

# Can We Talk?

After the War,  
the Peace



# Peace is to war as chess is to checkers.

Among the greatest challenges faced by high net worth families is navigating the difficult process of seeking peace after an internal family civil war. When a lawsuit, divorce, challenged trust, sudden death, mental health or physical illnesses confronts members of a family, there are often a series of unfolding issues that may seem more difficult than the precipitating problem. Perhaps seemingly unimaginable, there are lessons from the annals of war and peace that inform ways that families can maneuver through the shoals and rapids of family conflict.

In our work with issues of peace and social justice, war and diplomacy, we were involved with peacemaking efforts and the consequences of peace, more often than the consequences of war. We used to remind ourselves that, *"Peace is to War, as Chess is to Checkers"*. The meaning of this, of course, is that although both are played on the same board or playing field, the game of chess and the pursuit of peace are far more strategic, complicated and perhaps rewarding to the players than checkers. In checkers, like war, many of the moves are fairly straightforward, simple, and obvious. In the life of a High Net Worth family, acts of war conducted in the courtroom, family disagreements played out over decades, or the brutality of a sudden exchange of angry words carry with them scars that can tear the fabric of an otherwise highly successful family.

One key to assessing any conflict is to determine early on if the parties desire, or must maintain, a continuing relationships after a dispute. In divorce, often the reason to maintain a relationship is for the sake of children. Other reasons might include, the failing health of a former partner, shared business ventures or interwoven investments. More often than not, it is harder to continue and cultivate the peace, than it was to start the lawsuit, or family civil war in the first place. The nature and dynamics of conflict are that disputes surge forward quickly and with force, while living the peace after the conflict can be a long, and enduring challenge.

If the family cannot agree on the problem, they will not agree on the solution.

American psychologist William Glasser wrote, “If you want to change attitudes, start with a change in behavior.” In the American South, issues of race and attitudes toward minorities were intense and often acted out in violent ways, both systematic and physical. In the Civil Rights era, individual attitudes were often hard to change, but laws, social consequences and jail time or financial penalties were used to modify behaviors. In a High Net Worth family, individual family members may hold attitudes about other family members or unwanted family dynamics. In order to change the situation and negative attitudes that hold the family static in their relationships, new behaviors are required to move away from old perceptions and patterns. The trick is how to change behavior.

This is the work of the Spencer Legacy Group. We are experts in supporting families to not only end the wars, but we engage family members in creating and thriving through the peace. We have spent much of our careers focused on how to sustain the peace. Below are a few lessons learned about critical elements for sustaining the peace in high net worth families.

- All parties must have a sense of ownership in the process and the outcome.
- The rules for family voting, or legal instruments must ensure that losers don't lose everything and that winners don't win everything.
- Third party advisors and family allies can be helpful to the on-going process of waging peace. Independent perspective and the validation of individual family member perceptions is valuable in achieving parity in family disputes.
- The habit of compromise pays dividends in ensuring continuing relationships.
- Small steps of confidence building grow trust and flexibility in modifying behaviors.
- Parties can best negotiate the peace when they are mutually empowered to share perceptions and create a sense of parity.
- Like rip-stop nylon, families can benefit from periodic preventive measures to keep the fabric of the family from tearing when minor emotional incidents occur.
- Mutual respect is energized by “sharing reality” among family members.
- Taking time to celebrate achieving family milestones and positive accomplishments is critical to focusing and re-focusing on what it takes to be successful family.

One of the oldest American family adages is that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”. This Benjamin Franklin axiom is thought by many to refer to health, while Franklin was actually addressing fire safety. Family conflict can benefit from this wisdom as well in their efforts to better manage predictable conflict.

At Spencer Legacy Group, we have learned that prior to setting up family trusts and using other legal instruments, it is helpful to spend time with the parties pre-viewing what the desired outcome will be of that legal tool. We often say, *“If the family cannot agree on the problem, they will not agree on the solution.”* Family members may not accept a trust document if the problem it is trying to solve is not understood or agreed to by representative family members. This means it is easier to accomplish family buy-in prior to the consummation of a trust than to go to court to undo it later. Sustaining High Net Worth family peace requires as much effort as does the fighting. One is chess; the other checkers.

Allow the Spencer Legacy Group to show you how we can help your family overcome the issues that might sabotage your success. When it’s time to talk about the elephant in the room, give us a call at 1-800-694-0059, or find us online at [www.spencerlegacygroup.com](http://www.spencerlegacygroup.com).

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