

Can I borrow your ego please?

Eliane Markoff- April 2018

There is nothing wrong with having a strong ego. It can help you overcome a failure. It does not allow you to give up easily or accept failure. It also motivates you to overcome obstacles and try harder next time.

Having said that and as a mediator, I am the first one to ask people to put their egos on hold.

During mediation, when I find that the parties' egos are delaying or blocking resolution, I separate them into different rooms and then ask each: "May I borrow your ego?" Usually a pregnant pause follows. That is exactly what I hope for. I then continue to explain that I will only borrow their ego for the next few hours. I even compensate them for the loan of their egos. The price I pay them is a guarantee that they will walk away from the mediation less unhappy than they find themselves at that particular time. I do not guarantee satisfaction; I guarantee a lower level of dissatisfaction once the mediation comes to an end.

Once I have their egos in my "possession", I allow them to be humble and honest. I ask them to reflect on their current situation and to identify the real issues that brought them to mediation. I ask them to tell me confidentially what compromises they are willing to make to resolve the conflict. I will then switch gears and ask them to tell me what they enjoy in life. I create the environment that allows some of their anger to dissipate.

Depending on the situation and the parties, I sometimes ask them to put themselves in my shoes and advise me on what they would do if they were the mediator. This last technique may sound risky but it has proven very effective for me. It further empowers the parties to resolve their own issues and provides me with information that I may not otherwise learn. It also creates the platform for the parties to realize that their egos may be standing in the way to resolution of their dispute.

Of course, I hold on to their egos and return them only after a final resolution is reached!

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