

HOW TO ...

HAGGLE

THERE'S never been a better time to bag a bargain through a bit of judicious haggling. But, even so, most of us still feel too embarrassed to try. Here arch-haggler Derek Arden, a graduate of Harvard Business School and a conference speaker on haggling, tells TESSA CUNNINGHAM how to cut a deal.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

SUCCESSFUL hagglers start work before they even set foot in a shop. Find out the recommended retail price (RRP) of the item you're interested in. Visit rival stores and check internet sites such as www.kelkoo.co.uk to find the very cheapest deal.

You'll naturally expect to pay a little more on the High Street for the convenience of being able to return it easily if there's a problem. But internet prices give a good starting point.

PICK YOUR TARGET

CHOOSE a salesperson who seems friendly and helpful. If they're bored or aloof, they're not going to want to bother getting into a conversation, let alone trying to haggle.

It should be fun for them too. But don't waste your time. Ask early in the conversation: 'Do you have the authority to give discounts?'

If they say 'Yes', you know you're home and dry. If they don't, ask who does and whether you can talk to that person. Remember that some stores — such as electronic giants — have such small profit margins that they rarely discount. And always choose a quiet time to haggle. If the salesman has other customers, he won't be in the right mood.

MAKE IT FUN

HAGGLING should be a pleasant form of negotiation. No one owes you a discount, but if you're charming and likeable, people will warm to you — giving you an instant advantage. First impressions count. Smile. Show interest in the salesperson by starting with small talk — 'Isn't the weather lovely?' 'How's your day been?' — before moving onto the serious business.

ASK NICELY

START by explaining that you really like the dress or camera and want to buy it today. The salesperson will know you are serious and can sense a quick sale. Then explain your 'problem'. It's a little beyond budget.

I often put a big smile on my face and explain: 'My other half would go crazy if I paid that much for it.'

Whether you're serious or not, by that stage they should like you enough to want to do what they can for you.

Or try saying: 'It's a little more than I was expecting to pay. Are you able to help me?' That plays to the universal need to want to be helpful.

TURN THE TABLES

WALK into a car showroom and within a millisecond you will be bombarded by a volley of neuro-linguistic programming techniques. Trained salesmen use NLP to improve



Picture: GETTY IMAGES

communication — and make us do what they want. Well, you can do the same in reverse. The techniques are easy. The key is to build rapport with the other person. You can do this simply by 'mirroring' or copying their body language, so that you appear to be on the same wavelength.

Watch their gestures carefully and listen intently for clues on how close they are coming to softening. It's five times more difficult to lie with body language than with words.

HELP OUT

GIVE the salesman a reason to help you. Offer to pay cash — retailers have to pay a percentage of the sale every time you use a credit card. If you really can't get a discount, suggest a 'sweetener' you might be prepared to accept — such as a free laptop bag, free installation for a washing machine, free service on a car.

In larger stores, the best way to get a good deal is to give the retailer a reason to knock the price down. This can be the classic line about it being cheaper elsewhere — be ready to offer evidence. The item might be damaged, but repairable, particularly clothes. Or you could offer to take ex-display items off their hands. You could even cite student status, which, if accepted, will usually get you around 10 per cent off the original price. When buying more expensive clothes that need altering, try to get the alterations done for free.

BE PREPARED TO WALK AWAY

'SALE ends at 5pm today' is a classic way for shops to try to rush us into buying. Try the same technique in reverse. Make it clear that you have other options, but you are prepared to buy now — at the right price.

Say something like: 'If you can adjust the price a little, I'm happy to do the deal.' If there's no budging, walk away. You can always come back later.

HAGGLING COSTS NOTHING

DON'T expect to win every time. And remember, you have absolutely nothing to lose.

Mouse hunt

If you aren't brave enough to haggle, check out www.moneysupermarket.com for best prices on anything from milk to a car