



# GINI NELSON'S ENGAGING CONFLICTS TODAY

## *The Negotiator's Fieldbook Interviews*

Vol 2, #15



Daniel Shapiro, confronting psychological challenges

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### **CONFRONTING PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES: DANIEL SHAPIRO**

Daniel is Associate Director of the Harvard Negotiation Project, and is on the faculty at Harvard Law School and in the psychiatry department at Harvard Medical School/McLean Hospital. He specializes in the psychology of negotiation. He co-authored with Roger Fisher the book *Beyond Reason: Using Emotions as You Negotiate* (Viking, 2005). Daniel founded and directs the International Negotiation Initiative, a Harvard-based project that develops psychologically focused strategies to reduce ethnopolitical violence.

#### *A Personal Career Path*

**Gini:** Good morning, Daniel. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and experiences with us. What attracted you to the field of conflict management in the first place?

**Daniel:** In the mid-1980s, my family housed a student from communist Hungary. The student, Andy, spent a year with my family, and we became good friends. After his time in the United States, I visited him in Hungary and was exposed to communist Europe. With Andy and his father, we traveled throughout Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and even East Berlin. I became enamored by the rich heritage and identity of the people of Eastern and central Europe. When the Berlin Wall came to a crash in 1989, I asked myself how I could help the transition from a closed to open society in Eastern and Central Europe. I got funding to build a conflict management program in that region. That program stretches across more than 30 countries and has reached more than a million people.

**G:** If you knew earlier what you know now, would you still have pursued the same career path?

**D:** My career path has not been an easy one. My vision has constantly been to inte-

grate the ideas of psychology into the work of global conflict resolution. This raises the question of in what field I should situate myself. Is it psychology? Conflict resolution? Negotiation? Law? International politics? Academia enjoys putting disciplines into boxes, and I enjoy thinking out of the box. I now embrace the interdisciplinary nature of my scholarship, and believe that we need more of this kind of thinking to bring the tools of conflict resolution to bear on the tough challenges facing the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example, the tools of power politics or interest-based negotiation have an important place in conflict resolution, but leave a huge void in terms of how to deal with contemporary issues of intrastate conflict regional conflict, terrorism, etc.

**G:** What is the best advice you have been given, and what advice would you give a budding conflict specialist?

**D:** Follow your heart. You have one life. What do you want to do with it? Don't choose the easy path because it is easy. Don't choose the hard path because it is hard. Explore. Try out new things. And in the final analysis, listen to your gut.

#### *Conflict Resolution Heroes*

**G:** Do you have a "conflict resolution hero," and if so, who and why?

**D:** I have two heroes in the field of conflict resolution. First is Dr. Jerome D. Frank. He was a legend at Johns Hopkins University and a dear mentor. Among his numerous accomplishments, he wrote a book called "sanity and survival in the nuclear age." I reread the book just the other day, and his ideas ring as true now as they did when he first published the ideas some 30 years back. He discusses the psychological challenges confronting a world that now has nuclear weapons, and he offers prescriptive ideas. Dr.

## Helping People Handle Conflict

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Frank and I used to meet on a weekly basis, and we would talk about conflict resolution, psychology, psychotherapy, healing, and a broad range of other topics. He was open-minded, not a skeptic, and yet an empiricist. There's nothing to disbelieve until the lab shows evidence for disbelief. To this day, I embrace that critical sense of open-mindedness.

My other mentor is Roger Fisher. I have always admired Roger. *Getting to Yes* stands as a seminal book. I came to know Roger Fisher about 10 years ago.

### **The Biggest Questions**

G: What do you think are the big questions to be answered next in the conflict management field?

D: It seems like an essential ethical issue that the field of conflict resolution currently is grappling with, is the question of, "Where do I end and where does the other begin? Who am I and who is the other? Where is the separation between us?" And I think from that fundamental question falls a number of different questions. You have people from the West going and doing conflict resolution trainings in the Middle East or in Africa — where does the I begin, where does the other begin, and how do you respect the different cultures, the different backgrounds, the different ways of understanding and of being? That's the challenging ethical context in which to be working.

And it's just as much of a struggle for someone here in Cambridge, MA working as a mediator, you have a white mediator, born and raised in Manhattan, mediating between an African-American whose background is from Manhattan and a student from Harvard Law School, born and raised in Mexico, and they're having a dispute. As human beings sitting there, what kinds of assumptions do each of them bring? What is the appropriate behavior for the mediator in the situation, in the role of the facilitator? Where does the I begin? Where does the other person's I begin? And where does each person's I end?

Where's the line?

### **Thrills and Spills**

G: What has been your biggest thrill in being a conflict specialist?

D: A couple of things. I think that there are so few professions where you have the opportunity and some expertise to work with a whole variety of people across contexts. I've learned so much by working and doing consulting and teaching in a number of different contexts. What kind of consultant has the opportunity to, in one year, consult with everybody from Microsoft and Starbucks to her Majesty Queen Raniya to hostage negotiators with the FBI to working with NYPD's hostage negotiation team, to working with lawyers and medical doctors, and on and on and on. What profession has the opportunity to walk into an organization

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and have a real heart-to-heart with people about

what's going on and the challenges they are facing. I can think of very, very few professions. And so, for me, given our globalizing and globalized world, it's a great opportunity to really understand more about the challenges and opportunities facing a variety of different sectors — professional and more private sectors as well.

I think a second thrill, is that there're some professions where it's not as obvious the extent to which they are touching human life. Conflict resolution, by its very values and very orientation, is working to enhance human well-being and to alleviate suffering at a broad level. And to me, it's a thrill everyday to be doing this kind of work because there's such a clear purpose.

G: What was your biggest mistake?

D: That's a great question. I assume there are a lot of them. This is a really tough question...

I think there are a lot of risks I have taken; I wouldn't call them mistakes though.

G: Any regrets?



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Blog: [EngagingConflicts.com](http://EngagingConflicts.com),

A Mediate.com Featured Blog

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D: Generally speaking, I take a learning stance. If there has been some sort of mistake or a road I should have taken that I didn't, I learn from that. So I try not to look at life from a place of regret.

G: Thank you, Daniel.

[Please see the post in the *Engaging Conflicts* blog about Daniel's articles, "Identity: More Than Meets The 'I'" and "Untapped Power: Emotion In Negotiation."]

## ENGAGING CONFLICTS ANNOUNCEMENTS

First ... Happy Thanksgiving! It's my favorite holiday, probably because of the fact of harvest bounty and the sharing of good food and company. I hope you will be able to partake of a warm, loving feast with friends and other loved ones that day.



For those interested in domestic relations dispute resolution, I've started a new blog at [HandlingConflict.com](http://HandlingConflict.com). I've a 50-part series running based on the *bad* advice in a book I found in a thrift store called "Divorce War!" I'm commenting on each of the 50 strategies the attorney author of that book advises. Here's an excerpt:

**DON'T#3.** Hire the toughest, best-liked, and most highly connected lawyer money can buy.

Believe it or not, the writer means "most highly connected" *with the divorce judges*:

*Does he or she have a relationship on a first-name basis with the judge? Do they play golf, tennis, or otherwise socialize together? The stranger the relationship, the better off you are with the lawyer. It's not always what you know, but who you know. In legal societies, the "good old boy" system still exists pretty much as it did a century ago.*

**This is insulting to the judiciary, and in its own way naive, or worse, lazy, which translates into potentially dangerous for you. [For more, go to [HandlingConflict.com](http://HandlingConflict.com)]**

## COMING UP IN *ENGAGING CONFLICTS TODAY*

An interview with John Lande. John Lande is Director of the LL.M. Program in Dispute Resolution and Associate Professor at MU. He began mediating in 1982 in California. He teaches courses on Mediation and Non-Binding Methods of Dispute Resolution. His scholarship focuses on institutionalization of mediation in the legal system and how lawyering and mediation practices affect each other.

## RECENTLY IN THE ENGAGING CONFLICTS BLOG

- Ethics: First, Do No Harm
- Social Change Without Borders
- Chocolate From Beer: What Good Luck For Us All!
- Mediating As A Way Of Life: Richard Millen Engaging Conflicts Today Interview
- NYPD Hostage Negotiator: Jack Cambria Engaging Conflicts Today Interview

## TIP OR TOOL FOR TODAY

Remember the Milk (<http://www.rememberthemilk.com>) allows you to manage tasks quickly and easily. Using maps, to-do lists, reminders and more, you can easily manage all of your work right from your computer. Never forget the milk (or anything else) again!

## QUOTE FOR TODAY

It all begins when the soul would have its way with you.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

I encourage you to share this newsletter with anyone who is interested in timely and interesting negotiation, mediation and conflict management-related issues. The information in this newsletter may be copied and distributed without charge and without permission, but with appropriate citation to me and the Engaging Conflicts blog. A free subscription to the newsletter is available at [EngagingConflicts.com](http://EngagingConflicts.com).