

in the mix

the art of the deal

After nearly fifty years as an entertainment industry attorney, Eric Weissmann has worked all sides of the negotiating table and earned a reputation for closing deals.

The senior partner with Weissmann, Wolff, Bergman, Coleman, Grodin & Evall of Beverly Hills has gone up against Hollywood studios for actors and directors such as Elizabeth Taylor and Martin Scorsese. At other times, studios such as MGM/UA and Paramount have retained Weissmann as their advocate; in the early 1970s he headed worldwide business affairs for Warner Bros.

The Swiss-born UCLA School of Law grad first learned the ways of Tinseltown in the legal

department of Lew Wasserman's talent agency, MCA Artists, before its merger with Universal. Here's some Weissmann wisdom on the art of negotiation:

• **Talent should never represent themselves.** "No matter how smart you are, you need somebody who has experience," Weissmann says. Unlike professional negotiators, talent generally lack insight into how the opposition thinks and acts. And if negotiations get heated, talent shouldn't be on the firing

line — after all, they'll have to work with these people.

• **A seasoned negotiator can, as necessary, adopt any of three styles:** "The Dominant" (in the animal kingdom, the equivalent is the gorilla beating his chest); "The Submissive" (picking up restaurant checks, inquiring about the health of the family, laying on compliments) and "The Objective" (cool and professional, recognizing that each side has a job to do and not wasting time on posturing or posing).

• **A good negotiator recognizes upfront the value of the**

client and the odds of winning. Talent can't win everything, every time — not if they strive for a long career. "If you call someone a great deal maker, I will call them a great deal breaker," Weissmann says. "If you try to make the best deal each time, you're going to lose half your deals."

• **Up-and-coming talent: be reasonable — unless the other side is not.** "You have to appraise your situation," Weissmann says, then quotes Kenny Rogers: "You've got know when to hold 'em ... know when to fold 'em."
—Jennifer Pendleton