

They Wouldn't Compromise. Why Would You?

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Our forefathers did not want to compromise with our liberties. They didn't want our country founded on compromise. To compromise means to give up something. In their case, they were building something, not giving up something (other than oppression). But if you're new to the land use and access battles, then the idea of compromise might have a significantly different meaning to you.

Often I hear from two very different sides of the fence. One side says never compromise...it only means we lost something in the process – and we've lost too much as it is. The other side says we must compromise in order to gain ground – that it's only fair to play give and take. Which side makes the most sense in today's world of recreational access? Let's take a closer look.

If you're negotiating for a look-alike Rolex in a third world country, you might experience compromise at its best. The seller starts pretty high and you counter really low. You "compromise" in the middle somewhere, most likely close to where you both wanted to be in the first place. It's built in to the process. We expect it to go down that way. But is this how our access should be negotiated?

Let's look at this from the other hand perspective of no compromise. If the "hacker of fine wanna-be Rolex's" sets a price that we didn't want to pay, we are left with two choices – take it or leave it. So is this how our access should be negotiated?

After twenty-five years of doing this land use and access stuff, I find myself wanting to compromise less and less. Oh, I still do it alright. I just do it less and less. And for sure I like it less and less. I look at the picture of our forefathers who built this country and I don't see a lot of compromise in what they set out to do. Nowadays, our local, state and federal agencies are completely focused on finding compromise (with us and those that oppose us). So just how should we negotiate our access?

My friend, Roy Denner, President and CEO of the Off Road Business Association (ORBA) will tell you flat out – do not compromise! ORBA was founded on the principle that businesses are tired of losing ground and tired of compromising that ultimately means losing more ground. So Roy and ORBA continue to fight battles from the standpoint that we have a line in the sand and we don't compromise it. It's good to have folks like Roy and ORBA on our side. ☺

Clark Collins, Founder and past-Executive Director of the BlueRibbon Coalition started BRC because a politician told him that recreationists didn't have any clout, thus were not significant in the access game. Clark built BRC by building relationships with other (more friendly) politicians and agency bureaucrats. This process required a fair degree of compromise. "But you never lose sight of your fundamental principles and the big picture," says Clark. "You can compromise when the time is right and actually gain ground," he adds.

Thus we are left with these two sides of the picture, still pulling at us as we attend meetings, try to save our trails, and get thumped in the process. Fortunately, it's the wins that keep us going. It's the new trails, the improved access and the wins in court that keep us trying to do what seems right in working with our own government.

But I'm here to tell you, it's time for less compromise for compromise sake. Politicians make a living by slinging compromise – that is all they do. Let's not get too mad at them for that; heck it's their job. Along those same lines, agency bureaucrats go to extensive training sessions to learn the art of compromise. I suppose we should not blame them either as they always have a dozen different interests pulling at them. So who is left to blame for compromises that leave us holding the bag? Us? I think so.

If you're reading this thinking, "Boy, Del, you're sending a mixed message," then you're right. I am. I say when you have a good politician or a good agency bureaucrat who is trying to make things fair by offering compromises to several different sides, then work with them. Find some compromise you can live with. Learn to compromise smartly in this case.

On the other hand, find your line in the sand. Define your fundamental principles. Do not compromise them. Hold firm. But also remember this – your "holding" position is only as strong as your ability to hold it. You can quack all day long and threaten all sorts of things, but if you don't have the membership and money to back your play, then, well, I hate to say it, but you're just another duck in the noisy pond!

This leads me to my best advice for this dilemma.

First: after you define your principles (line in the sand), figure out your real room for negotiating. Include a list of things you want to gain -- not just those things you're willing to give up. Far too often volunteer groups go into negotiating sessions with agency folks and radical protectionists thinking only of what they might have to give up. Learn to think in terms of wins and gains as starting points.

Second: clearly articulate the consequences of your choices – what will happen with each choice you face. It's important to face the reality and consequences of your choices before you make them if you want to be successful in the long run.

Third: objectively analyze what you can really live with and what is best for the cause.

Fourth: ascertain just how much clout (membership and money) you really have at your disposal. It's almost like playing poker, there's only so many hands you can win with bluffing and bluster. Real clout and real wins come from a strong support base.

Fifth: build support for the plan of action you choose and make it happen! If your support base is not strong enough, then build it up.

In reality, our forefathers did their own form of compromising – they compromised amongst themselves and their constituents. They had to in order to build this country in a democratic fashion. However, they clearly did not compromise with their fundamental principles, and I think that is where we need to land more often.

In my humble experience, I have found those who oppose our way of life will compromise only as long as it benefits them. In the end, they ultimately shy away from “deals” that slant too much our way. Think about it – if a group has a fundamental driving force principle that says all dirt roads should go away or that logging should not exist within our borders, then why would they ever compromise otherwise?

The BlueRibbon Coalition and the Off Road Business Association are just two of the organizations fighting the battles for access. There are many others fighting similar battles with different membership bases. The point here is to join up!

Every recreationist and off-road business in America needs to belong to the BlueRibbon Coalition as they are the premier national multiple-use group that champions responsible access for all forms of recreation. Off road businesses also need to belong to ORBA as they are the only trade association composed of off-road related businesses united to promote common goals that support the prosperity and growth of the off-road industry.

When it comes to deciding where you stand on compromising, it should not be a decision that prevents you from joining this or that organization. You should join everything you can afford to join because membership is what makes a volunteer or trade association strong. You should join and let your voice be heard to help guide the groups that are fighting for your rights.

I suggest that your jobs are to figure out where you fit in these battles, where you stand on the idea of compromise, and to help those efforts that make sense to you. Whatever you do, don't compromise your rights away by not even being in the game.

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