

The Power of Asking the Right Questions: *How to Steer Any Diplomatic Conversation*

Columbia Law School Mediation Clinic

In partnership with UNITAR

May 5, 2020

Welcome & Introductions

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Goals for the Day

- **Learning to Use Questions to Steer Conversations**
 - **Identifying Different Types of Questions**
 - **Determining When and How to Use Different Types of Questions**
 - **Responding Effectively to Answers**

Diplomacy and the Power of Questions

***What can you achieve
by asking questions?***

Agenda

Introduction

- The Power of Questions

Tools for Information Gathering

- Types of Questions
- Active Listening
- Summarizing & Reframing

How to Ask the Right Questions

- Framing Your Questions
- The Mirror & the Window

Conclusion

- Questions & Reflection
- Thanks
- *Ask for More*



Information- Gathering Tools

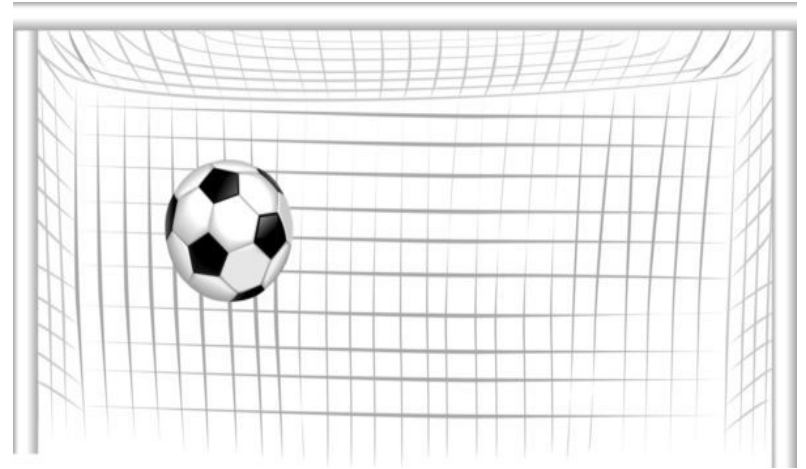
Types of Questions

Active Listening

Summarizing & Reframing

Purpose of Questions

- Clarifying
- Focusing
- Stimulating
- Suggesting
- Building relationships
- Encouraging participation
- Exploring and evaluating alternatives
- Moving toward closure



Types of Questions

Open Questions	Closed Questions
Cannot be answered with yes or no	Limited response/point of view
Allows respondent to express point of view	Answers are either right or wrong
Can be time-consuming	Quick responses
Builds trust and allows unrestrained response	Can feel interrogating or threatening

Exercise: Are These Questions Open or Closed?

1. Will you attend the meeting today?
2. How will you meet the financial targets?
3. Did you reflect on your goals?
4. What does your organization need?
5. Would you be willing to renew our agreement?

When to Ask Open Questions

Usage	Example
To develop an open-ended conversation	<i>How did you approach this task?</i> <i>How do you remain focused on your work?</i>
To find out more about a person: their wants, needs, thoughts, and beliefs	<i>What motivated you to make that decision?</i> <i>Why is that so important to you?</i>

When to Ask Closed Questions

Usage	Example
Testing understanding (asking yes/no questions)	<i>So, you want to move into our apartment—right?</i>
For setting up a desired positive or negative frame of mind in them	<i>Are you happy with the current state of the Global Compact on Migration?</i> <i>Would you like to focus on the Gender-Related SDGs?</i>
Moving to action (seeking assent)	<i>If I can deliver this tomorrow, will you sign for it now?</i>

Active Listening

- Be genuinely **curious**
- Listen to **understand** participants':
 - Concerns
 - Needs
 - Wants
- **NOT** to prepare your response

Non-Verbal

- Stop talking
- Eye contact
- Posture/facial expression

Verbal

- Acknowledge what is being said
- Acknowledge feelings
- Clarify
- Summarize interest, issues, and feelings

Summarizing

SUMMARIZING

Repeating the **essence** of what the person said, focusing on the issues in the conflict and the person's interests and feelings

- Use phrases like:
 - “If I understand you correctly. . .”
 - “What I’m hearing from you is. . .”
- When summarizing two or more people, highlight any **common ground** they have

Reframing

REFRAMING

Removing hurtful or escalating words but **keeping the force** of what the person said

Statement:

→ “I’ve asked you for this a thousand times now. Why can’t you ever do your job right?”

Reframe:

→ “I hear that you’re on a tight deadline, and it’s really important that I get this to you on time. Can you tell me more about the timeline we’re working with?”

