

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



## The Third Alternative

Read this short article adapted from a post by Stephen Covey. What is a **third alternative**?

...When people can't compromise, it can be a good thing. Because suddenly the way might be open to a 3rd Alternative.

In any conflict, the 1st Alternative is my way, and the 2nd Alternative is your way. The usual outcomes are either a war or a compromise. Compromise stops the fight -- but without breaking through to amazing new results. A 3rd Alternative is that kind of breakthrough.

3rd Alternative thinking doesn't just resolve a conflict, it transforms the conflict. It's not about putting Band-Aids on the old reality, it's about creating a new reality. With a compromise we all lose something, but with a 3rd Alternative we all win.

One person -- you -- can start the quest for a 3rd Alternative. Just go up to your "opponents" and say, "Are you willing to look for a solution that's better than what either of us have thought of?" Most people will say, "Such as?" And you say, "I don't know. That's the idea. Are you open to seeking a way out that's beyond your way *and* my way -- a better way?"

That's a magic question. When your opponents see you let go of your own position, at least temporarily, suddenly the anger drains out of the discussion. Creative minds take over from competitive minds.

Here's an example. When I tell people that Switzerland had a civil war not long before the American Civil War, they can't believe it. "Switzerland?" they exclaim. "The most peaceful, most productive, most efficient, happiest, highest-per-capita-income country on the planet?"

It's true. In 1847 the Swiss were desperately divided between deeply conservative rural Catholics and liberal urban Protestants. They spoke different languages, lived on different sides of the Alps, and were so angry at each other they started shooting.

Fortunately, the Swiss came to their senses and asked themselves, "Can't we do better than this?"

And they did. They arrived at a 3rd Alternative: a country where all their religions, languages, and cultures flourish, and where their diversity is the source of their strength.

They and so many others show us how to create new and better results instead of conflict -- and how to build strong relationships with diverse people based on an attitude of winning together.

What is a third alternative? How is it different from compromise?

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