hours, 1 week vacation, start full time in 2 weeks.
3. ***Creative Compromise(s)*** (write here at least one other possible deal, drawing on your Tradeoffs):  
45K salary plus loan or bonus worth another 5K, 42 hours, 10 days vacation or personal days, start part time in 2 weeks and full time in 4 weeks.

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\* That is, ranking of Topics. If your counterpart cares most about how much vacation time you take and least about salary, you've spotted a simple tradeoff- take more salary and less vacation.

\*\* That is, favorite Options for a given Topic. If your counterpart would like to compensate you more but says "I have no more cash to pay you right now," another tradable (e.g. bonus or loan) may work instead.

# I FORESAW IT plan form

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Interests (that is, the underlying concerns and needs; the reasons why someone wants something.)

(Mine)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ ... (Throughout this form, "..." means "feel free to list more ideas")

(Other Person's ("OP's"))\*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ ...\*\*

(Common) (shared needs you and OP can satisfy together. "If we work together, we can...")

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ ...

Factual and Financial Research (note useful questions you need to answer, and then note the answers you learn through your research; attach materials you've gotten, and spreadsheets you've created.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ...

Options (for each topic, list at least six options (i.e., possible deal terms) that will satisfy your respective interests.)

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Rapport, Reactions and Responses (list things want to say to set a constructive tone. Also list things you fear the OP will say. For each, write how you'll respond. No need to write a dialog-- just note several separate interactions: 'if he says this, I'll say that.' *Advanced technique*: roleplay with a teammate.)

Constructive points to help build rapport:

- 
- 
- 

If OP says:" \_\_\_\_\_ "  
I can say:" \_\_\_\_\_ "

If OP says:" \_\_\_\_\_ "  
I can say:" \_\_\_\_\_ "

\* OP means "Other Person." *Advanced technique*: If you have several OPs, or if there are several influential players, list each one's interests separately

\*\* Appeal to the OP's Interests to show why your proposal is good for him

\*\*\* Appeal to the OP's Alternatives to agreement (see below) to show why saying "no" will hurt him

**I FORESAW IT plan Form (continued)**

Empathy and Ethics (first speak in OP's voice about how matter seems ("I think...I feel...").)

" \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_."

-Ethical dilemmas- (then list ethical problems you each face.)

(Mine) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(OP's) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Setting and Scheduling (note when and where you'll negotiate. *Advanced technique*: note discussion rules you'd like to use. *Advanced technique*: sequence who you'll talk to when.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Alternatives to Agreement (that is, things you will do if you don't agree with the other side, and vice versa. (Thus, this part is quite different from Options.) List several you each have, based on brainstorming and research. Include your Best Alternative to Negotiated Agreement (BATNA) and your Worst (WATNA).)

(Mine)	(OP's) ←
_____	_____
_____ (BATNA)	_____ (BATNA?)
_____ (WATNA)	_____ (WATNA?)
_____ ...	_____ ...

Essential, in part because it helps you assess the OP's bargaining strength.

Who (list those who can influence the negotiations, besides you and the other negotiator. *Advanced technique*: list each key player in each side's organization, as well as allies who can strengthen your side's bargaining strength. List each player's interests in the Interests section.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ...

Independent Criteria (list information you've learned that can serve as fair standards you and the OP will both trust. Attach materials you've acquired if any.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ...

**I FORESAW IT plan Form (continued)**

**Topics, Targets & Tradeoffs**

<i>Topics</i> (That is, what matters will you discuss in the negotiation?)	<i>Targets</i> (That is, first, what is the most you can realistically hope for for a given Topic and second, what is the least you will accept for that Topic? (Check Factual Research and Alternatives.))	<i>Tradeoffs b/w Topics</i> (That is, rank Topics from dearest to least important)	<i>Tradeoffs w/i topics</i> (That is, list 2-4 favorite Options that would satisfy your interest in that Topic)
_____	_____ - _____	_____	_____ _____ _____
_____	_____ - _____	_____	_____ _____ _____
_____	_____ - _____	_____	_____ _____ _____
_____ ...	_____ - _____	_____	_____ _____ _____

**Now, construct offers using your Topics, Targets & Tradeoffs**

Opening Offer: (Before you write something here, jot down on scrap paper the best possible deal you can realistically imagine by listing the upper Target for each Topic. (These are your 'Best Targets.')

Then add to that deal a reasonable cushion so you can make concessions- especially to your favorite topics. Write down that cushioned proposal here.)

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Least Acceptable Offer: (Write down here the worst possible deal you will accept by stating the best deal you have elsewhere, or, if you have no such alternative offer, by listing the lower Target for each Topic. Later, compare any tentative deal to this one to make sure you're not accepting a bad one.)

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Creative Proposal(s) (Write down here at least one other possible deal. You might describe a deal that gives you lots of your favorite Topic and less of your least favorite Topic; or a deal that uses creative Options (i.e. Tradeoffs w/i Topic) to satisfy your interest in a Topic at low cost to the Other Person. Have such deal(s) ready in case an impasse arises during the talks.)

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**Finally, test your offers:**

- (1) Do the offers satisfy the *Interests* you've listed?
- (2) Are the offers at least as good as your best *Alternative* to negotiated agreement?
- (3) Do the *Independent Criteria* you listed confirm these offers are fair?
- (4) Are there any Time Bombs in your proposed offers? (Think, "what if...?")
- (5) Which of your offers give you the chance to achieve the best *Targets* you've set for your favorite *Topics*?
- (6) How will OP *React* to your offers and how will you respond?