



Is *Flirtation* an Effective  
Negotiation Tactic?

Whenever I train my Italian students to exchange **civilities** and practice **small talk** in English, I usually mention a few practical situations where these may come in handy: apologizing, introducing, greeting, thanking, negotiating and... **flirting**. To my great amusement, the response I get from my students is almost unfailingly the same: wide-open eyes and a choked 'gulp!' of disbelief. Apparently, flirting is still somewhat viewed as a **norm-breaking behavior** in Italian culture and society.

Why so? Maybe because it bears connotations of **sinfulness, manipulateness** and **moral depravity** – accordingly, most people can't get over the ingrained fear of the possible consequences of flirting, thus preferring to play it safe by avoiding it at all. Whatever the cause behind it, the impression one gets is that flirting is viewed as improper, especially if **the flirter is a woman**, and that any flirtatious attitude may **tarnish the flirter's professional image**.

Preventing the personal from encroaching upon the professional is the golden rule of business – both in terms of financial and of psychological gains. Yet, since negotiating rests upon establishing a relation of mutual trust, utter impersonality may backfire in such a situation. Flirting, by contrast, may help tinge the interaction with an **empathic note**: from both an anthropological and a psychological standpoint, flirting is a powerful **social glue** in that it boosts both parties' self-confidence and tears down the wall of mistrust in a flutter of eyelashes. As such, flirting may prove an effective **trust-building strategy** with one single (but major) downside: misunderstanding. Flirtation can prove healthy and effective on the workplace only as long as both parties involved partake in it in a **playful and light-hearted spirit**, that is, without expectations. So, the secret to enjoy the benefits of this interpersonal exchange is not to make a fuss over it. **Relax: it's just a flirt.**



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