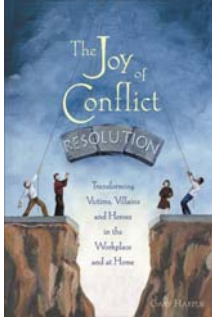


## An Excerpt from The Joy of Conflict Resolution...

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### Tips on Probing

Asking questions is as much an art as a science. Through practice, we can learn to ask questions that gather valuable information. When we add genuine curiosity and trust our instincts (not our impulses), we can achieve the depth of understanding that can transform conflicts. Here are some tips.

When confronted by a position, ask the person what is important to them and why. Seek to understand what is motivating them to adopt their position.

- “What’s important to you about ...?”
- “In what ways would that improve efficiency?”

Conflict often is prolonged when people use a common term but attach different meanings to it. Ask the other person to define a term.

- “What do you mean by [practical]?”
- “What does [teamwork] mean to you?”

We often assume people think the same way we do. Instead of making assumptions, explore their thought process.

- “How did you arrive at that conclusion?”
- “What led you to that conclusion?”
- “When did you arrive at that view?”

Finally, conflict is extremely personal. People adopt positions based on personal experiences. When someone demonstrates passion toward an issue or a position, find out how it affects them personally.

- “How does that affect you?”
- “What are your concerns about ...?”
- “When does that impact you?”
- “How would that benefit you?”
- “What would you be looking to achieve by ...?”



“Melanie, you seemed pretty adamant you don’t want Vic up front. How come?”

## **I'll show you mine if ...**

Imagine your boss asking you, "Are you happy in your job?" For those of us who value continued employment, the right answer likely would be "Yes, boss." Even the open-ended version — "How are you feeling about your job?" — still would have us wondering, "Why is he asking?" or "What's her agenda?" Depending on our history and relationship with our boss, we might assume the worst and become defensive and guarded.

A question, by its very nature, asks the person being questioned to reveal something. And when we view the person asking the question as our conflict villain, we are understandably reluctant to reveal ourselves. We can reduce this suspicion and mistrust by letting the other person know our reason for asking a question. Before asking an employee how they are doing, a manager might say, "I've noticed you've been very quiet recently. What's up?" Before requesting a rush job, she might say, "I need the report for a meeting with the director at 3:00. How does that fit with your workload today?" Danaan Parry addressed this need for transparency in his book *Warriors of the Heart*:

The cardinal rule for asking questions is: Give something of yourself before you demand anything of someone else. If you want to know what's going on for another person, then tell them what is going on with you first. Only then do you have the right to ask your question.

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