

Why We Can't All Just Get Along



Send him mail.



"Win-Win World" is an original column appearing sporadically on Thursdays at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Russell L. Roth. Russell is a 30-year marketing veteran and graduate of Jay Snelson's "Science of Human Interaction" course (he calls it "Win/Win 101"). He has owned and operated businesses in advertising, real estate and internet marketing. He holds a degree in Studio Art from the State University of New York and is seeking a music publisher for his portfolio of original Country/Folk fusion songs. A native of Central New York state, Russell currently resides in southern California with his wife, Valerie. Archived columns can be found [here](#). WWW-only RSS feed available [here](#).

Not long ago a friend of mine asked the question, "Why is there so much violence in the world? Why do we find it so difficult to respect and appreciate each other?" Here is the answer I gave her.

Violence between humans exists because, almost to a person, we have been raised and educated to believe that in order for ME to gain something, YOU must lose. This win/lose mentality is responsible for all inter-human violence and has so permeated our way of thinking that we barely see it for what it is. We believe that violence is inevitable because of competition, natural or otherwise, and we believe the urge to compete for what we've been told are scarce or limited resources is a natural state and therefore impossible to abolish.

Because of this, many of us believe that violence may be attenuated or controlled, but violence and the need for it are inevitable and inescapable. This win/lose philosophy is invoked wherever competition exists, which is everywhere.

Siblings compete for parents' attention and affection, students compete for scholastic fame and acceptance by the best schools, workers compete for the corner office, men compete for the most desirable women, and vice versa, nations compete for land and/or more power, or better natural resources, and different religions compete for the hearts and minds and money of fresh initiates. In the present world, competition sooner or later becomes inexorably associated with violence.

Such is the inevitable outcome of adopting a win/lose philosophy, and it's given

competition a bad name. Is humankind doomed to inflict and suffer violence forever?

Well, maybe not... if humankind can swap one outlook for another.

WIN/LOSE = LOSE/LOSE

Looking at all the wonderful things humans have succeeded in doing – wiping out diseases, catapulting to the moon, building huge cities, forging magnificent cultures – is it too incredible a notion to imagine humans trading a cruel, inefficient approach for a kinder, far more efficient approach? I don't think so.

The human race (there is only one race, and it is human) may have had brutal and violent beginnings, but it is not necessarily hard wired to commit violence. Violence has helped some of us survive over time, but violence ceases to be a viable survival skill when it involves hurling hydrogen bomb-tipped rockets at your enemy.

Today, when the concept of win/lose is employed, all parties become losers. We need to learn new survival skills, because none of the win/lose approaches we have tried thus far have worked. What's the definition of insanity? – Doing the same thing over and over, and expecting different results. Plainly, we've been doing this for centuries and, just as plainly, the results still suck. Is it not time to try something that's never been tried before?

But just what is that something? I and many others hold that we need to release our white-knuckled grip on win/lose and embrace Win/Win, in every facet of our lives. Win/Win is simply this: In order for ME to win, YOU must win. If you lose, so do I.

Please note this is not some lame attempt to get you to join a religious cult or give your life savings to some do-gooding charity in the hope that what goes around will come around. No, with Win/Win the returns are assured. With Win/Win we exercise total freedom in entering voluntarily into whatever pursuits or relationships we judge to be in OUR OWN SELF INTEREST... with others who have freely decided to do the same alongside us, in their own self-interest.

In order for me to win, you must also win. What a novel idea! Do you think we can work together to see if we can find a goal or solution or undertaking that benefits all parties who care to participate? It sounds radical because it is. But just because it's radical doesn't mean it won't work. Just because it hasn't yet been tried doesn't mean we should never try it.

But how exactly would this Win/Win world work? What would it look like if no one were victimized by lies or force, and all citizens were allowed to labor, keep or spend their money, use, enjoy and hold their possessions as they saw fit... as long as their actions did not result in hurting (lying or forcing) anyone else? Is it possible for the inhabitants of an

entire planet to live by the golden rule?

Yup. And I know how.

The only way for this to happen is by employing Win/Win instead of win/lose as the model for all human dealings.

WHY WIN/WIN?

The beauty of Win/Win is that its adoption precludes not only violence, but coercion in all its forms. I and many others define coercion as the use of force, threat of force, or commission of fraud to compel an individual to behave in a way that the individual deems contrary to his or her interests.

