

# EASING CONGRESSIONAL GRIDLOCK

A DIVORCE MEDIATOR'S GUIDE

WE'RE RUINING OUR FAMILY  
WE'VE GOT TO STOP DOING THIS!



*for the union*

# THAT CAN'T DISSOLVE

## SEIZE THE MOMENTUM!

Because I spend my days helping couples communicate to solve real life problems, I can't avoid seeing the hallmarks of a dysfunctional marriage in the current Congress: tiresome bickering while neglecting the needs of the family. Let's not fall back into this pattern.

**Carol Bailey is a mediator, family law attorney, adjunct law professor, and writer about relationships and happiness.**

[www.integrativefamilylaw.com](http://www.integrativefamilylaw.com)



## UNLIKE A CHRONICALLY

unhappy couple, you can't divorce. You're stuck. But your family (that would be us, the nation) needs you to stop arguing and take care of family business.

I'd like to sit you down at my mediation table, look each of you in the eye, and say, as I do to families:

Over the last year, you totally lost your focus on your family, digging in and bickering endlessly about things no one understands or cares about.

You've both been so grim and humorless that your family celebrations aren't fun anymore. You both just want to win without caring about the family. What kind of a role model are you?

Let's fix this! There is something positive you can do to seize the momentum of the budget deal and turn this around for good.

From working with real life people who bitterly dislike each other but are highly motivated to improve their families' lives, I offer you, the United States Congress, the following tips which regular folks have shown over and over again will improve communication, enhance problem solving and lead to productive decision making. If you will each use just one of these tips every day you can lift the national mood, improve your poor standing in the eyes of the nation and move our country forward with some responsible decision making:

## 1. KNOW YOUR PURPOSE AND DON'T GET DISTRACTED.

### YOU'VE GOT TO STAY FOCUSED

on your defined purpose all of the time, otherwise your activities are misguided and meaningless. With so much negativity in Washington right now it appears you have forgotten

your true purpose. You're so off course. Remind yourself of your true purpose daily and stay focused on it. Hint: It's your constituents' and the nation's welfare. Not your reelection.

## 2. DISCIPLINE YOURSELF TO AVOID NEGATIVE ACCUSATIONS.

### IT'S VERY TEMPTING TO ACCUSE

the "other side" of negative intentions so you can criticize them and make yourself appear superior. But it's also very dishonest, lazy and destructive to indulge that

temptation. Positive statements build trust. Trust leads to solutions. Don't consider yourself superior to others if you can't and won't make positive statements about them.

## 3. GET OVER YOURSELF: THIS IS NOT ABOUT YOU OR YOUR PARTY.

### TO BE AN EFFECTIVE LEADER

you must depersonalize the issues and stay focused on your objective, to take care of the "American family". When you find yourself feeling personally attacked, or your party being attacked, don't react. Take

a step back and refocus. Tit for tat exchanges sabotage communication and obstruct decision making. And decision making is your main job. Someone has to stop the bickering, be the grown up and say something helpful. Let that be you. Always.

#### 4. GENERATE A DESIRE TO LISTEN AND HEAR: YOU DON'T LEARN ANYTHING NEW WHEN YOU ARE TALKING.

**LISTEN AND ACTIVELY LOOK** for value in your opponent's position. Try to find something you agree with, rather than the current pattern of refusing to agree on the most obvious facts. A small point of agreement can

lead to a larger agreement. If you can find nothing in the other party's positions that you agree with and you generally learn nothing from listening to them, then *you* are the problem, not them.

#### 5. DEMONSTRATE THAT YOU BELIEVE OTHERS HAVE A RIGHT TO THEIR OWN POINT OF VIEW BY TREATING THEM WITH CIVILITY.

**WE'RE ADVANCING DEMOCRATIC** principles all around the world. You, in Congress, of all people must honor, and demonstrate that you honor, the right of others to hold a view different from yours. If you can't do this, and instead are intolerant of other points of view, you undermine

the whole basis of our great democracy. Demonstrate that you honor your opponents' right to differ by treating them with civility. Repeat: Demonstrate that you honor your opponents' right to differ by treating them with civility.

