



## How to Always Win

### A New Understanding of How to Win Every Argument

A stellar characteristic of Americans has always been their ability to compete, indeed to win. This zeal to achieve has accomplished many wonderful things for our country and its citizens, including major medical discoveries, unparalleled economic success, even liberty itself. But after the extremely negative campaigning of the recent elections, and the endless nightly debate about whether or not we are winning the war on terror and who's to blame for what's right or wrong in our country, I can't help but ask if our need to compete has gone awry. It doesn't seem to be enough any more to succeed. What worries me is people's need to take it a step further to prove they are right, and sometimes, to prove they're right no matter what. You can be sure that a win-at-all-costs attitude does not contribute to good relationships on a global scale or, as concerns me here, to personal relationships, which are, after all, the bedrock of a person's emotional and physical well being.

For insight on this painful problem, In every conversation, people have an agenda. It might be to inform, to amuse, to get to know each other better or just to pass the time — there are lots of reasons for verbal exchanges. But when the agenda includes ensuring that you are right, by definition it means establishing that the other person is wrong. There isn't a conversation in the world that doesn't ultimately come to a screeching halt if one or both parties have the attitude that "I am right, you are wrong, now get used to it." This is incredibly destructive to any relationship — in the Middle East, in the workplace, with your in-laws, or in the bedroom — because it slams the door on any real possibility for a dialog. In fact, Lauren says the battle to be "right" is at the base of all dysfunction, be it wars between countries, conflicts at work or closer to home - marital or parent-child conflicts.

#### **WHAT IS FACT?**

There is a simple truth at play here. It is possible to be right — look out the window and if you see water falling from the clouds you can rightly announce it is raining... or that the sun is shining... or that it is night or day. While some philosophy students may debate this, obvious facts of this nature fall neatly into a right/wrong category. But just about everything else in the world is far more complex and dwells in the world not of black and white, but of gray. This is the realm of relativism, which means that what is right to me is shaped by my point of view and isn't necessarily right to the other person. Often our own point of view is shaped by misunderstandings

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or misinterpretations that we assume to be hard fact. If you want a relationship to work, she continues, the most important thing you can do is understand that virtually every thought and opinion you have is based on personal perception, not on fact.

Couples may argue that one spouse was being rude or unfair but the so-called offending spouse doesn't see it that way. In fact, that person no doubt thinks the other one was being unfair. Perspective is behind the difference and determines why you both think you are right.

It is crucial to understand and accept that your perspective is not fact and that both parties have a valid point of view. This is how contradictory opinions can exist in a relationship without causing disharmony. The problem is that most people are invested in their own interpretation and perspective and are disinterested in the other person's. Deep inside, people believe that by making themselves right and their "opponent" wrong they'll "win," but this form of winning is not necessarily the key to happiness or success. Once people are willing to accept the existence of contradictory "truths," it changes the dynamics of the discussion because no one is any longer trying to win. This insistence on being right is a manipulation, which is a common human trick. People dress their opinion up in self-righteousness — you have to accept what I am saying because I am right! I am reminded of a couple I know who have different religious beliefs. When he tries to open her thinking to even entertain the idea that others see things differently, she responds "but I know I am right." That ends the conversation — and much to her frustration, ends her attempts to convert him and win.

## **SEEKING A NEW DEFINITION OF VICTORY**

While the need to win creates continuous and deep-seated relationship dilemmas, it is possible for anyone to pull out of this emotional quagmire and, in so doing, immediately improve interactions with others — including with those who are closest to you. It is no longer about having one person right and one wrong. Rather, it is listening to each other's "truths" completely so you have all version(s) of the situation and accept that another person can have a different opinion. Here is what we advise to make this important change...

- Accept that most discussions, including yours, are not based on fact but rather on a relative point of view.
- Always evaluate if you are discussing fact (weather, the time, the color of your new car, etc.).
- Ask yourself if you are treating your platform as fact when it is actually your opinion (and if your discussion has become a battle, you can be sure opinions are the subject).

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- Frame your conversation in words that convey not “this is how it is,” but rather, “when you said this, what I meant was... ” or “this is how it seemed to me” — in other words, that you accept that your “truth” may be based on important misunderstandings that you believed to be true, and that each view of the situation as it was or is, not as an absolute truth.
- After someone speaks and shares their point of view, before you give yours, first say theirs back to them so they feel heard and understood. And be open to correction, because if you say something that didn’t accurately capture their perspective, they should make sure you get it correctly.

## **CHANGE ONLY TAKES ONE**

You may now be thinking that this is great for you, but what about the other guy? If he won’t change his position, what good will this do? Take heart — when one person assumes responsibility for accepting that his/her perspective is relative and understands that aiming to “win” leaves everyone as losers, it is sufficient to turn a discussion around. You have put one fact on the table and that is there are two different points of view going on. Who can argue with that? You allow the other his/her right to his view of the truth but you also claim the right to yours. This acceptance surpasses the need to win, allowing a peaceful negotiation of the situation — if not immediately than in the near future... and that is truly winning in a far more constructive way.