So if a thief points a gun at you and orders you to hand over your property, whether or not he discharges his weapon into your body, his demands are contrary to your well-being. He is attempting to force you to sustain a loss. That's coercion. Likewise, if a used car salesman secretly turns back an odometer in an effort to entice you into purchasing his vehicle, that's coercion too.

Thank God we have a government to make and enforce laws designed to protect us from such heinous acts of coercion.

Right?

Well, here's where we come to the really controversial and difficult-to-envision part: simply put, political government cannot exist in a Win/Win world. It's literally impossible.

GOVERNMENT = COERCION = HASTA LA VISTA, BABY!

Unfortunately, government is so thoroughly, and by its very nature, coercive. It cannot exist WITHOUT being coercive. What's more, it cannot exist without holding and enforcing its MONOPOLY on coercion.

I don't think I need to spend too much time talking about all of the coercive acts for which governments are responsible, do I? Here are just a few:

- Forcing citizens to hand over their money (taxes).
- Breaking of promises (*de facto* fraud), as when a politician tells you "no new taxes" in order to get elected, then raises them as soon as he lands in office; or promising to balance the budget when he or she knows that this would be next to impossible.
- Evicting citizens from their homes to make way for "needed" roads, utilities, even shopping centers. (It doesn't matter whether the homeowner is paid for the property at the going market rate... forcing the homeowner to "agree" to such a transaction is

coercion.)

- Forcing citizens to serve in the military.
- Underperforming. Closely related to the breaking of promises, this is the worst, most prevalent form of fraud committed by governments. Why we tolerate it is beyond all reason. When government takes it upon itself to provide citizens with a steady, dependable supply of fresh water, for example, it forms a contract with the citizens promising to do just that. But then it inevitably fails its mission to provide the stuff in ample amounts. Upon breaking the contract, it then adds insult to injury by blaming the users – and even threatening to penalize them for watering their lawns on certain days, or washing their cars in their driveways. This type of fraud amounts to nothing less than betrayal and abuse of the citizens who put the government in power.

These acts all involve the use of force, threat of force, or fraud, against the government's own citizens – the very people it is said to serve. And yet, we as citizens not only allow this sort of behavior, we EXPECT it from our government, because somehow we believe this supports “the greater good.” We not only expect it... we demand it. Isn't this sick?

All of these acts – force, threat of force, and fraud – are legal when committed by the government... and illegal when committed by any other individual or entity. Thus we can truthfully say that government holds and enforces a monopoly on coercion. We even expect government to work tirelessly to enforce this monopoly in the mistaken belief that this will protect us FROM coercion. How dysfunctional is that?

Government not only wields coercion, it MUST coerce in order to survive. Don't believe me? What do you think would happen to a government that woke up one morning to discover all of its power to commit violence, threats or fraud was suddenly gone? Well, this has actually happened many times in history. It's called a “coup.” And the government that experiences one does not survive for long, does it?

No, when a government suddenly becomes non-coercive it instantly loses all its power to keep its citizens in line through force, threat of force, and fraud. The government collapses and chaos rules... until another coercive government is formed to take its place... or at least, until a military or police force restores order through coercion. Once a government ceases being coercive, it ceases being a government.

And because government is the only “legal” coercive entity, it is a major attraction to those people who seek to live a life of coercion for profit: politicians and bureaucrats. These people wish to force others to behave in a way which they want them to behave. It doesn't matter whether the politician's intentions are good or evil. When you wield an inherently evil tool, it imbues evil to your cause, and to you. Politicians forcibly take your money and give it to themselves and others. They are legalized thieves, and experts in the exercise of coercion of the citizens they are sworn to protect from coercion. Truly a Bizarro world if

there ever was one.

And the really sad thing is, contrary to what you've been taught by government-run "educational" institutions, this thievery and betrayal are wholly unnecessary.

SO WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

So to review, we know that the only sure way to eliminate the suffering caused by cruelty and violence is to eliminate coercion. We've seen that government cannot exist without institutionalizing and practicing coercion, and that in order to survive it must hold and enforce a monopoly on coercion. And thus we now realize that the first step in abolishing human-upon-human violence, fraud and suffering must be to abolish political government in all its forms, and instead embrace Win/Win.

