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## **Hello Dalai**

By Andrew Malekoff

“Giving money and power to government is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys.” – P.J. O’Rourke

### ***The Dalai Lama and the New York State Senate***

On May 9, 2009 Nobel Peace Prize laureate the Dalai Lama offered an invocation for the New York State Senate, calling for compassion during tough times. The 73-year old spiritual leader of Tibet spoke from the chamber floor about honesty and transparency and told the Senators and spectators about his deep respect for American values. “This house,” he said, “I think demonstrates the American democratic system.” *Ya think?*

Just one month later, as we are now painfully aware, a failed legislative coup paralyzed the system that the Dalai Lama praised in the house that he sanctified. Since that time the State Senate deconstructed into a child’s game of “Who gets to hold the gavel.”

### ***Teaching our children about conflict resolution***

What can we learn from the senate stalemate fiasco that will help our children when they are in conflict with their peers? According to Marjorie Kostelnik, Dean of the College of Education & Human Sciences at the University of Nebraska, in our zeal to reach a compromise, a child might be denied their legitimate right to maintain possession of a desired object. When this occurs, she advises, “the focus should shift to helping the child who wants the object to generate appropriate strategies, such as asking, trading or bargaining to achieve their goal.”

Of course, sometimes our first response to the fuss is to say: “OK kids, who started it?” or ‘How many times have I told you not to quarrel?’” Children typically respond by denial or finger pointing. Of course, neither of these responses leads to constructive problem solving.

Kostelnik says, “It is better to approach the conflict saying: ‘You both seem very upset’ or ‘It looks like both of you want the [gavel] at the same time.’ These statements focus on the problem that exists between the children rather than giving sole responsibility to either child.” *Boy oh boy, our New York State Senators sure have given us a lot to think about.*

Perhaps the most important goal in conflict resolution is not so much the outcome of a situation as the enhanced ability to handle conflicts on a more mature level. In healthy conflict resolution there are some basic rules of conduct that we can teach our children. No name calling, staying with the topic at hand, no dredging up the past, keeping an open

mind, and listening to other points of view. This means no filibustering or talking over one another.

These tips are especially important, living in an era of violence – random, sudden, illogical, and lethal – where anything that seems the slightest bit threatening – a put down, a disagreement, a dirty look – demands immediate retaliation. We need to help our children to peaceably resolve conflicts. It is ironic that the Dalai Lama, a man that advocates for peaceful solutions based upon tolerance and mutual respect, spoke before the Senate just weeks before the mess in Albany.

### *The Dalai Lama and the Beatles*

To digress a bit, when I was a freshman in college in 1969, the Beatles were at their pinnacle. A rumor went around that Paul McCartney died. Word spread like wildfire that there were hidden messages about this on their album covers and in the lyrics of their songs. One neat trick, back in the day, was to play their songs backwards for clues. I did this with the song “Revolution Number 9.” I was sure that when I spun the vinyl disc counterclockwise that I heard the words, “turn me on dead man, turn me on dead man.” This was so freaky that it gave me goose bumps. Of course, the whole thing turned out to be nothing but a clever hoax.

For some reason, this episode in my life recently popped to mind and led me to get hold of the audio of the Dalai Lama’s address to the New York State Senate. Something told me to play it backwards. When I did, I could swear that I heard two words repeated over and over again – term limits, term limits, term limits.