

THE 1ST OF 50 THINGS

COMPROMISE

*'Compromise, if not the spice of life, is its solidity.  
It is what makes nations great and marriages happy.'*

Phyllis McGinley

1/50

# COMPROMISE

When I was imagining my first entry, I thought it would be about something big like sex, religion or politics, but I had a sudden impulse to write about Compromise instead and maybe it's not such a bad idea. If your lives are going to be like anyone else's, the sooner you get friendly with Compromise, the better. I've had a long career in the film industry, working alongside some of the richest, most successful and most famous people on the planet, and I can't think of one of them who gets their own way all the time. I have many amusing (and some not so amusing) anecdotes about people who struggled with that concept, and they've convinced me that it's never a good thing to feel absolutely entitled to getting one's own way. And as in show business, so it is in politics: as president of the USA, Barack Obama was the most powerful person on the planet, but his domestic agenda was continuously disrupted by the Republican majority in the Senate, which caused him no end of grief. Even he didn't get to have it all his own way. And somehow there is something very sad and unhealthy about someone who gets too much of their own way. It creates a kind of neurosis that bursts out when life throws them a curve ball. I want you to be able to get through life without having a breakdown if you don't get your own way. That's why I think Compromise is important.

Compromise is an old person's word. When I say 'old' I am talking about anyone over the age of thirty. By thirty you have hopefully grasped that you are possibly not operating from the geographical centre of the universe, that life does not always go your way and that you just may, sometimes (often, actually) have to adjust your aims and your expectations and learn to deal with the disappointment that it brings. Before thirty, you may think you are the master of the universe and you spend a lot of time being aghast that God/the universe/everyone you know has not recognised this fact and brought you all you demand on silver platters while carrying you around on a bejewelled bier. Or was this just me?

But, if you are lucky, by the time you get to thirty this permanent and unpleasant state of surprise begins to pale and you start to get over yourself. (On the other hand, if, by thirty, you have not embraced Compromise then you are probably a megalomaniac or sociopath and doing very well in the entertainment business, judging from some of the people I've met!)

Compromise is defined as 'a settlement of differences by mutual concessions, an agreement reached by adjustment of conflicting or opposing claims, principles, etc., by reciprocal modification of demands'.

So Compromise means that no one gets exactly what they want. We see it all the time in everyday life. The 2010–2015 UK Parliament was led by a coalition government between two political parties who had previously been in opposition. Just getting both sides of the coalition to agree to Compromise on a daily basis made the job of pushing government policies through Parliament a much more arduous process. Arguments raged over many topics, including environmental policy, the

top rate of tax and university tuition fees. But, you know, I really believe that some of those policies were the better for being even more thoroughly debated and pulled apart. In fact, that's exactly what the democratic parliamentary process is based upon.

Similarly, in your real life, your personal relationships, Compromise is vital. One person cannot prevail at all times. For a start, it's unhealthy, and also, the relationship can't last very long under those conditions. Something, or more likely someone, is going to break down. In most instances you have to find a way for both of you to win. And sometimes you win by being happy that the other person is getting it their way.

As I've said, in my opinion getting your own way all the time is bad for you. It creates false expectation and discourages effort, be it in relationships or business or life generally.

Of course, there are certain things on which you can't Compromise. When King Solomon was presented with two mothers claiming the same newborn baby, his proposed Compromise was a fantastic bluff, but cutting babies in half is never going to be seen as a great success.

Likewise, you can't Compromise on things like your kid's name. You both have to love the name. You can't fake it. There was, I admit, a point when I thought Charlie would be better called Humphrey. But your mother didn't like it and that was that. And that was not a problem because we both had to love it or it was a non-starter.

But if you are in a loving relationship based on trust and respect, then you are safe to make big shifts towards one another. Sure, one person might be more persuasive – you've all seen your mother wrap me around her little finger – but you can't

persuade someone to love something that they hate. The only way forward is to, say it with me: Compromise!

I heard a great joke about Compromise:

A guy tells his friend, 'My girlfriend wants a cat, but I don't like them, so we're going to compromise.'

'Oh really?' says his friend. 'How are you going to do that?'

'We're getting a kitten.'

And that, kids, may just be the most eloquent demonstration of Compromise ever.

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