

Review of *Changing the Conversation: The 17 Principles of Conflict Resolution*

There is a tricky recurring problem for attorneys who negotiate divorce agreements, and it highlights one of the reasons why negotiating lawyers might consider some ADR techniques. The problem is those clients who expect their attorneys to employ the same kinds of arguments that the clients had used with their estranged spouses. That is, the very same dysfunctional communicating that demonstrably didn't work during their marriages!!

In a previous article, I argued that it was time to bring more ADR conflict resolution ideas into conventional divorce law practice, and I promised to outline some of the most useful ADR contributions. In the interim, I discovered a new book that does lots of this for me. The book is *Changing the Conversation: The 17 Principles of Conflict Resolution*. It is published in paperback by Penguin Books for \$18, and is available for less on Amazon.com. The new book was written by Dana Caspersen and is posted on the Home pages of the website, www.CreativeDivorce.net, together with an Amazon link. This is one of the best single books on ADR negotiating since the classic *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, which came out in 1981 (it's now also published by Penguin.)

This new book is set up to be easy to read, remember, and apply in practice. It provides concrete examples of each of the 17 principles, and also provides an anti-principle for each. For those of us who have lots of experience with angry, frustrated clients, the anti-principles may seem more familiar than the working principles. The book does an excellent job of explaining why the anti-principles are ineffective. It also has some practical suggestions as to how to recognize the emotions involved in the conflict, and for keeping them in proper perspective without ignoring their existence.

Although this book wasn't specifically written for divorce cases, its ideas are almost totally consistent with divorce negotiations. As a general book on conflict resolution, it could even serve as a helpful handbook for marriage counselors, especially since so many of the communication difficulties in marriages are actually negotiation problems. You can read the book in two hours, and then keep it handy for future reference. Trust me, you will continue to refer back to it. For those of you who are interested in politics, you may find yourself sending a copy to your state legislator, your member of Congress, or even to the President of the United States!

For attorneys who are skilled in conventional divorce negotiations, this review isn't intended to urge you to make major changes in how you practice. However, the book can be a source of some new ways to accomplish effective results. With the two books mentioned above serving as bookends for that discussion, my article on ADR contributions has just become easier to write.