

BOOKSHELF



WHEN GOLIATHS CLASH

Let's say you're in an argument with your spouse. He or she complains that you don't pick up your socks, or that you pull all the covers over to your side of the bed at night. How should you respond?

What if, instead of feeling defensive and angry, you "took this feedback as a gift and not as a threat"? What if you were able to regard this information about socks and bedclothes as "data points," as descriptions of changeable behavior rather than attacks on your character?

This would be an example of "depersonalizing conflict," a technique recommended by [Howard Guttman](#) (LYS '76, SAS '77) in his new book, *When Goliaths Clash: Managing Executive Conflict to Build a More Dynamic Organization* (2003, American Management Association).

The target audience of the book is actually senior management of corporations. But Mr. Guttman hopes that his advice may reach a wider audience as well, because all of us—in our families and neighborhoods, as well as our jobs—face conflict all the time. Hence, business executives, and most of the rest of us might benefit from Mr. Guttman's expertise. "Anyone interested in improving his or her ability to manage conflict and improve performance should find value" in the book, Mr. Guttman writes.

He has collected conflict-management tips and stories from over twenty years of reading, studying, and, most importantly, advising such high-power firms as Sara Lee, L'Oreal, and Pfizer, as well as many smaller companies. His business, [Guttman Development Strategies, Inc.](#), in Ledgewood, New Jersey, employs about twenty-five people, and his wife, Jacqueline, to whom the book is dedicated, is the chief operating officer. The firm provides executive coaching, strategic planning, and training strategies.

Mr. Guttman took a unique and interesting educational path to arrive at his current career. After earning his B.A. at New Jersey's Fairleigh Dickinson University, he began working with the New Jersey Historical Society, providing needs analysis. He "loved working with the community" and wanted to learn more about nonprofit organizations. So, he enrolled at what was then the Western Reserve University School of Information and Library Science.

Then, he discovered "a gap" in the education he was getting, realizing that social-science expertise also would be helpful. He asked permission from the University to work on a double master's degree by enrolling as well in what is now the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences. "It's a testament to the University," he says now, "that they let me have the dual degree. They were willing to go outside the box."

After completing his degrees and returning to New Jersey to work with nonprofits, businesses began to hear about Mr. Guttman's work, and now he functions mainly in the business sector.

When Goliaths Clash is full of actual examples of successful, and not so successful, strategies for dealing with conflict. The key to conflict management, says Mr. Guttman, is training people to "provide feedback and to receive it." A good leader provides frequent, direct feedback to his or her team and solicits feedback in return.

If we all told the folks at work, frankly and calmly, what they're doing that displeases us, and then welcomed their suggestions to us in return, our working environment could certainly run more smoothly. And, if we applied the same strategies at home, maybe the socks would get picked up and we'd all be warm at night. 🧦

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