

Men get ahead by chatting before negotiations

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Whether sealed with a handshake, a million-dollar contract, or a string of curses, every business deal is a reflection of trust. Both parties trust that the other will hold up their end of the bargain. Good negotiators have a store of social capital before bargaining begins; built up through interactions outside the negotiations that establish trust. Working with a team of researchers from Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität and Technische Universität in Munich, Germany, American University's Kogod School of Business professor of management Alexandra Mislin researched how small talk before a negotiation impacted perceptions and outcomes.

The study, titled "[Should He Chitchat? The Benefits of Small Talk for Male Versus Female Negotiators](#)," published in the *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* reveals that small talk can be another tool in the arsenal for men, one that builds [social capital](#) and increases their likelihood of beneficial gains from negotiation. "We saw a boost in positive negotiation outcomes for men when they engaged in small talk before the negotiation," Mislin said. "Even a little small talk contributed to getting a better deal." However, the same is not true for women.

For example in a salary negotiation with one's employer, "based on our findings, we suggest that people negotiating employment contracts, particularly men, think twice before skipping the small talk," said Mislin. "While both men and women may experience benefits from small talk when negotiating salary, men might walk away with a better deal."

According to the researchers, it comes down to expected gender behaviors and stereotypes. Because women are expected to be more communicative, they are anticipated to make small talk and thus earn no extra social capital for engaging in "chit chat" before a negotiation. "It's not as notable a behavior when a woman makes small talk," Mislin said. "So she is not as likely to experience a social boost from the effort." But the same communal behavior from men is unexpected, and thus contributes to more positive perception of men as well as more favorable final offers.

The researchers discovered that the benefits to men who small talk are more pronounced in [negotiation](#) situations that are characterized by more ambiguity and where small talk is not necessarily expected. In situations where expectations are clearly defined, including an expectations of small talk (e.g. an employment contract interview), both men and women who small talk are perceived more favorably. But this positive perception only translates into better deals for men who small talk.

"Our findings reinforce the notion that [men and women](#) in the same situation, engaging in the same behavior, can experience different reactions because of different behavioral expectations associated with their gender," Mislin said. "But our research also suggests that there may be areas where violating stereotypes is beneficial, as we see here for the [men](#) who engage in [small talk](#)."

Provided by American University

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