Put more directly, the government... ANY government... cannot exist without coercion. Coercion cannot exist in a Win/Win world. Therefore, there is no place for government in a Win/Win world. Government has got to go. PERIOD. Can't have it. Don't want it. Don't need it.

With political government gone, we envision not a COERCION-driven society, but a MARKET-driven society. A society where voluntarism replaces force, threat of force, and fraud.

In the absence of any form of political government, who makes all the decisions? The free market, that's who. Who makes up the free market? Consumers like you and me, and the businesses that serve them, and serve them well, or perish. For just as there is no more government to regulate, tax, and otherwise handicap businesses in their attempts to serve you, there is no more government to use your money against your will to bail out failing businesses, or grant one group of businesses an unfair advantage over the other in the interest of "leveling the playing field." Without the meddling hand of government placing unnatural, inconsistent and prohibitively expensive restrictions and requirements on businesses, businesses are left to thrive or die. How? By serving you and me, and either succeeding or failing.

It's that simple. How's THAT for leveling the playing field?

And now I can almost hear you wondering out loud, "So with no government to step in, how will we the people be protected from the evils of big business controlling pricing, quality and availability? For that matter, who's going to protect me and my property from crooks and murderers? Who will maintain order?" Again, my friend, my answer remains the same: the free market will protect you.

In fact, the entities that stand ready to shield you and me from all coercion already exist in

large part. We simply need to tinker with them a bit, to enable them to do that in which they excel. And we need to allow them to do what they do.

We know that businesses that fail to keep their customers happy will lose money and eventually die. They will be replaced – put out of business – by other businesses that do a better job. A more cost-efficient job. No business will hold a monopoly for very long; for without government to protect such businesses through bailout, regulation or law, sooner or later, when customers tire of the lack of choice that comes from being locked in to a particular supplier, new businesses will spring up that will offer a choice and foil the monopoly. They will win customers away from the monopolies, restoring competitiveness to the market. This is why we call the free market economy self-correcting.

This frequently happens to a certain extent in spite of government intervention, or when government intervention is partially, grudgingly, withdrawn. One example: who has been slowly putting the US Postal Service, once a government-run monopoly, out of business for the past many years now? How about FedEx, UPS, the Internet? The good ol' USPS no longer holds the monopoly on getting it there despite rain, sleet, or snow. It hasn't for years. And it is now suffering because it cannot compete.

When the airlines were “deregulated,” remember how a whole plethora of small, regional and boutique airlines suddenly sprang up? And remember the shakeout that followed, when many of these new airlines discovered they couldn't operate profitably, yet others of their kind survived? Your choice as a consumer was enhanced by deregulation because competition among airlines increased dramatically. And choice is the enemy of monopoly.

It works the same for car manufacturers, lending firms, cable companies, corner grocery stores and dog-walking services. As long as there's no government to interfere by bestowing bail-outs or creating new regulations, the failing business will do just that: fail – leaving only the most able and profitable companies to serve the consumer in their superior fashion.

And what do you think will happen when true competition finally rules the market and businesses are no longer saddled with ridiculous, draconian and costly taxes and regulations? The prices of goods and services will plummet.

Conversely, the citizens' disposable income will soar, as all taxes will be a thing of the past and “pay as you go” will rule the day. Only profitable companies will be allowed by the market to exist, and they will compete intensely for their share of the work force, so salaries, wages and benefits will be high across the board. Employees will be rewarded with hefty bonuses for high performance that directly leads to the continued success of the employer. What could be more fair?

WHAT ABOUT PROTECTION FROM BAD BUSINESS PRACTICES?

But how will this absence of government coercion affect the citizen when it comes to protection of the individual? As I mentioned, the seeds of protection are already present. Businesses will provide the required services, and consumers will vote with their dollars. If these businesses fail to deliver what the market wants, they will die. Only those businesses that perform to our liking will survive.

Here is one scenario of how this might work. There are others, but I like this one the best.

Among the government “protections” to go the way of the dinosaur will be privacy laws (as we know them today). If you take advantage of your neighbor, if you prove untrustworthy or capable of practicing violence... in other words, if you commit coercion... everyone will know. That is, everyone who wants to know will know.