Let's Practice

EXAMPLE

“We’ve tried to work with the local community but we can’t. They’re lazy. They don’t communicate well. We keep trying but they keep messing up.”

EFFECTIVE SUMMARY

So you’re saying that you have been trying to work with the local community, but you have been having difficulty communicating, and you feel like the community isn’t contributing equally.

Asking the Right Questions

Framing Your Questions

The Mirror and the Window

Framing Your Questions

Avoid making **assumptions**.

“John didn’t finish an important research project before a big meeting and made the team look bad.”

→ Assumption: John doesn’t care about his work or his team. John is selfish.

Did you just ignore the fact that this
was due today?

→

Tell me what happened with the research project.

“Jane is always negative in meetings. She shoots down suggestions and is not helpful.”

→ Assumption: Jane is a bad person who does not want to contribute in a helpful way.

Why do you always shoot down other
people’s suggestions?

→

Tell me what you think would be a good alternative.

Framing Your Questions: Examples

Aim for **open questions** using **neutral language**.

Why are you so fixated on this point?

Help me understand what is important to you.

Did you remember to discuss this with her?

Tell me about your conversation with her.

What's the big deal? This seems like an ancillary issue.

What are your concerns?

Don't you think the proposed plan will only make things worse?

What are your thoughts on the proposed plan?

Why didn't you approach it this way instead?

How do you think can we improve our approach next time?

Aren't you concerned he won't respond well to that suggestion?

How do you think he will respond to that suggestion?

The Mirror & the Window

- Questions to ask yourself
- Questions to ask others

Why is it important to do both?

The Ask for More framework

Using questions to guide your negotiation

The Mirror & the Window

What does asking *myself* questions have to do with diplomatic conversations?

A lot. Research finds a definite link between self-awareness and negotiation proficiency.

Asking the right questions helps us cultivate self-awareness and knowledge.

How will asking *other people* questions help me navigate diplomatic conversations?

Asking the right questions helps us get the information we need to build better relationships and craft better agreements.

The Mirror



- Negotiation starts before you sit down with the other side—you need to steer your own internal conversation first.
- Ask yourself open questions to clarify your own goals, interests, emotions and solutions.
- Your source of power in negotiation is not bluster but knowledge.

Mirror Questions

Questions you ask yourself to find clarity on who you are and what you want to achieve

Examples:

What's the problem I want to solve?

What do I need?

What's the first step?

The Window



- Ask open questions in order to create trust, gather information, and design better solutions.
- Listening more than you talk generates better deals and more value.
- You also generate relationships that create more longer-term, mutual gain.

Window Questions

Questions you ask someone else to understand their perspective

Examples:

What do you need?

What does that look like?

What are your concerns?

Wrapping Up

Reflections

Thank You

Ask For More

Reflection/Questions

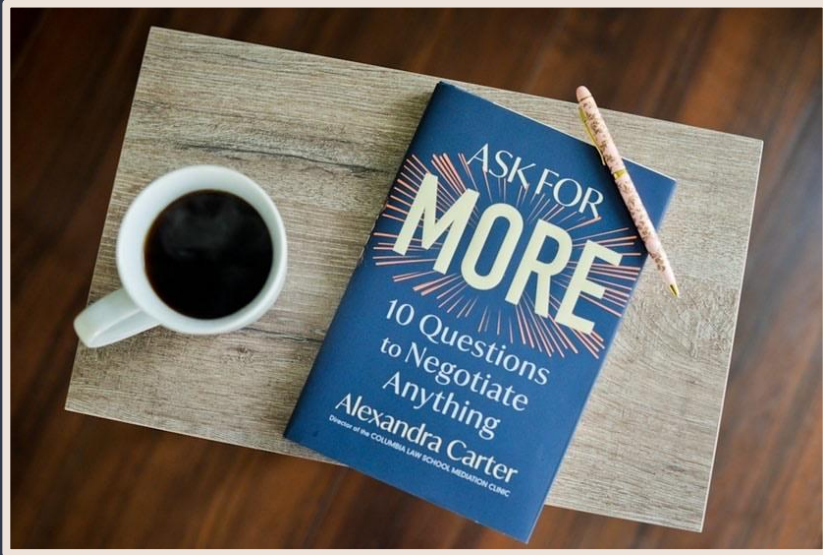
- What questions do you have?
- What is one skill you're excited to use moving forward?
- What are some concerns you have?

Thank You!

A Reminder of the Power of Questions

- ❖ It has NEVER been more important to lead your important conversations with questions.
- ❖ The right questions can help us achieve the personal clarity we need to navigate uncertain times.
- ❖ Asking the right questions can also give us a greater understanding of others in times of crisis.

Ask for More



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