

ASK FOR MORE

10 Questions to Negotiate Anything

ALEXANDRA CARTER

ALEXANDRA CARTER is a Clinical Professor of Law at Columbia Law School, where she is also Director of the Mediation Clinic. She has helped thousands of people improve their negotiation skills through her classes at Columbia. She is also a world-class negotiation trainer for the United Nations, where she has taught diplomats from more than 80 nations how to enhance their negotiation skills. Alexandra Carter worked as an attorney and as an analyst for Goldman Sachs before teaching at Columbia Law School. She is a graduate of Georgetown University and Columbia Law School, speaks fluent Chinese, and was a Fulbright Scholar in Taiwan.

The author's website is at: www.alexcarterasks.com.

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MAIN IDEA

The best way to negotiate is to ask questions. Negotiation is any conversation in which you are steering the relationship, and the best way to do that is by asking ten questions – five for yourself and five for the party you're negotiating with:



Negotiation is never a zero-sum game. Nor is it something the loudest voices dominate. It's an essential skill that can add value to your life, your career, and also your everyday life. You'll get far more value by asking the right questions of the person you're negotiating with than you ever will by arguing with them. Ask questions and prosper.

"Most people think negotiation is mostly backward-looking, but negotiation is steering. It is creative. It is generative. Ultimately, negotiation is how we create our future. Sometimes we do that by solving a problem before anyone else even comprehends it. That creative place is where negotiation becomes innovation."

– Alexandra Carter

The Ten Questions



Look in the mirror Pages 2 - 5

Before you enter into any negotiation, take thirty minutes to first ask yourself five good questions. If you do that, you'll end up getting better results, and feel more confident the deal you're striking is what you want. Don't forget to write down and follow up on the answers you give to these five mirror questions:

- 1 What problem do I need to solve?
- 2 What do I need to get out of this?
- 3 What do I feel about this?
- 4 How have I handled this before?
- 5 What's the first step?

Look out the window. Pages 5 - 8

The key to negotiating a great deal is to see the other party clearly. To achieve that, you need to ask some questions and then listen empathetically, even if they are your adversary. Try and discern their needs, concerns, and feelings. If you can do that, you'll be a better negotiator. The five window questions are:

- 6 Tell me?
- 7 What do you need?
- 8 What are your concerns?
- 9 Have you handled this before?
- 10 What's the first step?

The Ten Questions



Before you enter into any negotiation, take thirty minutes to first ask yourself five good questions. If you do that, you'll end up getting better results, and feel more confident the deal you're striking is what you want. Don't forget to write down and follow up on the answers you give to these five mirror questions:

1. What problem do I need to solve?
2. What do I need to get out of this?
3. What do I feel about this?
4. How have I handled this before?
5. What's the first step?

1 What problem do I need to solve?

Clarifying the problem you're trying to solve when you negotiate is the starting point for every good negotiation. Albert Einstein famously noted if he had an hour to solve a problem, he would spend fifty-five minutes analyzing the problem and then five minutes thinking about solutions. If you want to steer a negotiation productively, you first need to correctly define the problem you're trying to solve.

"Most people think that the fun part of negotiation is figuring out the solution. Nope. This—defining your problem—is the juicy work. Once you learn how to define a problem, you'll find how incredibly satisfying, creative, and even fun it can be. Defining the problem helps you create the solution."

– Alexandra Carter

An interesting example of the importance of accurately figuring out what problem you're trying to solve arose when the non-profit Attendance Works analyzed why more than 8 million students miss so many days at school they become classified as "chronic absenters".

Everyone assumed the problem was the kids didn't like school, but Attendance Works found many kids did not attend school because their clothes weren't clean. They didn't want to feel embarrassed in front of their friends. Schools which teamed up with local businesses to provide clothes-washing services saw attendances jump from 46 to 84 percent.

To define the problem at hand clearly and concisely:

1. *Take a piece of paper and write down the exact problem you want to solve* – so you're dealing with something concrete, not abstract.
2. *Take what is written and summarize it in one sentence* – so you have a clear, concise aim for the negotiation.
3. *Change anything which is backward-looking and negative to forward-looking and positive* – so you focus on what you want in the future rather than being trapped in the past. For example, "Our junior employee satisfaction rating is low" should become "We need to achieve high junior employee satisfaction levels".
4. *Take your sentence and change it into a question* – by adding how, what, who, or when. "What can we do to achieve high junior employee satisfaction levels?"
5. *Revise your question to broaden it* – to reflect the true bigger picture issues at play here. "What can we do to make this a great place to work, and where achievers will want to come and stay?"