#### 6. CHECK YOUR FACTS. OPINIONS ARE BASED ON "FACTS" YOU BELIEVE. MAKE SURE YOURS AREN'T DISTORTED.

**FACTS ARE OFTEN DISTORTED** by the person who reports them, mostly unintentionally. If you are genuinely trying to solve our nation's problems, be aggressive in checking the accuracy of the facts you rely on. Be enthusiastic in changing your mind if you learn something new,

rather than being stubborn just to prove a point. If you aren't learning new things on a regular basis, you are not aggressively checking your facts. Be an effective decision maker by seeking accurate information; it is better not to know than to have the wrong answers.

#### 7. THERE IS NO WAY TO REACH AGREEMENT WITHOUT COMPROMISE BECAUSE THE VIEWS OF ALL SIDES MUST BE LEGITIMIZED.

**IF YOU "WIN" AN ARGUMENT** then the other side waits for a chance to retaliate, ambushes you and then they "win". This is the story of ongoing violent conflicts that we all want to change: rigidity supported by force, responded to with rigidity and another kind of force. If you

can relax your rigid demands and point of view, then there is space to incorporate the interests of others and a stable resolution can be created. Rigid principles obstruct problem solving. If this is too subtle for you then you probably shouldn't be running our country.

#### 8. RESIST THE CULTURE OF NEGATIVITY AND LEAD THROUGH INSPIRING OTHERS.

We don't remember the speeches of John F. Kennedy, Ronald Regan and Martin Luther King Jr. because they were negative; we remember them because they were inspiring. Our news and media are filled with negativity, to which we are all instantaneously and unrelentingly exposed. Resist joining this disharmonious chorus and speak in your own strong voice with a positive message of inspiration about what you value, not what and who you hate.

## 9. BE CLEAR IN YOUR THINKING AND IN YOUR SPEECH. TELL OTHERS WHAT YOUR GOAL IS AND HOW YOUR PLAN WILL ACCOMPLISH THAT GOAL.

**THERE ARE SO MANY WORDS** flying around and so many people talking over each other that it is often unclear what you're saying. Your goal and your plan are what others really need to know and we rarely hear that. If others can trust that you have a goal they believe in and that your means of accomplishing

it are thoughtfully organized, you will create opportunity to build consensus. You will also become a star by simply showing others you have a goal, a plan and the clarity to articulate them. Obstruction in lieu of conversation is never a goal of people who are respected as effective decision makers.

## 10. LAUGH WITH OTHERS ABOUT OUR HUMAN CONDITION AND LEARN TO DEVELOP COMPASSION FOR OUR SHARED SITUATION.

**LAUGHING HELPS PEOPLE** reach agreement. Let your guard down and allow yourself to laugh. This creates an opening to see our shared humanity, which is a strong motivation for finding agreement. We are all the same, with the same fundamental needs, desires and fears. We all love our children and

want them to be safe, we all want to prosper and we all want to feel good about ourselves. When you forget our common nature and choose to see others as an enemy you single handedly become the obstacle to agreement. Counteract negativity by laughing with others.

Attached for your wallet is The Ultimate Credit Card summarizing these 10 Tips so you will never find yourself in a deficit as you seek to improve communication, reach agreements and better serve our country.

# THE ULTIMATE CARD

No Credit Limit – Never Expires

Triple Miles Earned In Citizen Approval Rating When Used Daily

## 10 TIPS FOR COMMUNICATION AND PROBLEM SOLVING

1. What are you doing right now? Don't get distracted from your true purpose. (This works in love as well as politics.)
2. Avoid negative accusations about others.
3. This is not about you. Instead of being defensive, stop, and say something helpful.
4. Listen to hear something new.

**THESE ARE SOME STRATEGIES THAT** help common people, your constituents, work through impasse, address negative emotions, correct nonproductive thinking and improve bad relationships through better communication. They are able to resolve significant, life changing issues every day because they are motivated to take care of their families. You yourselves can't possibly like your interactions with each other and the quality of your relationships across the aisle and ideological divide. So, do something positive! Since you can't get out of this marriage, get into it! These tips work and will make things better, if you use them.

*WIN REELECTION*

*by showing us you are*

**AS SERIOUS**

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**ABOUT SOLVING OUR NATION'S PROBLEMS**

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**AS WE ARE**

*about solving our personal ones!*

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10

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#USfamilymatters

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5. Demonstrate that you honor other people's right to differ by treating them with respect.
6. Aggressively check your facts to make sure they're accurate.
7. The interests of others must be included to reach a stable resolution.
8. Resist negativity and lead through the inspiration of your values.
9. Tell others clearly what your goal is and how your plan will get them there.
10. Counteract negativity and reach agreement by laughing with others. Humor matters.