



# What I learned about **Negotiation** *from* My Mentor and Friend, **Alisa Noda**

**O**n July 3, 2007, Alisa Noda passed away suddenly.

It was difficult to lose someone I looked up to and admired—a friend and a beautiful person. She continues to inspire me in many ways.

Alisa was a Japanese-Canadian lawyer who practised Aboriginal law and who, like all of us, negotiated on a daily basis. I served with Alisa on the National Nikkei Museum and Heritage Centre Board of Directors and saw her negotiation skills in action in many meetings. Here are some techniques I observed her use to negotiate successfully.

## 1. Prepare

No matter what the meeting or negotiation was about, Alisa was always prepared. She did her reading, research, and information-gathering ahead of time. Being prepared allowed Alisa to understand the issues and interests of the other party, as well as her own; ask questions that were helpful to both parties; and put her position forward in a way that made sense in the context of all the information.



## 2. Set a goal and keep focused.

Alisa set goals for the

negotiations, which in turn guided the discussions. She didn't veer from those goals unless she had a very good reason to do so. Once we were on a topic of discussion, Alisa made sure the conversation was kept on track. She was very good at bringing people back to the subject at hand—and especially to the decision that had to be made.

## 3. Keep an Open Mind

Even though she was focused, Alisa also kept an open mind while negotiating. She knew where she wanted to go but if, in the course of negotiations, she received new information or a new perspective, she was willing to look at her goals and revise them if necessary.

## 4. Be Optimistic

Alisa's optimism was key to her success in negotiation. Every negotiation has its ups and downs. At times, it appears things are hopeless—the matter will never get resolved. Alisa maintained a spirit of optimism, a “we can do it!” attitude that kept the parties encouraged and willing to continue with the negotiation.

## 5. Be Confident

Alisa exuded an air of confidence in negotiation. Grounding her confidence were her humility, her willingness to admit she didn't know something, and her willingness to learn. Because of these qualities, people knew she was genuine and that her confidence was real.

## 6. Close the Deal

Alisa was amazing at getting things done. In terms of negotiation, that meant she made sure that at the appropriate time, she closed the deal. The appropriate time could be a few minutes, in one case—and years, in another. Regardless, Alisa was skilled at knowing when the right time was. That allowed her to move onto the next project in her busy, fulfilled, and love-filled life of work, family, friends, and community service.

Alisa was a role model in her negotiation and leadership skills and continues to influence many people's lives, including mine. I miss her and count myself lucky that I knew her while she was here among us. ▲

**Yuki Matsuno is a mediator, facilitator, and lawyer. She works with families, organizations, and government clients by guiding difficult conversations and assisting parties to come to resolutions that work for everyone. Yuki is a Provincial Court (Civil) Mediator, an accredited Law Society of BC Family Law Mediator, a member of the BC Civil Mediator Roster, and a member of the Employment Standards Tribunal. For the past several years, she has had the pleasure of coaching BC Notary students in the subject of mediation.**

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