How? The power of the Internet, for one thing. Have you heard of Angie’s List? It’s a fancy blog for customers of local service providers. If you hate the job your plumber did unclogging your toilet, you can post a critique of his foul practices online for the world to see. Future potential customers can then avoid doing business with him. He loses more and more customers. Finally, he goes out of business. Problem solved. And you didn’t have to participate in a coercive system (i.e., run screaming and crying to some judge or big-daddy bureaucratic regulatory government body) to teach him a lesson.

Take it one step further. Say that the plumber was wise enough to purchase insurance in case he ever needed to make good on a failed claim to an unhappy customer... a form of malpractice insurance for plumbers. In the above case, the unhappy customer would present a claim to the plumber’s insurer. The insurer would examine the claim, determine its veracity, pay to make it right, and probably raise the plumber’s rates, much like auto insurance companies do today.

If the customer was unhappy with the decision of the insurer – say, if the insurer failed to make sufficient reparations for the plumber’s actions, in the opinion of the customer – the parties could take the case to a private arbitration firm, which would make the final decision.

Naturally, should the insurance company find itself frequently paying sums of money to cover for their client’s bumbling ways, it would not only raise the plumber’s rates, it may even drop him as a client. No insurance company would want to insure a proven inept plumber. And no consumer would want to hire an uninsured plumber. Plumber goes out of business. One more excellent example of the free market policing itself.

Of course, the plumber is not the only party who must watch his Ps and Qs. The insurance company must deal fairly with its plumber-client and his customer, or risk being exposed as a less-than-desirable insurer, thereby risking its own customer base and ultimately its existence. And in turn, the arbitration firm must scrupulously examine and adjudicate the

case of the cheapskate insurance firm, lest word spread that ITS performance is substandard. And so forth.

All parties have much at stake, because competition abounds and there are no government bailouts or protections. Reputation, for both the individual citizen and the operating business, will become everything.

GETTING PERSONAL: THE FREE MARKET AND CRIME

Just as there will be no government to protect businesses that deserve to die, there will be no government to protect those individuals who attempt to practice coercion in the form of murder, rape, theft, burglary, fraud, or any of the activities which today are considered illegal. But how would it work?

It's so charmingly simple.

First, should you suffer an act of coercion, you would begin in much the same way as described above. Except instead of a poorly performing business, you would now, for example, seek arbitration against a thief who has taken your property. If you can prove your case, the thief – or his insurer – pays you a reparation. This already is far more than any victim usually gets in today's judicial system.

And what about crime prevention and apprehension of the accused? Enter the private security firm. Citizens would contract with private security firms to offer real, competitive, protective services for their homes, families and businesses. They could do this either directly, with the security firm of their choice, or through an insurance company offering full-service packages of financial and personal protection.

For example, let's say as a homeowner, I decide to insure my property against coercion (theft, destruction, home invasion, vandalism, etc.) as well as against natural destroyers such as fire, flood, and the like. Naturally it would benefit both me and my insurer to protect my property by installing burglar alarms, closed circuit TV monitoring, and even possibly adding patrols by armed officers, employees of the private security firm that's working with my insurer to control loss. This protection can be easily extended to include not just property but my family's lives and limbs. Who needs a corrupt and coercive police force when I can rent-a-cop through my insurance plan?

One might even envision an insurer-provided, personal crime alert device, worn somewhere on the body, or even implanted, with GPS tracking, that could be activated upon the infliction of violence. "Help, I've been beaten and I can't get up!" Private security would already be routinely patrolling your area, and upon receiving your distress call would be at your side in no time. Reaction time statistics for each company would be posted on the Internet, so you and your insurer would have the information you needed to pick the

right security firm for your needs and situation. Or, whichever security firm was able to get an officer to your side first, that firm would be the one receiving payment for services rendered. When was the last time YOU had two or more POLICE organizations competing for your business?

As we said above, once the accused was apprehended by security officers (assuming the fool tried to escape), you would seek justice through arbitration. If your accusation “sticks” you are either paid by the criminal, his insurance company, or your own... or a combination. Any paying insurance companies, then, would exact reparations from the thief over time. If the thief had no insurance and no job with garnishable wages, the private security firm would perhaps remand custody of the miscreant over to your insurance company, which would pay you for damages and then indenture the thief until his debt was fully paid.

Here is a very important concept. Note that while force may necessarily on occasion become a part of this process, the use of force in this instance is NOT coercion. Force used to correct an act of coercion is not coercion. It is corrective force.

