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## **Ask What, Not Why**

The most effective way to gain information during negotiation is the most obvious: Ask questions. Skilled negotiators ask more than twice the number of questions than average negotiators do during a negotiation. They probe to clarify issues and to understand underlying interests that drive the position a party has taken. But this skill is more than just asking questions, or a negotiation could quickly devolve into an interrogation.

Questions used in negotiation tend to be open-ended, probing for information that will provide clues for creative solutions. Professors Michael L. Spangle and Myra Isenhardt of Regis University note that *what* is asked more often than *why*. *What* questions promote descriptive responses that uncover hidden information. *Why* questions tend to be confrontational, promoting judgment, evaluation, and defensive responses. The questions we choose depend on the phase and context of the negotiation. Here are a few examples:

### **Information sharing:**

1. What is important to you?
2. To help me understand, prioritize your interests for me.
3. What is the problem as you see it?
4. What would you like to know about us in this deal?

### **Problem solving:**

1. Are you willing to do problem solving on areas where we appear to have differences?
2. Can we break the problem into smaller parts?
3. Is there a better way we can do this?
4. What are we trying to achieve by . . . ?

### **Option generating:**

1. Would you consider . . . ?
2. What if . . . ?
3. What do we need to do to make this work for you?
4. Can you reframe your proposal in a different way?

### **Settlement:**

1. Are you willing to give a little on this issue so we can finalize this agreement today?
2. Do you see any problems later if we choose this course of action?
3. What will you need from me in order to sell this agreement to your group?