

CONFLICT & DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Easing the Tension Between Empathy & Assertiveness

As you read the material for our next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the reading:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.

Reading

- Machiavelli, N. (1988). Cruelty and Mercifulness; and Whether It Is Better to be Loved or Feared. In Q. Skinner & R. Price (Eds.), *The Prince* (pp. 58–61). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1532).
- Mnookin, R. H., Peppet, S. R., & Tulumello, A. S. (1996, July). The Tension Between Empathy and Assertiveness. *Negotiation Journal*, 12(3), 217–230.
- *Optional*: Pruitt, D. G., & Kim, S. H. (2004). Strategic Choice. In *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement* (3rd ed., pp. 37–62). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Questions

1. What is Machiavelli's answer to whether a ruler should be feared or loved? How does Machiavelli's assumption of psychological egoism help justify his answer?
2. According to Mnookin *et al*, what is the difference between empathy and assertiveness? Why do many people tend to believe that these are necessarily opposed for negotiation and conflict resolution?
3. Mnookin *et al* give about five benefits of empathy for a negotiator. What are these benefits? If all a person really cares about is his or her own self-interest during a negotiation, would these benefits be compelling enough to make such an egoist cultivate empathy?
4. They also give about four benefits of assertiveness? What are these? Are these benefits compelling enough for an egoist to be assertive?
5. When it comes to the three negotiation styles Mnookin *et al* analyze, what are their respective advantages and disadvantages?
6. Finally, how do Mnookin *et al* justify their claim that empathy and assertiveness are not inherently opposed, and that a good negotiator must be both?

While Machiavelli and Mnookin *et al* discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the various strategic approaches to conflict (avoidance, yielding, contending, and so on), the optional reading by Pruitt and Kim summarize factors that can influence the approach one might choose.