

The Divorce Agreement Newsletter

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The Interplay between Marital and Political Conflict

Politics works best when the leaders of both sides have and value an ongoing relationship. The classic example was the working relationship between President Ronald Reagan and Speaker “Tip” O’Neill. Divorces often work out best when parents are committed to a lifelong relationship of a family nature. Conversely, when one or both spouses seeks to avoid any future contacts with the other, except through intermediaries, the negotiations are frequently bitter and do not necessarily end quickly.

In both the marital and political arena a sort of *tribalism* may take over. It is not unusual in some of the most difficult divorces for each side to assemble a “tribe” of friends and family, who even assist financially as well as emotionally in keeping the conflict alive. Tribalism was certainly alive and active in the 2016 election. On one side the tribalism took the form of raucous and angry rallies of mostly white participants, and on the other the “tribe” celebrated being multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. There were two very different views of where America should be going.

Fundamentalism often plays a significant role. A common cause of marital breakup is when one spouse gravitates to a less tolerant approach to life and faith, and/or the other moves toward a more open and tentative style of living. In the current political arena, religious fundamentalists also often have a fixed attitude about politics. On the other side, there are a variety of ethnic groups with their own sets of grievances and goals.

Gender issues are often important in both marriages and politics, as are relative levels of education. Differing attitudes toward the interaction of stability and change, as well as the means and goals of change, are reflected in the problems that both individuals and groups have in adjusting to social and economic changes. Change often produces insecurity, causing conflict.

When the emotions in a marriage become more negative, conflict results and is usually harder to resolve. Much of contemporary American politics appears to be directed at raising the emotional level of political discourse. Emotions often get in the way of searching for common sense solutions to agreed problems. In marriages as in politics, it’s damn hard to solve a problem when it’s difficult to agree as to what the problem is, or even if a problem exists. There is probably a strong emotional component.