

Assume That Ego Is In the Way

In a disagreement with someone about how things should be done? Don't spend time arguing or analyzing or lecturing about whether their ego (pride, reputation) is in the way.

Of course it is. And so is yours.

You should take ego for granted in any decision-making process. Even at your best and most enlightened, you will ultimately care about your reputation. As you should – it makes sense to care about making decisions that will ultimately reflect well on you. And that's true also for anyone with whom you're disagreeing or negotiating.

You can choose to focus on ego, of course. It's very satisfying to be able to point out someone else's ego as "getting in the way" – while you conveniently ignore your own.

This ego shaming really just makes things worse and raises walls higher. And it relies on a pretty backward way to resolve conflicts – focusing on supposed root problems with individuals instead of focusing on the problem you are working on. If your project is going to happen, it's going to be done by flawed individuals with sometimes rowdy egos. Get used to it.

Because ego cuts both ways (every way, really), you won't find resolution on a disagreement with ego finger pointing. At best, your egos cancel each other out.

Step 1 is acknowledging all of that. But step 2 is finding something besides ego to talk about. Assuming you both want fame and glory and success from what happens next (and assuming you both think those are bad reasons for doing something), what are the *other* reasons for choosing option A or option B? Is option A better for design? Is option B better for cost?

Relativize your goal not to your motivations, but to an objective standard you both agree on (this is classic *Getting to Yes* stuff). Do that and you'll finally be on the road out of the hell of second-guessing and suspecting people's motivations. Take it for granted that your egos are getting in the way and keep going. If you do, you might actually find your egos getting along.