

## **The Art of Questioning in Negotiation**

Of all the tools in your negotiation toolbox, questioning is probably the one that is most often used by great negotiators. Questions create involvement, guide the conversation, set the pace of the conversation, clarify statements and objections, determine beliefs, attitudes and values, uncover the party's thoughts and needs and show your sincerity. Neil Rackham and John Carlisle observed hundreds of negotiators in action in an attempt to discover what it takes to be a top negotiator. Their key finding was that skilled negotiators ask more than twice as many questions as average negotiators.

If you are probing for lots of information, it is best to keep your questions open-ended. The more open-ended the question, the more information you are likely to get. This questioning strategy deters a person from being able to answer simply "yes" or "no." With open-ended questions, the other person will be doing most of the talking. Then her/his answers can lead into more detailed questions without your seeming intrusive.

Be prepared to field questions that the other party will ask and want to know. Brainstorm ahead of time for possible questions, scenarios and answers you will encounter. There will always be tough questions. If you are the expert, you are expected to know the answers. Obviously, if you don't know the answer, you should not make one up. How do you save yourself from losing credibility? One way is to throw the question back and ask for her/his insights or opinions. Another strategy is to ask to have the question repeated. This stalling tactic gives you more time to think of a response. Restate the question and ask if it is correct. Such a strategy also helps you make sure you understand the question.

Remember that the person with whom you're negotiating may answer all your questions but still hold back pertinent information simply because you did not directly ask for it. Your negotiation partner is not going to volunteer crucial information just out of charity. Hence, it is imperative that you thoroughly prepare in advance so you know *when* to ask, *what* to ask and *who* to ask. If you think of something important that the other party did not disclose, you'll have all the more reason to be watchful and wary.

## **Handling Objections**

When you get people involved in the negotiation process, you will almost invariably get some objections. The way in which you handle objections will correlate with how mentally involved people become with your message. The better you become at handling objections, the more persuasive you will become at negotiating. The key to great negotiation is anticipating all objections before you hear them. Fielding questions and handling objections can make or break you as a negotiator. Such skills will help you in every aspect of your life.

### **Here are some tips on how to effectively handle objections:**

1. Find out if the objection is something you can solve or compromise.
2. Let the other side(s) state their objections. Hear them out completely, without interruption.
3. Always ask your opposing team(s) to restate their key points. Letting them speak, particularly if they are upset, drains emotion from their objections. Allowing them to voice their concerns also gives you time to think of a response.
4. Skillful negotiators will always find some point of agreement with their counterparts. It's important to recognize the apprehension or objections people have instead of ignoring them.
3. Stay calm. Scientific tests have proven that calmly stated facts are more effective in getting people to change their minds than being emotional is.
4. Don't be arrogant or condescending.

5. Give the person room to save face. People will often change their minds and agree with you later. It could just be that they did not have all the facts, that they misunderstood or that you didn't explain everything correctly.

**Agreement: Win–Win Solutions**

The agreement is the most important part of your negotiation. It is highly recommended that you have the resulting agreement put in writing, including what the consequences will be if either side does not live up to its end of the bargain. This is what the whole negotiation process is about: finding the win–win solution. Coming to a resolution does not have to take weeks, months or years. Agreeable negotiations can finish in days or even hours.

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