

“What Will It Take?”

Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow, www.disabilityisnatural.com

Are you tired of fighting? Tired of not getting what you need? Want to improve your relationships with others? If so, it's time to change tactics, and become a negotiator!

From this point on, don't ask a question that can be answered YES or NO. Instead, negotiate by asking, “WHAT WILL IT TAKE?” For far too long, children and adults with disabilities and their families have asked yes/no questions, and too many times, the answer is no! Sometimes, this provokes a fight; other times, we give up. We can move beyond both of these!

In an IEP meeting, for example, Lisa, a parent, asks, “Can the school buy a computer for my daughter, Claire?” “No!” might blast out of the special ed director's mouth like a bullet! At that point, Claire's only recourse is to fight (and escalate the tension) or give up and give in. In either case, Claire will probably not receive the computer she needs for learning.

But let's look at a different scenario, using negotiating skills. When Lisa asks, “What will it take to ensure Claire has a computer in the classroom, dedicated for her use,” there's a different outcome. The special ed director can't say NO, because that's grammatically incorrect! He *has* to tell Lisa something like, “Well, we don't have any money in the budget for that.” Lisa (who has done her homework and knows exactly where she's going with this) continues with, “Yes, I understand the budget's tight. I wonder what it would take to find \$40.00 per month to lease one from Computercom?” Now we're talking! Surely there's \$40.00 per month somewhere: in the school building budget, the district budget, or even in the PTA budget! (As a side note, when are we going to start looking at the many ways a school PTA/PTO

can assist with the inclusion of children with disabilities?)

In some cases, you might need to ask WHAT WILL IT TAKE? numerous times in the same conversation. That's fine—keep doing this until the issue is resolved. Each time you ask WHAT WILL IT TAKE?, you'll learn a bit of information you didn't know before. In your response, acknowledge what the other person said, take the new information and reframe it into the next WHAT WILL IT TAKE? question. And if you feel like a parrot, saying the same phrase over and over again, use questions like, “Perhaps it might be possible to...” or “Why don't we consider...” or something similar.

This strategy can eliminate fighting, nagging, hurt feelings, and more! In addition, it's a technique that can be used with anyone, anytime, anywhere, such as:

WIFE: Honey, what will it take to get the gutters cleaned out this weekend?

DAD: Son, what will it take to make sure you're home on time tonight?

CUSTOMER: What will it take to get a refund or a replacement?

When people with disabilities and family members think of themselves as negotiators, they can move beyond feeling like recipients, beggars, or second-class citizens. *Negotiating, by its nature, presumes equality between two parties.* This strategy can even help us repair damaged relationships, when we ask, “What will it take for us to get along better?” You might be surprised—and pleased—by the response!

What will it take for *you* to try this strategy today and become a negotiator? What have you got to lose?