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Politics is the most selfish activity ever conceived by man. And yet, we entrust our most sacred institutions to its machinations. Isn't there a more noble and righteous path?

Aristotle said, "Man is by nature a political animal." Some say politics is a necessary evil. I say it's both. Politics arises whenever authority or power is negotiable. The imprecise science of human interaction does not permit a neat, orderly discourse that can be modeled mathematically. Thus, we must embrace something more chaotic, less predictable, and decidedly less friendly.

There are decent politicians, but there is no decency in politics. Politics is mean, nasty, and vicious. Gentlemen do not do business this way. Politicians do.

The first rule of politics is: don't take it personally, even though it is. Face it -- politics is personal. Although one may object to an idea, in politics, that point of view becomes personified in an individual, who can then be attacked by proxy, since ideas themselves have no substance.

If you hate the policy, you will hate the politician. Most liberals dislike George W. Bush personally, although few have ever met him. Likewise with conservatives and Hillary Clinton. Would you so soundly condemn a friend or family member solely on the basis of their perceived political perspective? Unlikely. Yet, politics becomes a sort of free-for-all, wherein restraint is checked at the door.

Taking The High Road

Years ago, I remember reading a pithy quote on the placemat of a restaurant. It said, "Never wrassle with a pig. You just get dirty, and the pig likes it." Shrewd politicians understand the need for dirt, and use it freely. It's part of the field of play, and if you throw enough of it around, some is bound to stick.

All modern systems have the notion of a statue of limitations, except for politics and perhaps marriage. Past sins are resurrected with relish, providing infinite ammunition for critics and opponents who may be able to muster no rational objection to an opponent's current condition. Redemption is elusive. Heroic contributions can be discounted with the wave of a hand, because some stubborn fact refuses to fade with the passage of time.

There is no place for naïveté in politics. The naïve are either crushed on entry, or used as pawns in a bigger game. Most of us remember Jimmy Stewart's 1939 performance in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. When confronted with betrayal, his shock is so complete that he is unable to respond. Yet he recovers, stands his ground, and triumphs in the end.

The second rule of politics is: Never give up. Richard Nixon suffered agonizing defeats, but persisted until he achieved his objective. After losing elections for both President and Governor of California within two years, he vowed that "you won't have Dick Nixon to kick around anymore." Yet six years later, he was elected President.

Abraham Lincoln lost eight elections, including two for Congress and two for the Senate, but ultimately was elected President. Persistence

counts.

Theodore Roosevelt said it best:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

Well, politics sounds like a pretty nasty business. How do we reconcile it to the Navy core values of honor, courage, and commitment?

Let me suggest certain key principles. First, attack the issue, never the person. Criticize the "what," but not the "who." Second, always treat others with respect. Agree to disagree, but do so with civility. Third, know your motivations. If you seek only power and not responsibility, back down. You are not ready. Lastly, remain humble. Power can be intoxicating; it is dangerous to the soul. Always reflect servant leadership in your actions, and you will remain true to your values.