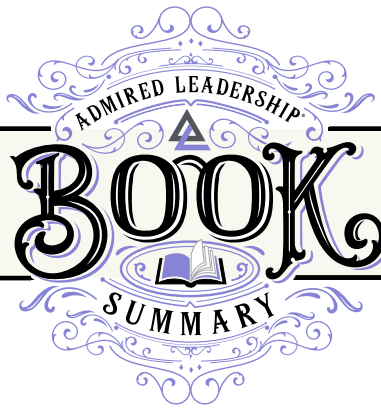




Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours



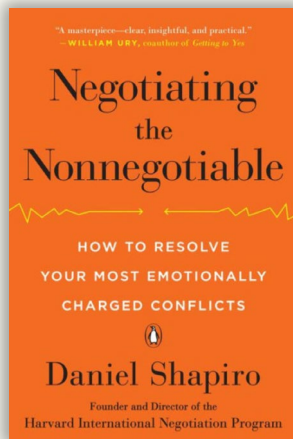
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# Negotiating the Nonnegotiable

How to Resolve Your Most Emotionally Charged Conflicts.

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Daniel Shapiro, founder, and director of the Harvard International Negotiator program, argues the key to conflict resolution is the understanding of the relationship from which the conflict arises. **In *Negotiating the Nonnegotiable***, he suggests, “we typically view conflict as a binary concept – me versus you, us versus them – and focus on satisfying our independent interests. But conflict literally exists between us – in our relationship – and in that space live the emotionally complicated dynamics that thwart cooperation” (p. xv). However, once we understand our identity and how our identity relates to that of our potential adversaries, we can begin to create harmony out of discord.

## Key Quote

“The single most powerful advice for overcoming divisive politics is to persistently emphasize that your conflict is a shared challenge. It is not you versus the other side but the two of you attempting to resolve the conflict together.” — **Daniel Shapiro**

## KEY POINTS AND CONCEPTS

### Understanding Identity

To collaboratively problem-solve, you must uncover each person’s stakes in the argument and the fundamental sources of discontent. “You cannot resolve conflicts unless you address them at the root – which stretches beneath rationality, beneath even emotions, to the heart of who you are: your identity” (p. xiv).

Your identity is fluid, not fixed, and it is ever-changing according to what you think, feel, and experience. “Your identity comprises the full spectrum of persistent and fleeting characteristics that define you... Everything you experience in a conflict – a wave of shame, an urge to escape, an impulse to yell – will not only be lived and felt by you, but also narrated to you, by you, in real time” (pp. 12- 13). Once you understand that identity is fluid, you can resolve emotionally charged conflicts by directing attention toward the aspects of your identity that you can affect, rather than those that appear immutable.

Your relational identity is the hidden source of leverage when interacting with others. It evolves as you negotiate your relationship, which gives you tremendous power to shape it. “By reshaping your relational identity as cooperative, you build closer ties of connection” (p. 22).

The fixed-identity fallacy explains each person’s inability to compromise based on the immovable and fixed characteristics of a person’s identity. This fallacy breeds conflict when you believe your identity is threatened and you feel you must demand the other person to adapt to your perspectives, your beliefs, and your values (pp. 11-12).

While respect of identity produces harmony, a threat to identity triggers emotional force and self-protection to trump collaboration (p. 25).

As defined in Freud’s idea of narcissism of minor differences, even a small disagreement can elicit a strong emotional reaction, especially the more alike we are. “Humanity’s infinite commonalities pale in comparison to a singular difference that takes on outsized importance. In short, the trivial can become more than a matter of trivial concern” (p. 25).

### **Identity Politics**

“The underlying strategy of positive identity politics is straightforward: Define who you are, not who you are not. Then persistently position yourself to maximize partnership and minimize resentment” (p. 128).

To support cooperative and positive relationships, design an inclusive decision-making process by considering three key questions (p. 123).

- **What is the decision to be made?**
- **Whom does this decision affect?**
- **How much input should each stakeholder have in the decision-making process?**

According to Shapiro, we should use the **ECNI method** as a process for inclusive decision making while accounting for differences in authority (p. 123).

- **Who will you exclude from the decision-making process?**
- **Who will you consult before making the decision?**
- **Who will you negotiate with to reach a decision?**
- **Who will you inform after a decision has been made?**



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Relationships require relentless maintenance and an allowance of some conflict. “A good relationship is sincere, amicable, and resilient to tension; it allows for differences to be safely discussed... The marital couple who fails to work through their day-to-day grievances should be prepared for a blow-up. And the negotiator trying to broker peace must maintain communication with concerned parties – or be ready to deal with crisis” (p. 128).

“Identity politics is a matter of power, and power is relational: You acquire it through your relations with others” (p. 128).

### **Creative Introspection**

Creative introspection is a method used to shed light on the emotional narrative and matters of deep significance fueling your conflict (p. 162).

Identify what’s at stake in conflict by searching for what pushes you and the other side to clash (p. 145). Further unearth concerns by detecting both parties’ core concerns and strongest emotions.

Understand your mythos of identity – “the core narrative that shapes how you see your identity in relation to that of the other side” – by creating a metaphor or archetype to depict your conflict (p. 139). For instance, is your conflict brother-to-brother or like David and Goliath? The ability to creatively introspect on conflict will make it feel less isolating as it conceptualizes conflict in a broader scope of human experience (p. 151).

A communal mindset is cooperative, not adversarial; compassionate, not self-righteous; and open, not closed (p. 135).

### **Conflict and Connection**

The backbone of reconciliation is human connection (p. 176). “Human connection has different levels of depth; the deeper you bond, the more likely you will stick together even during the turmoil of conflict” (p. 177).

**Shapiro’s REACH framework** introduces a process for evaluating your current level of connection with another person. The framework begins with recognition of existence and goes up the scale with an ascending order of emotional depth (pp. 177-179):

- **Recognition of existence:** “Does the other party treat you as invisible, or acknowledge your existence?”
- **Empathetic understanding:** “Does the other judge your emotional experience as irrelevant or authentically appreciate it?”
- **Attachment:** “Does the other perceive you as expendable, or emotionally irreplaceable?”
- **Care:** “Do you sense that the other is indifferent to your fate, or cherishes you?”
- **Hallowed kinship:** “Does the other view you as ideologically incompatible, or as a kindred spirit?”



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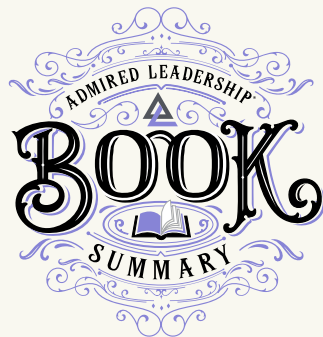
“If you want to improve your relationship, get close enough that you benefit from a positive connection, but not so close that you invade each other’s space” (p. 184). Assess your level of connection and reflect on whether you are getting too distant or too close for comfort.

Keep in mind, the objective of negotiating conflict is not to win or achieve victory, but to produce harmony between relationships.

“You cannot solve the problem from within it” (p. 39). Conflict narrows your range of thoughts, feelings, and actions, so it requires a conscious strategy to break free from its emotional response. Should you find yourself amid conflict, jolt yourself back to a rational mindset, expand your field of vision, and externalize the negative (p. 39).

“You must balance acceptance with change; focus on redemption, not revenge; and most of all, strive for affiliation and autonomy, for us and them, for now and always. That is the path to reconciliation” (p. 225).

Shapiro, D. (2016). **Negotiating the Nonnegotiable: How to Resolve Your Most Emotionally Charged Conflicts.** New York: Viking.



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