

# The Ten Essential Elements of Effective Agreements

**1. Intent and Vision:** This is the big picture of what you intend to accomplish together. The first step is sharing a big picture of what you are doing together as a context for the details. The clearer and more specific the measurable detail of desired outcomes, the more likely you will attain them as visualized.

**2. Roles:** The duties, responsibilities, and commitment of everyone must be clearly defined. Everyone necessary to achieve the desired results must be part of the agreement.

**3. Promises:** The agreement contains clear promises so that everyone knows who will do what. With specific promises, you can tell if the actions will get you to the desired results and what actions are missing.

**4. Time and Value:** All promises have deadlines for completion. These are called “by-whens”--by when will you do this and by when will you do that. The length of time the agreement will be effective is also important. Value is an understanding of who gets what for what. Is the exchange satisfactory? Is it fair? Does it provide adequate incentive? Clarity is critical because everyone must anticipate satisfaction or someone will sabotage the transaction. Remember that value has many forms, and it is essential to understand the different kinds of value people will be satisfied with.

**5. Measurements of satisfaction:** To prevent disagreement, the evidence that everyone has achieved his or her objectives must be clear, direct, and measurable. The element is critical because it eliminates conflict about the ultimate question--Did you accomplish what you set out to do?

**6: Concerns, risks, and fears:** Bringing as-yet unspoken fears and risks to the surface provides the opportunity to anticipate and prevent some of the challenges likely to come up during the collaboration. This discussion will deepen the partnership being created, or it will let you know this is not a partnership you want. This is where you get to say what’s still creating “chatter” about moving forward, and others get to respond and take care of any fear.

**7. Renegotiation/dissolution:** No matter how optimistic and clear you are, it will become necessary to renegotiate promises and conditions of satisfaction. Circumstances change, and it is critical to anticipate this at the beginning so the relationship can evolve and prosper. It is also crucial to provide everyone with an exit strategy that they can follow with dignity. Anyone who feels imprisoned in a transaction, partnership, or relationship cannot make his or her maximum contribution to the enterprise. It is essential to recognize that the relationship is much more important than the agreement. Things keep moving forward if the functional relationships are intact, not because of a lengthy legal contract.

**8. Consequences:** There are two kinds of consequences. Although you may not want to police the agreement, it is important to agree on consequences for anyone who breaks a promise. Equally, if not more important, it is essential to understand the consequences to everyone (including people who are not even part of the agreement) if the collaboration does not accomplish its purpose.

**9. Conflict resolution:** Conflicts and disagreements arise when people work together. If you agree to step into the attitude of resolution, and have an agreed process that leads to a new agreement, resolving conflicts will be “normalized.”

**10. Agreement?** When you have dialoged about the first nine elements, it's time to ask whether you trust moving forward. Everyone ought to be satisfied and ready to take action. Now is the time to work on the agreement until you are satisfied that you have an agreement. If you're not clear that you do have an agreement you can trust, then you don't! Unless and until you are satisfied, do not move into action. You will not have a shared vision to work toward. Are you ready to commit to embracing the future as a new opportunity that can be enjoyed? This attitude lubricates the collaboration. Once you have an agreement, someone (or everyone) must take responsibility for stewarding the project, ensuring the agreement is honored and the intended results are obtained. While this is everyone's responsibility, it is sometimes important enough to have a point person responsible for making sure the agreement is implemented. One of the questions you ask in determining if an agreement is legally binding is whether there was ever a meeting of the minds. To have a true agreement for results, you also have to have a meeting of the hearts