"Creating is not a result of genius, unconscious incubation, or aha! moments. It is a result of thinking: a series of mental steps consisting of problem, solution, repeat."

– Kevin Ashton, author

"Whatever you're facing, you now hold in your hands the tool to help you break through: Ten questions that will help you negotiate anything."

– Alexandra Carter

"When you change your questions, you change the conversation."

– Alexandra Carter

"We make our world significant by the courage of our questions and by the depth of our answers."

– Carl Sagan

2 What do I need to get out of this?

Needs dominate everything a human does. They are the driving force behind how everyone behaves. Needs influence every negotiation whether you realize it or not. Therefore, it makes sense to pause before any negotiation and do a gut check to clarify exactly what your real needs are.



It's all too easy to confuse your needs with your wants and desires. To get your needs in focus, try this:

1. *Take a piece of paper* – and write down your initial answer to the question "What do I need?" Take five minutes to write down everything that comes to mind without censorship. Remind yourself that needs are the reasons why you make demands, not the demands themselves.
2. *Divide your list into two buckets or categories* – tangibles and intangibles. Make a fresh list of your tangible needs and your intangible needs.
3. *Now take your tangibles list* – and for each item ask "What makes this important?" and "What does this represent for me?" Write down your answers to those questions because this is getting to the why. You're heading towards understanding your deepest needs and values. You should also ponder the question: "How else might I fulfill my need for _____?"
4. *Then turn to your intangibles list* – and for each item ask: "What would that look like?" Write down your answers to that follow-up question. Then ask: "How else might I _____?"

Note that money counts as a basic human need because it allows you to buy the necessities of life. Money can be a tangible or an intangible need, dependant on your perspective. Explore what that would look like for you. Knowing what you actually need will be enormously helpful in any negotiation.

By the way, if you get stuck and can't come up with any specific needs, think about whatever you find intolerable about your situation and flip it around. Write down the opposite and go from there. Just doing this will probably clarify things much more.

"Needs are the reasons why we make demands. When you uncover your needs, you get valuable information that helps you and the other person have a more successful negotiation."

– Alexandra Carter

Understanding human needs is an essential negotiation skill. Scientists and experts in this field typically organize those needs into numerous categories like this:

- **Physical Needs** – food, clothing, shelter, sleep, sex, air, water, etc.
- **Safety Needs** – security, economic stability.
- **Psychological and Emotional Needs** – love, belonging, acceptance, affiliation, dignity, pride, achievement, reputation, sense of accomplishment.
- **Self-direction Needs** – freedom, autonomy.
- **Transcendence Needs** – religious faith, service to others, the pursuit of science.
- **Cognitive Needs** – knowledge, understanding, curiosity, predictability.
- **Aesthetic Needs** – appreciation, balance, form, etc.
- **Self-actualization Needs** – self-fulfillment, personal growth, transformative experiences.

Everyone (including you) will prioritize those needs differently. As you look in the mirror and try to understand your needs, separate what you think from what other people believe you should need. Be clear about what your actual needs are.

3 What do I feel about this?

"When I first studied negotiation, my mentor, Carol Liebman, taught me that feelings are facts. She did not mean to say that feelings are as objective a reality as time, weight or temperature, but rather that they are real, they exist, and they must be dealt with in any negotiation. Feelings shape our perception of reality and our decision-making at every turn."

– Alexandra Carter

Feelings are always going to be an integral part of every negotiation. They will impact your decision-making, and all your other abilities. Even when you're making a negotiation on behalf of an organization rather than yourself, you will need to understand and deal with feelings.

Always take a gut check and identify honestly how you are feeling as you prep for any negotiation. Why?

