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How To Go Below The Line

Interests (desires and concerns that motivate people) are not always expressed in a negotiation. Instead, people talk about positions (something they have decided upon, such as how to divide the value in dispute). Our interests are what cause us to decide on our positions. Use active listening to probe beneath the parties' stated positions to determine their underlying interests:

1. Pay attention to the speaker and acknowledge the message. Don't mentally prepare a rebuttal. "Listen" to the speaker's body language.
2. Be aware of your own body language, facial expressions and tone of voice. Have an open posture, and make small verbal comments to encourage the speaker to continue.
3. Provide feedback. Use questions to motivate a discussion and to clarify what you hear to increase your understanding, without arguing. Questions that restate and reflect on the speaker's comments (without judgment or reframing it to your advantage) acknowledge the emotions and needs beneath the statement. For example:

"Tell me about" (Encouraging)

"Can you help me understand your concern with . . .?" (Clarifying)

"What I'm hearing is" "It sounds like you are saying" (Reflecting)

"You said that you would like" (Restating)

Take the other party's interests into account, and they will be more likely to listen to your interests and the options you suggest for a successful resolution.