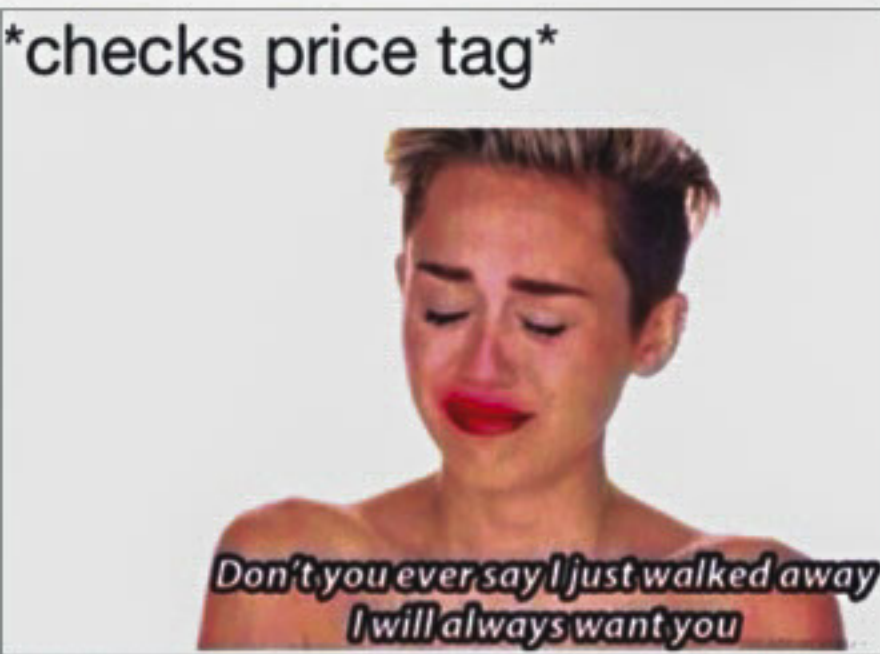


THE ART OF BARGAINING



MYAT "MOE MONEY" KHAING

I once agreed on a fare of Tk 30 from Shahbagh to TSC. Don't judge me. I was at Dhaka University for the first time. When my friends came to know this, they mocked me and I know you have been in my position too.

From Nilkhet to Jamuna Future Park and from rickshaw to CNG fares, life has been all about keeping a straight face while you fail miserably at pretending to be a pro. Here I am, providing tips to save you money so that you can virtually treat me at an overhyped and overpriced restaurant.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Not everything can be haggled. Products like electronics are strictly sold at fixed prices. While some fixed prices could still be negotiated, be sure about it to avoid embarrassing yourself. Shopkeepers may say "Bhai, lekhai ase fixed price" on your face.

Ask your friends about their experiences and the prices they have bought those goods at from different places. Set a price you will not exceed. Fares are fixed on public buses. If you're in a new location, ask your friends the usual fares for different destinations or ask the conductor.

Pro-tip: Take a friend along in case you aren't confident enough. Feel free to post inquiries on prices on Facebook groups like 'Desperately Seeking Dhaka'.

THE RIGHT TIME TO STRIKE

Shopping is for any time, every day. But believe me when I say this: shopkeepers do not want to let go of their first customer. They do take the proverb "Morning shows the day" seriously.

They also go easy on the last customers. The effect is evidenced on the last day before Eid/Puja.

Most CNG/rickshaw drivers increase the fare when they realise you're alone and see no other vehicle around to take you. Act confident and nonchalant.

Pro-tip: Don't get yourself killed. If the fare is unbelievably low, they're either muggers or they don't know where they are going.

POKER FACE

Everyday commodities that can be bought at fairly cheap prices are easy to bargain for. If you dress down, sellers will logically expect you to have fewer bucks in your wallet.

On the contrary, if you are shopping for expensive products, dress well. Sellers will take you seriously and convince you to buy their products.

Pro-tip: While you dress ordinary, play the "student manush" trick. Especially when you use a public transport, you get away with almost half the fare.

BROWSING

If you're not particularly looking for a product, skim through the display. But do not focus on something for too long. It makes you seem more interested and willing to compromise on a higher price. Cruise the aisles and look at different products while you wait for an employee to approach you.

Pro-tip: Build a rapport with the seller. It always works.

GO LOW

When you state a price/fare at the outset, you lessen your bargaining power because the amount only goes up from there. Ask casually.

Pro-tip: If s/he doesn't budge and you have to throw a num-

ber, start really low.

PLAY IT COOL

Feel free to react and show astonishment even if you have no idea what the price should be. Roll your eyes. And while you do that, be confident. Refer to other shops where you can get the same product at a more affordable price (don't lie, though).

The seller might go on to say that there's a difference in quality between the products. Respond to it by saying that you'd like to buy from him only if you get the absolute best price.

Pro-tip: Point out scuffs and scratches. Once it gets the seller's attention, they start to fear other customers' knowing about it. Hence, they will get into negotiation mode.

MENTAL CALCULATION

The usual drill is to half the price asked for. But often, sellers triple the price so that they can still make profit when they sell at half of the price. In the end, it's your call. You cannot take back your words. Be confident and make eye contact when you state the price you're willing to buy at.

Rickshawalas charge maximum 20-30 taka extra. You may start 20-30 taka less if you have no idea.

Pro-tip: Be reasonable. Remember, the seller needs to make a profit too.

FEEL FREE TO WALK AWAY

Both of you are playing the adamant game at this



point. When you ask one last time whether the price could be further negotiated and the answer is a no, walk away. You are likely to have more options. In most cases, the trader will call you back.

Move on to the next rickshaw/CNG. They are willing to give you the service at your demanded price when they see more competitors.

COMPLIMENT AWAY:

A number of sellers in Bangladesh go on saying, in a regretful manner, how considerate they have been during the sale. Do not argue with numbers.

Say in a sympathetic tone how the new meter-fare rule is encouraging more people to use CNG auto rickshaws. Tell them you will come again to their shop. Ensure them that you will tell your friends and family about the shop.

Pro-tip: Take their business card. It shows your words are sincere. In case of transports, you can give a tip.

Don'ts

- Don't be too loud or annoying.
- Don't haggle when prices are displayed.
- NEVER haggle at restaurants.
- Don't haggle if the other person is unwilling.
- Don't quibble over insignificant amounts.
- Don't take it too seriously.

Haggling isn't about taking advantage of someone. Neither is it an opportunity to get away with goods at unreasonable price. It's a skill, which when mastered, saves you the money to help you buy whatever you love. And you may use this adroitness this time too. It's like an endless cycle and only practice can make you perfect.

Myat Moe is an occasional philosopher whose favorite pastime is confusing people with her nationality. Reach her at 145michelle@gmail.com