1. *This is important data to have* – it will help you understand your own priorities before the negotiation begins.
2. *You'll craft better solutions* – by harnessing your feelings rather than ignoring them. A good question to ponder is: "What would help eliminate or at least reduce my feeling of ____ in this negotiation?" Just working through that question will frequently lead to some concrete ideas for how to move forward.
3. *You minimize the opportunity for your underlying feelings to sideline your negotiation* – by acknowledging them and getting them out in the open first. If you try and suppress your emotions, it might be like having a smoldering volcano lurking in the background ready to erupt at the slightest provocation. Identifying your feelings, and then handling them properly, can help you harness their power so you achieve great results.

Just writing down your feelings as you prep for a negotiation is helpful. Do this with a mindset that you're connecting to your feelings so you can find the fun, the joy or the excitement that is on offer here – that is, so you can connect to your positive emotions.

If you're stuck trying to figure out how you really feel, try going through this list of the most common feelings highly experienced negotiators sometimes have:

▪ Anger	▪ Gratitude	▪ Rage
▪ Anxiety	▪ Grief	▪ Regret
▪ Belonging	▪ Guilt	▪ Rejection
▪ Betrayal	▪ Happiness	▪ Relief
▪ Blame	▪ Horror	▪ Sadness
▪ Calm	▪ Humiliated	▪ Shame
▪ Confusion	▪ Hurt	▪ Stress
▪ Contempt	▪ Jealous	▪ Stuck
▪ Disgust	▪ Joy	▪ Surprise
▪ Empathy	▪ Judgment	▪ Sympathy
▪ Fear	▪ Loneliness	▪ Triumph
▪ Excited	▪ Love	▪ Vulnerable
▪ Frustration	▪ Pride	▪ Worry

Go through that list and see if you agree you're feeling one of these emotions, or a mix of a few different emotions. You can also go back to your needs (tangible or intangible) to try and put your finger on what you're feeling. The two most common hidden emotions tend to be guilt and fear. These are the two emotions which most often blow up negotiations, so take care to identify whether guilt or fear are present.

"As a general principle, I believe in transparency during negotiation. Clear communication helps you create more value. And expressing positive emotions like compassion, excitement, or pride have been shown to help build a connection with the other party and increase the chance that they want to help you achieve your goals, as well as their own."

– Alexandra Carter

"Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate."

– John F. Kennedy

4 How have I handled this before?

One of the best ways to prep for a negotiation is to ask: "How have I handled this successfully in the past?" If you can mine your past for clues on how you handled comparable challenges, you can put yourself in a positive mindset for today's negotiations. Success always leaves clues.

If you do this, several good things will happen:

1. *You'll be able to place today's negotiations into context* – which in turn will make you more likely to achieve a better outcome in the current negotiation. Having a powerful positive anchor is great because it will launch you into the future in the best way possible.
2. *Remembering your prior successes can generate some very worthwhile data* – you can recall good strategies that delivered in the past and can work again.
3. *Having a positive frame of reference will prime you to think creatively* – because you'll feel better and more empowered. Creativity is important in most negotiations and the more you have, the better it generally turns out for you.

It really helps if you turn your past successes into a kind of Rocky-style montage that you run through in your mind. Think back to how you felt, and what success sounded like and felt like. Relive the joy and sense of achievement as you shook on the great deals you've made in the past. Add some background music to your mental movie. All of this will prime you to do better in your upcoming negotiation, so it's time well spent.

If you don't have any spectacular successes to recall, you might be able to think back to a situation which had some of the elements but not all. Count that as good ammunition for a positive attitude in your current negotiation. Most people have more success stories in their past than they realize at first.

"Occasionally, I get someone who tells me they can't think of a success. At all. Sometimes people, no matter how successful or accomplished they appear to be from the outside, have difficulty describing their own work as successful. They may attribute the outcome to other

people ("It was a team effort") or luck ("I was in the right place at the right time"). For others, their standard for what counts as a success is so high as to exclude... well, everything (e.g., "I submitted my op-ed to multiple major newspapers. One of them snapped it up right away, but cut it down significantly to be printed as a letter."). And still others, including Michelle Obama and Sheryl Sandberg, have described suffering from a well-known phenomenon called "impostor syndrome," in which instead of considering yourself a success, you're just waiting for the world to recognize you for the fraud you know you are."

– Alexandra Carter

If this is you:

- Be aware that you're doing this, and feel free to stop immediately.
- Try speaking with a friend or colleague and get their ideas about your true contributions. They might have a clearer picture than you do.

"It might seem counterintuitive to learn how to negotiate by asking questions. Twenty years ago, before I first studied conflict resolution, I assumed that negotiation meant winning points, or making demands. But two decades later, I've learned something remarkably simple from having resolved hundreds of conflicts as a trained mediator: you get more value in negotiation by asking than you do from arguing."

– Alexandra Carter

"Having worked with thousands of negotiators over the course of my career, I can tell immediately who the experts in the room are. Expert negotiators know that their greatest source of strength in negotiation is not bluster but knowledge. Expert negotiation requires you to understand yourself and someone else well enough to conduct a conversation that produces value for both parties. But most people don't ask the right questions to acquire that knowledge."

– Alexandra Carter

"The best negotiators and leaders are the ones who ask the right questions and therefore get the right information to help them make better deals."

– Alexandra Carter

5 What's the first step?

To end your self-examination phase, start designing your ideal future. Figure out what is the first step you want the other party to take to move them in the right direction. Doing this is important for two very good reasons:

1. *Focusing on the first step forward will build momentum* – and that momentum can then motivate everyone to take many subsequent steps forward. Many times just getting someone to take the first step will focus and organize their thoughts so they can keep moving forward on their own power.
2. *Many negotiations are cumulative* – and if you can get people to successfully take the first step, they will then agree to take the next four or five as well. Taking action and moving forward can have an amazing clarification effect that is well worth taking advantage of.

"In order to figure out the best first step for you to take, you need to do the work of figuring out where you want to go, what you need, what you're feeling, and how you have been successful in the past. Answering all these questions prepares you to answer this final question and help you solve your issue."

– Alexandra Carter

1. What problem do I need to solve?
2. What do I need to get?
3. What do I feel about this?
4. How have I handled this before?
5. What's the first step?

Taking each of those in-the-mirror questions in turn:

1. *Review your problem or your goal* – and make sure you understand exactly what you're trying to negotiate. Doing this should bring to mind some logical steps forward, any of which you might reasonably choose as your first step.

2. *Review your needs* – which will likely be a list of intangibles and tangibles. Go back to exploring "What would that look like?" for you. Think about what first steps would see those needs being met. Consider every idea, even something that seems crazy or impractical. Think about what outcomes would fully meet your needs so you have clarity and something to aim for.
3. *Revisit how you feel about the negotiation* – because both positive and negative feelings can help you craft better decisions. Ask: "What would eliminate my negative feelings here?" Use that as an idea generator for the way forward. You should also ask: "What concrete steps could I take to increase my joy about this?"
4. *Consider a prior success* – and use that as inspiration and motivation. Look at the steps you took in the past which led to a great outcome you want to repeat. Identify mistakes of the past and clarify what you can do better. Figure out what to replicate and what to avoid.
5. *Identify a good first step* – a small step in the right direction that will build momentum for more action in the future. With any luck, you'll actually be able to come up with a number of options for moving forward.

"Very often what initially brings people into my mediation office is not what they are most concerned with, deep down. They've never been able to ask themselves the questions that perhaps go beyond the money in dispute, the last argument they had with a spouse, or the four corners of the contract that brought them into the room. When I ask them these questions, we unearth what's really driving these disputes—and everything makes a lot more sense, including what we're looking for in the upcoming negotiation. This is what I call the Mirror."

– Alexandra Carter

"It is easy to talk to people who are like-minded. We talk to ourselves much more than crossing the aisle. What really works in negotiation is when you have the courage to take that walk—to go and try and understand another person's or group's perspective. But you have to take that step."

– Nikhil Seth

The Ten Questions

Negotiation

Look out the window

The key to negotiating a great deal is to see the other party clearly. To achieve that, you need to ask some questions and then listen empathetically, even if they are your adversary. Try and discern their needs, concerns, and feelings. If you can do that, you'll be a better negotiator. The five window questions are:

- 6. Tell me
- 7. What do you need?
- 8. What are your concerns?
- 9. Have you handled this before?
- 10. What's the first step?

6 Tell me

"Tell me" is the ultimate open-ended question. You ask the other person to share anything they want. This is the perfect negotiation starter because it allows you to get the most information possible by getting someone else's perspective on your problem or goal. It's kind of like putting on another pair of glasses.

"No question unlocks trust, creativity, understanding, and mind-blowing solutions like "Tell me." Open questions like "Tell me..." have been called "wellsprings of innovation" because the information they produce can transform institutions as well as individuals. Instead of sticking a line in the water and limiting yourself to one fish, you're allowing yourself the opportunity to find out a wealth of information and establish a positive relationship with the person across the table."

– Alexandra Carter

Several good things happen when you ask the "Tell me ..." question:

1. "Tell me ..." allows you to learn exactly how the other party defines the problem at hand. You may in fact

learn they define it in a way you weren't expecting. "Tell me ..." allows you to step into their shoes.

2. "Tell me ..." builds a relationship with the other party. It signals you genuinely want to understand the pressures they are under and respond. "Tell me about yourself" is the perfect ice breaker.
3. "Tell me..." empowers you to listen for what's not being said.

Of course, how you structure this question is also open and flexible. Some possibilities:

- "Tell me about yourself."
- "Tell me about what brought you here today."
- "Tell me about the issues and challenges you face."
- "Tell me more."
- "Tell me about your day."
- "Tell me about your goals."
- "Tell me have you made an offer yet?"
- "Tell me about your hopes for this meeting."
- "Tell me about the person you're looking for to fill this job opening."
- "Tell me your thoughts on the settlement offer on the table."
- "Tell me your perspective on what's been happening lately."
- "Tell me what's been happening from your perspective."

Once you ask a "Tell me..." question, give the other person enough time to answer. Be comfortable with the silence while they think, and then summarize back to them what they say. This ensures you've heard correctly, and it's an invitation to give more feedback and details. All of this will help the negotiation move forward.

7 What do you need?

A great way to progress a negotiation, or to drill down to the nitty-gritty details, is to look the other person in the eye and ask: "What do you need?" If you cut to the chase like this, you'll be amazed at how frequently a collaborative and productive compromise can be reached, even in the most bitter of negotiations.

"Identifying the underlying needs helps us avoid cookie-cutter negotiations and create innovative, durable, and specific solutions that work for the people involved. Never make the mistake of assuming that you know what someone's needs are just because their demand sounds familiar."

– Alexandra Carter

The good thing about asking "What do you need?" is it can be personalized and customized in a wide variety of ways:

- "What do you need from any vendor who supplies your stores?"
- "What do you need to get out of this deal in order to make all your stakeholders happy?"
- "When you're considering how to prioritize your budget, what do you need the most?"
- "What do you need first and foremost when you work with homeowners?"
- "What do you need to get this job done?"
- "What do you need here? I felt that earlier in our discussions, you were leaning towards ..."
- "What do you need? How about if we adjust this number and ...?"

When you ask this question, be comfortable with and enjoy the silence while they are thinking. When they reply, you can then ask an open-ended follow-up question to get more details. This can be a simple "Thanks. Tell me more about..." or even just a direct "That's interesting. Tell me more."

The other party is either going to come back with some tangibles or intangible issues:

- If they bring up intangibles, your follow-up question could be: "OK, what would that look like?" or "Great. Tell me, what would a workable solution look like and feel like for you?" That will encourage the other party to bring their needs to life, and to add some specific details. You can then work with them to find a mutual path forward.
- If they bring up tangible items, you can then follow-up with: "Excellent. Now help me understand. What makes this so important to you?" By doing this, you avoid coming across as confrontational or aggressive. Instead, you signal that you're open to engaging and figuring out the best way forward.

Follow up with more open questions. Summarize what you're hearing and repeat that back to them to encourage more details to be forthcoming as well. Doing this not only enhances your understanding of what they said but it also signals that you're giving them your full attention and patience.

Also, don't forget to listen for what's not being said. These questions should help you read between the lines and understand background issues as well. Non-verbal communication clues may tell you a lot about issues which need to be explored in order for a win-win agreement to come together.

"I love the "What would that look like?" question and ask it in virtually every negotiation scenario—but most negotiators don't even know this question exists. Or if they do, they can't ask it. Why? Because they haven't first found out from the other person what they need, as you just did. Here is where you start to see your earlier work in posing broad questions and listening—really listening—to the answers, pay off."

– Alexandra Carter

8 What are your concerns?

The next step in your negotiation should be to ask the person about their concerns. Doing this will provide useful information for you, but even more importantly, it will make the other person feel like they have been heard.

"Asking about someone's concerns is the best way to understand and address any lingering concerns about you or your business that might prevent a successful deal. People often won't share their concerns with you up-front. Instead, they'll leave them unsaid, and leave your negotiation unresolved, or give someone else their business. But when you ask someone about their concerns, you give yourself the best possible chance of reaching success in your negotiation."

– Alexandra Carter

Asking about their concerns will usually bring their needs to the surface. You'll get to understand which of their needs are not currently being met, which will create a great opening for you to come up with a solution they will love. You can also use this information to eliminate barriers to an agreement.

"In addition to helping you address any barriers to agreement, the other reason to ask what concerns someone has with you or what you are offering is that it builds rapport and it encourages openness. It shows that you simultaneously possess enough confidence to address any concerns that may come up, and that you care about making sure what you are offering is right for this deal."

– Alexandra Carter

Asking the other party in a negotiation about their concerns is better than asking about their fears. Concerns are addressable, fears are emotional and hard to pin down. By signaling that you want to work systematically through their concerns, you maximize the chances they will go ahead.

As you ask about their concerns, be comfortable if there is an extended period of silence. That's perfectly fine, as they will need some time to think. When they answer, the best approach is usually to summarize back to them

what they just said, and add "Can you tell me more about that?"

Again, watch the non-verbal clues they give off as they speak. Listen for what is not being said. Some people will say "yes" while shaking their head no at the same time. That should be a clue you need to dig a bit deeper. Similarly, a shrug of the shoulders may indicate there are other unexpressed concerns which they are afraid or embarrassed to admit. You might need to do some probing to get to the heart of the matter.

9 Have you handled this before?

As previously mentioned, thinking about a prior success is good for you while you are prepping for a negotiation. It puts you into a positive frame of mind, and also triggers the kinds of memories which generate motivation and empowerment. The same thing happens when you ask the other party in the negotiation, "How have you handled this successfully in the past?"

"Once you know the goal you're working on, or the problem you are solving, recalling a prior related success helps you and the other person remember concrete strategies that might help again in your current negotiation. In many situations, this question will help you refine your understanding of the problem you want to solve and give you ideas to fix it."

– Alexandra Carter

Recalling their prior successes is helpful:

1. *It will help both of you define the problem at hand more clearly* – you can work together on potential solutions.
2. *This will help the other person gain more confidence and motivation* – to resolve the issue you're discussing. It will help you both gain a better context and awareness of possibilities.
3. *It will put everyone into problem-solving mode* – and expand the universe of possible options for moving forward.
4. *Dwelling on past successes will increase rapport* – and allow you to treat them like a partner in the current negotiation.

Some good ways to phrase this are:

- "How have you handled this successfully in the past?"
- "From my perspective, you've been really successful at ..."
- "Can you tell me more about your experiences with ...?"
- "Can you go over some of the successful examples of this you've previously come across?"
- "How have you handled this kind of situation in the last? How did that pan out in practice?"

Make sure you acknowledge those successes when the other person mentions them. Show appreciation for what they did. Summarize and ask for feedback. As usual, listen for what is not being said. Make the other person feel a sense of accomplishment and it will help you in your current negotiation.

"The most proficient negotiators are those who listen best. Research on game theory, which is the study of strategic decision-making, tells us that cluelessness, or a lack of strategic thinking, can result from a lack of sincere communication that focuses on the other person's experience. Studies show that empathic listeners not only create better connections with the people across from them, they actually maximize how much information they take and retain from a conversation."

– Alexandra Carter

"Listening is a fundamental negotiation skill, perhaps the most important. Remember again that a negotiation is any conversation in which you are steering a relationship. Research shows us that when you listen in order to understand what the other person is saying, not to respond, you listen differently, and better."

– Alexandra Carter

10 What's the first step?

"So far in your negotiation, you've covered a lot of ground: You've asked the other person their view of the situation, you've delved into their concerns and needs, and you've also asked them what those needs would look like. You've covered how they have handled an issue like this successfully in the past, and gathered some useful information. This is your last chance to look through the Window and see them, and your situation, as clearly as possible. Now you will have the chance to ask them to look forward, just as you've done."

– Alexandra Carter

Asking "What is the first step?" at this stage of the negotiation is good for several reasons:

1. *You will generate some options for moving forward* – from which you can choose whichever adds the most value. The more options there are, the greater the chances are of a successful negotiation.
2. *You signal that you're treating the other party as a partner* – meaning they will be more likely to reciprocate and treat you that way as well.
3. *You give them respect and a chance to demonstrate leadership* – which will generally get them into a growth mindset.
4. *You build momentum and a path forward* – which is helpful, even if you don't yet know all the steps which will be involved.
5. *You make it more likely they will execute on whatever is ultimately agreed as part of the negotiation* – because they will feel like they have some skin in the game.
6. *You make it less likely the other party will shoot down your idea* – because they will feel like they own the solution as well.

"The issue here is to recognize that in science (and indeed, perhaps in life as a whole) we have lots of ideas that don't work out. You cannot tell initially if the idea will work or not—you need to explore it and do some work on it in order to find out. This is a necessary process... we are not wasting our time in exploring ideas that turn

out not to work—we are helping to generate good ideas.”

– John Kirwan, professor, University of Bristol

The simple fact is asking people for their ideas in a negotiation costs nothing and can benefit you immeasurably. When you ask for ideas about one step forward, you make a negotiation outcome seem more manageable and realistic. Taking things one step at a time is incredibly powerful, and in some negotiations just one step forward can make a huge difference.

So how do you ask this question effectively? Some possible ways of formulating this question are:

- "What's our first step here?"
- "What would you see as the logical first step to make this happen?"
- "What ideas do you have about the future?"
- "What are your thoughts on how we can move forward?"
- "What would you see as a logical step forward we could take?"
- "Would you be OK with this as an initial step forward? We could ...?"
- "I have an idea. How about if we ...? What do you think?"

One little trick you should be aware of is if nobody can think of a good first step to take, you might ask, "What's the worst step we could take right now?" Sometimes, just thinking about what won't work will give you some excellent clues and hints about what will.

Once you've gone through all the mirror questions and all the window questions, you're ready to start negotiating. You'll know your own needs, and the aspirations of the other party. You'll have everything you need to frame the negotiation advantageously.

There are generally three winning strategies for framing in negotiation:

1. *You can frame your negotiation as a search for a workable solution to the other person's problems – and convince them that your proposal is the solution that ticks all the boxes.*
2. *You can frame your negotiation as more about what they gain from coming up with a good agreement – and less about what it will cost them. You can truthfully show them the value added far outweighs the direct costs involved.*
3. *You can frame your negotiation around transparency and trust – about clearly looking at the facts and then working together to figure out the best path forward using both of your resources.*

It's your prerogative as a negotiator to figure out which of those approaches will be most likely to bear fruit. Please note that the timing of your negotiation matters as well. Most often, you won't be in a position to negotiate immediately when you're getting answers to the questions. You'll probably need some time to organize your thoughts and go through the data. Most negotiators do a fact finding meeting first, and then come back for the negotiation in a follow-up meeting. Even taking a break for lunch might serve the same purpose.

Wrap up your fact gathering meeting by giving a concise summary of the progress you've made and the information you've shared and they've shared. Then thank them for their time, energy and openness. Set a time for when you'll gather for more discussion, and any assignments which someone need to completed before that next meeting.

Then, when you come back, you can run through that summary again to start the ball rolling. You should then go after any low-hanging fruit to generate momentum and carry on from there. Stress commonalities where their thinking aligns with yours, and then explain your solution. Propose a trial period, after which a long-term decision can be made. Great negotiations almost take on a life of their own if you've laid a strong foundation.

"I wrote this book to bring you techniques that you can use to improve any negotiation or relationship in your life. And in doing so, improve your life itself. They've certainly improved mine. Today and every day, I wake up knowing that I am doing what I was put on this earth to do. My purpose was to help you do, and feel, the same. I love helping people reach their own personal highest and best, and then go on to share what they have learned with others."

– Alexandra Carter

1. What problem do I need to solve?
2. What do I need to get?
3. What do I feel about this?
4. How have I handled this before?
5. What's the first step?

← **Look in the mirror**

Negotiation

Look out the window →

6. Tell me?
7. What do you need?
8. What are your concerns?
9. Have you handled this before?
10. What's the first step?