

## A Sumbiosis Think Piece

### Behavioral Rules (George J. Mitchell)

In a highly interesting podcast by Alison Beard from the Harvard Business Review<sup>i</sup>, the former U.S. Senate majority leader, George J. Mitchell describes a conversation he had with his Republican counterpart, Sen. Bob Dole, following his nomination. In this conversation, Georges Mitchel suggested a list of behavioral rules that should govern their relationship:

- I will never surprise you.
- I will give you as much notice as possible of every action I intend to take so that you will be able to consider your response.
- I will never criticize you personally or try to embarrass you.
- I will always be available to you if you have a concern, a question, or an issue you want to raise.
- To the extent humanly possible, I will always keep my word to you.

They both adhered to those rules. In the words of George Mitchell:

*"And to this very moment, (...), never once since then has a harsh word ever passed between Bob Dole and me, in public or in private. We disagreed on much legislation. We negotiated vigorously over procedural agreements that keep the Senate functioning. But we tried and I think succeeded in not making it personal and always trying, to the extent possible, to understand and accommodate each other's concerns.*

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<sup>i</sup> <https://hbr.org/podcast/2015/06/george-mitchell-on-effective-negotiation>. George Mitchell chaired as mediator the negotiation that led to the conclusion of the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1998.