

# How to become a better negotiator in 9 simple steps

Top real estate agents Amie Quirarte and Craig Wilburn share how agents can conquer their negotiating fears and become better advocates for their clients



Amie Quirarte of Tahoe Luxury Properties (top) and Craig Wilburn of Team Dynamo at Keller Williams Realty (bottom).

BY [MARIAN MCPHERSON](#)

February 18, 2021

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At the beginning of Team Dynamo at Keller Williams Realty CEO Craig Wilburn's career, he lost a deal due to a couch.

"The couch fail was a \$700,000 transaction I was working on [and] had under contract, and I actually had both sides of the transaction on this one," he told the Connect Now crowd. "It was a personal friend of mine's home I was selling, and

we found the buyer. And everything was going fine until the [homebuyer] decided to go and just do another walkthrough of the house."

"We allowed him to go to the house and the seller happened to be home, and apparently they got to talking," he added. "In that conversation, the buyer was under the impression that the seller was going to go ahead and leave their couch in the house."



Craig Wilburn

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Wilburn said that simple walkthrough led to a chain of events that led to two extra home inspections and a commission cut to offset the cost of buyer repairs. However, it would be the misunderstanding about a couch that finally tanked the deal.

"[The seller] said 'I never told them that the couch was staying in the house,' and we went back and forth and back and forth. And the long story short is I didn't have enough negotiation skills in my body to be able to save the deal," he said. "That deal fell apart. Because of the couch."

Wilburn and Tahoe Luxury Properties agent Amie Quirarte said they've both had their fair share of difficult deals and each experience taught them how to be better negotiators for every kind of situation, including sellers who need to stay in their home months after the sale or buyers who need to suss out the competition in a [bidding war](#).

"When you start negotiating, you think that it's you against the other agent, but really, it sounds a little bit cliche, but if you all win, then y'all win," Quirarte said. "If you don't, then the deal is dead, then you have nothing."

“The only person that loses, in that case, is the buyer and the seller,” Wilburn added. “Remember our purpose in negotiating is to get the buyer and the seller what they want. Not what we want. Not how we think it should be.”

Here’s what Quirarte and Wilburn had to say about becoming better negotiators:

## **1. Stop thinking of negotiating as a bad thing**

Wilburn said negotiating has a negative connotation and is often conflated with arguing or fighting; however, negotiating is a natural thing all people do.

“It’s not just a tool, it’s a way of life because we do it in every aspect,” he said. “I’ve got several [kids], and they all negotiated with me from the time they could speak.”

“Whatever they want, they begin to negotiate,” he added with a laugh. “So we know [negotiation] is a natural thing.”

## **2. Be aware**

Wilburn said the couch fiasco taught him to make sure he “never allows people to have conversations he’s not aware of.” He said agents need to be aware of not only what the other agent is doing or thinking but also separate conversations buyers and sellers might have about items they’d like to fold into a deal, such as a couch.

### 3. Double-check the facts, and communicate clearly

Like Wilburn, Quirarte said she had a major gaffe at the beginning of her foray into luxury real estate. The deal was for a \$3.5 million home, and the buyers and sellers were going back and forth over the buyer's offer, which was \$30,000 less. After some negotiating between Quirarte and the listing agent, they came to a deal, or so they thought.

"I believed that I had explained the proposal to my buyers, accurately," she said. "The sellers were going to agree to a certain price, and the buyers were going to take that off of the purchase price."

However, on closing day, Quirarte's clients said they noticed a discrepancy with the sales price and Quirarte realized she didn't **explain the deal correctly**— a move that shaved \$30,000 from her commission.

"Now that is a very expensive mistake," she said. "The lesson I really took from that was communication and listening to your clients is so important."

### 4. Be an active listener

Both agents said one of the most common mistakes in negotiations is listening to craft a rebuttal instead of [listening to understand](#), which negotiators call active listening.

“The challenge a lot of people have is that most people think being a negotiator means ‘I want to win, and Amy’s going to lose,’” Wilburn said. “If your starting point is from that narrative, you’re already losing.”

Wilburn said the best negotiators listen to understand their counterpart’s point of view and identify “ways to gain consensus on a common topic.” When the fellow agent and their client feel that you’re concerned about their outcome as well, he said, you’re more likely to garner a deal that works for your client as well.

## 5. Embrace awkward pauses

Quirarte said agents must learn to [embrace awkward pauses](#) when they’re asking a difficult question or trying to gather information the other agent doesn’t necessarily want to share.

“You let them feel awkward for a second. You just let it go,” she said. “You just sit, and you listen. You will be amazed at how much information someone tells you because they feel uncomfortable.”

## 6. Remember, it’s not always about money

Quirarte said people often [distill negotiating down to getting more money](#). However, some buyers and sellers are less concerned about the price tag and may be searching for flexibility with closings or move-in dates.

“Pick up the phone, and call the agent, especially if you’re competing. And say something along the lines of ‘Hey, what’s important to your sellers?’” she said.

Offering other benefits, such as giving the sellers some flexibility on their move-out date after closing, can [edge out a buyer with a higher bid](#).

“I have a listing in escrow where the sellers need to stay at the house until September, and that’s a non-negotiable. And that’s really not something common that happens in Tahoe because most homes are second homes,” she added.

“The person that was able to secure the property said ‘OK, we’re gonna let you stay there until September,’ but had the agent not have been in regular communication with me, they would have just thrown out a huge number.”

## 7. Don’t compete, cooperate

Wilburn and Quirarte said agents must approach real estate with collaboration at the forefront of their minds. When you’re a [known collaborator](#), they said, it provides more options for any client you have.

Wilburn said he’s more interested in “working together to get a buyer and a client on the same page” than competing with fellow agents for the most market share. “Relationship building with other agents is paramount,” he said.

## 8. Invest in negotiating books and training

Both agents said taking negotiation classes and building a collection of books on the topic are crucial to building better skills. Chris Voss and Daniel Pink were Quirarte and Wilburn’s [favorite negotiation experts](#), and both have taken the National Association of Realtors and other associations’ negotiator designation classes.

“I was a little bit hesitant to do it,” Quirarte said of negotiation classes. “The first time I heard about it was maybe five or six years ago, and I found those classes immensely helpful, especially when I was a brand new agent because it helped me [build up my confidence](#).”

## 9. Practice and build your confidence

Wilburn encouraged agents to build their confidence through role-playing sessions with fellow agents because they know the bevy of situations you can encounter. The more you practice, he said, the more confident you’ll be.

“It’s very important,” he said of role-play. “The more comfortable you get with having these things roll off your tongue, and it is going to be natural.”

“You’re going to find that you won’t be intimidated or even pressured by negotiation,” he added.

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