

THE MASTER NEGOTIATOR

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Tactic of the Week #4



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Tactic #4 - Asking an Open-Ended Question

Summary: Using an open-ended question to get more expansive or revealing information from a counterpart.

Open-ended questions almost always start with who, what, where, when, how, or why. They play a strong role in negotiations as techniques for gaining as much accurate information as possible.

Example

Carrie is in the market for a used car. She wants to buy one from someone who has completed the scheduled maintenance. More specifically, she wants to buy a car from someone who has changed the oil every three thousand miles. She thinks about asking a closed-ended question like "Have you changed the oil every three thousand miles?" But since the owner would know the answer Carrie wants to hear, she is afraid he would answer "yes" even if the real answer was, "Yes, when the car was new, but over the last year, the oil has never been changed." She decides to use an open-ended question to gain more complete information, and says, "Tell me what type of maintenance has been done on this car." This request has to be answered with details instead of a simple "yes" or "no."

Counter

Sometimes you have no idea why a counterpart is asking you a specific question, in which case it may be wise to ask your counterpart a question to clarify or verify why the information is important. For example, the car seller might ask, "Can you tell me what specific type of maintenance records you are interested in reviewing?" Clarifying Carrie's needs may be important, especially if the person selling the car has done all the repairs himself—and has not kept records. A second counter is to rephrase the question as a closed-ended question and then answer it. For example, the seller could respond, "If you are asking if I have changed the oil regularly, the answer is yes."

Do you have any negotiation questions? If so, then send them to us by hitting the "reply" button. We'll do our best to address them in upcoming issues.

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This tactic is one of 101 strategies and tactics featured in [The Only Negotiating Guide You'll Ever Need](#), by Peter Stark and Jane Flaherty.



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