And in this completely transparent, free market society, the need for corrective force will be rare. In the first place, there will be far fewer financially desperate people because the free market will create prosperity in volumes previously unknown – and also because few individuals will be willing to risk apprehension and punishment, as adjudication and reparation will be imposed far more quickly, efficiently and successfully than when the government was in charge. And finally, people will just be plain... well, smarter. Having been educated by a private and competitive school system, they will have learned that a win/lose life is pointless and intolerable.

And such is the way it would be with every facet of our lives. Everything that’s government owned and controlled today would be part of the free market, subject to all the natural laws of free market economics.

GEE, IT SOUNDS GREAT, BUT REALLY EXPENSIVE!

But where will the money come from to pay for all of the newly privatized products and services once the politicians are run out of town? Well... where is it coming from now? Today a hefty chunk of your income is wrested from you every working year, in the form of state and federal income taxes. Then there’s sales tax, the tax which most of us forget we pay daily because we are so used to it. And don’t forget estate tax. Capital gains tax. Corporate tax, the tax that taxes you twice. And finally, the most unfair tax of all: property tax. You mortgage the next 20 to 30 years of your life for a home to live in, and then the government extorts thousands of dollars from you every year until you die, simply because you own that home. Simply because it CAN. And it does this long after your house is fully

paid for: it taxes your property for as long as you own it. And should you not be able to pay your property tax, what happens? The government takes your property away from you.

When it comes to property taxes, it doesn't matter whether or not you have kids that go to public school. You pay regardless. Even if you do have kids, your kids will only be in public school for 12 years. So chances are excellent that for the major portion of your lifetime your property taxes will go toward educating someone else's kids.

And whether it's your kids or someone else's, they are ALL being trained by government employees to endure, inflict and spread coercion against themselves and others by obeying, supporting and participating in political government. They are being taught, as were you, that this is the only way.

By the way, when all is said and done, would you care to know the total percentage of your income you are coerced into paying each year in the form of taxes – all taxes – assuming you are an above-average income earner in the US? It's an astounding 61%... and more!

HOW DO WE MAKE IT ALL HAPPEN?

This is all well and good, you say, but this is so radically different from the system we have now, the free market you advocate will never be allowed to come into existence. This is too impractical a solution.

My answer to this is that Rome wasn't built in a day, either. It happened over time. So can this. We are in the early stages of transformation. I don't have all the answers. But I do know that right now, the most important and practical thing we can do is simply get the word out about win/lose versus Win/Win. This is a time of awakening.

We do NOT advocate violent overthrow of government in order to bring to reality the non-coercive, free market society we envision. We DO advocate teaching our kids to think critically, for themselves, at an early age, and never to view such phrases as "Because I said so," and "Because we've always done it this way," and "It's what God wants," as acceptable answers to their questions. We advocate treating our children like people and not property; teaching them the golden rule and explaining why it is so imperative in achieving a state of non-coercion, of voluntarism. And we advocate modeling for them the kind of thoughtful, self-interested, non-coercive behavior we want them to exhibit. We also need to talk with each other about these issues, as I am doing now with you. If enough of us understand that a Win/Win world is the way to go, the change will eventually be achieved non-coercively, through societal evolution.

It won't be easy or quick. But if we truly want to eliminate suffering, violence, fraud and poverty, we must give Win/Win a try.

How could the results be worse than the coercion we suffer today?

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Nearly all of the thoughts that I have shared here did not spring original from my brain. Private citizens, philosophers, economists and a few social scientists (there are not many TRUE social scientists) have been thinking about, discussing and teaching these topics for years. Below I offer a woefully incomplete listing of individuals and works that have helped pioneer and develop this thinking, in the event you'd like to learn more.

- *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand – for the moral foundation upon which voluntarism is built.
- Educator and social scientist Jay Stuart Snelson, and the V50 Lectures – for the scientific approach to the study of human interaction.
- Ludwig von Mises – for an exploration of the economics of a free market.
- *The Market for Liberty* by Morris and Linda Tannehill – my favorite; for more ideas on how a free market-driven society might work.
- Also visit The Sustainable Civilization Institute on Facebook.

Finally, I would like to sincerely and deeply thank Dr. Norman Imberman, for exposing me to these concepts which have fundamentally and forever changed the way in which I think about the world.

Read more from “Win-Win World”: