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## Training Senior Leaders Across the WPP Network

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### The problem

WPP Group is an international holding company with 40% of the marketing and media companies in the world. For more than a decade it had seen a threat to both quality and revenues from aggressive negotiation counterparts who demanded (and often won) concessions. To make things worse, routine contract negotiations were undergoing major changes in compensation structures, which created confusion for WPP about options for gain. WPP lacked a unified approach to creating value in negotiations, and difficult negotiations created stress for client relationships and agency leaders.

### What were the traditional solutions?

The traditional solutions involved large scale introductory and largely off-the-shelf training workshops, with the hope that better individual skill at the table would lead to better results. This option was very expensive and would not have addressed some of the contextual problems that many of the agencies faced (e.g. alignment of the negotiation team members; a core process for preparation; defining a clear value proposition and demonstrating it to clients; finding ways to “bet on” performance.)

### What did CBI do instead?

We began by interviewing twenty top WPP executives from across the agencies to determine the best way to help WPP improve its negotiating capacity. Next, we produced a report diagnosing the reasons that client negotiations were sometimes falling short. We worked with internal champions who could reach key leaders and gain the endorsement of WPP’s CEO. We then designed, delivered a tailored workshop for agency leaders around the world. The workshop was designed to do three things:

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1. Introduce participants to the Mutual Gains Approach to negotiation
  2. Present the idea of negotiation as an organizational capability and explain the role that leaders must play in building that capability
  3. Explore ways that WPP and CBI could support agencies as they developed their negotiation capabilities.

More than 500 leaders attended the 12 workshops held in New York, London, Germany, Spain, Latin America, and Asia.

In addition to training senior leaders, CBI trained internal coaches and trainers, conducted case studies, used agency studios and crews to produce two teaching films, and created teaching simulations for use by internal trainers. We also laid out the ways that WPP could increase learning and preparation rigor through the use of on-line tools. Finally, CBI helped WPP senior executives to plan a larger rollout of a branded internal program, ACCORD, to further build negotiation capability in key agencies.

## **Results**

CBI surveyed WPP training participants at intervals following the global workshops. Many negotiators indicated that implementing the Mutual Gains Approach helped them to become more successful negotiators. This new approach also impacted the bottom line. When we interviewed a sample of six trainees, they collectively reported close to a million dollars in savings.

For more information about CBI's customized services for corporate clients, contact [Hal Movius](#).