

Destructive Third Party Investigation

When a mediator encounters difficulty helping two parties resolve a conflict, there is a high probability a hidden destructive third party is fueling the ongoing dispute.

As this source of conflict is hidden, the mediator and parties experience frustration and defeat. Tensions escalate, signaling the process has reached impasse.

The mediator does not give up but rather begins an assessment that will uncover a hidden destructive party — a gossip, a detractor, a character assassin, a saboteur.

The following are sample types of questions that might be posed in such an investigation. Do not use them in a rote manner. Rather, use creative phrasing appropriate to the situation.

You work back and forth between the two parties locating the hidden influence driving the conflict.

Once you have a fair level of certainty that you have located the hidden destructive third party there is no need to continue asking questions. You will then move into the handling phase.

Questions:

With regard to *the other party*, who have you relied on for information or advice?

Has anyone helped you understand *the other party*?

Who do you trust to provide information about *the other party*?

Do you have friends in common with *the other party*? Relatives? Associates?
Acquaintances? Who?

If you fail to reconcile with *the other party*, who might consider they will benefit?

Can you think of anyone who might benefit if this conflict continues?

Has anyone pointed out the flaws and shortcomings of *the other party*?

Can you think of someone who might understand the shortcomings of *the other party* better than you?

Will you need to avoid becoming the victim the flaws and shortcomings of *the other party*?

Who might best help you avoid becoming a victim of *the other party*? What special knowledge might they have?

Can you think of anyone whose influence on *the other party* might be hidden?

Do you believe *the other party* might respond to gossip? Why do you feel that way?

Just before trouble occurs who appears on the scene?

Are there any bystanders who seem to always witness your interaction with *the other party*?

Do you suspect someone might have pointed out your flaws and shortcomings?
Who?

Has *the other party* pointed out your flaws? How did they make them known?

Has someone made up things about you so that they might criticize you? Who?

What is there about *the other party* that annoys people?

How do you know people find *the other party* annoying?

Has anyone told you they are annoyed with *the other party*? Who?

Do you feel comfortable sharing things people have said with *the other party*? If not,
why not?

When it comes to *the other party*, has anyone sworn you to secrecy?

Are you free to tell *the other party* what others have said about them?

Is there a reason you cannot share what you know about *the other party*?

Is there anything it is better that *the other party* not know?

How will you go about encouraging the other party to share with you what others
have said?

Will you need to promote honesty and candor?

If you reconcile with *the other party*, will anyone feel left out?

Is it possible that someone might be jealous of your relationship with *the other party*? Who?

If you reconcile with *the other party*, will anyone feel threatened? Who?

Is anyone afraid they will be excluded if you make peace?

Is insecurity common with the people you know? Who is insecure?

Do you have “inside sources of information”? Describe.

How do you find out what is really happening with *the other party*?

How will you bring to light back channel or hidden communications?

Do you have all the information about *the other party* you will need to resolve this conflict?

How will you encourage *the other party* to share hidden information they have received about you?

How might you help *the other party* sort out what is true and what is false in their view of you?

Do you believe *the other party* will bring all important information to the negotiating table? What might they hide?

With regard to this conflict, has anyone you know engaged in character assassination? What happened?

Do you feel your character has been unfairly targeted? Why?

Do you believe other people consider you to be a problem? Why?

Has anyone attempted to ruin your reputation? Who?

Does *the other party* feel it is okay for people to criticize you? Why?

What might motivate someone who wants to ruin your reputation?

Have you found others have been jealous of you lately?

Are you standing in someone's way?

Has anyone advised you to avoid mediation? Who?

Who thinks you should not mediate?

Has anyone discouraged you from seeking peace with *the other party*?

Is there anyone who doesn't particularly like you?

Has anyone caused you to fear settling the dispute with *the other party*?

Has someone told *the other party* they should not trust you?

Has someone told you that you should not trust *the other party*?

Who do you believe might be interested in lowering trust?

Is someone afraid others will get ahead?

Who might be insecure?

Are insecure people affecting this conflict?

Does someone you know criticize the success of others?

Has anyone criticized your success?

Has anyone criticized the success of *the other party*?

Has *the other party* found it difficult to praise your accomplishments?

Have you found it difficult to praise the accomplishments of *the other party*?

Do you or *the other party* have friends who might be called paranoid?

Has anyone connected with this conflict been unusually fearful? Who?

How might you describe the hidden communications behind this conflict?

Who do you know that would prefer to remain out of sight? Low key?

How would you describe the shadows that surround this conflict?

What would you guess might lurk in those shadows?

If you and *the other party* were to walk together through the woods, what might present the greatest danger?

