

# Kluwer Mediation Blog

## The Peacemaker's Code

Martin Svatoš (FORARB/Charles University) · Thursday, January 20th, 2022

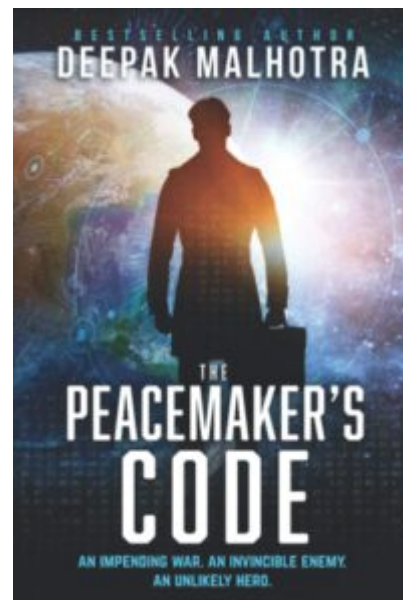


### List of Must-Read Books for Every Negotiator

Let me introduce you to my new project. I would like to put together a list of five books every negotiator must-read. And when doing this, I do not have in mind works directly related to negotiation and/or mediation such as *Getting to Yes* by Roger D. Fisher a William Ury and *Mediation Process* by Christopher W. Moore. My goal is to direct your attention to books seemingly unrelated to conflict resolution. Some of them will be even from a completely different genre. What connects them together is the fact they include some messages and inspiration relevant to negotiation and conflict resolution. Naturally, it will be completely based on personal preference. In non-subsequent posts, I will be gradually filling the list. Actually, I had started a couple of years ago when I blogged on [The Man Who Planted Trees](#).

?Today, I want to write about an excellent novel *The Peacemaker's Code* by Deepak Malhotra.

### Harvard University Professor



The Peacemaker's Code

Do not be scared. The main character is not Harvard University professor Robert Langdon. What ties this book to the famous university is its author. Deepak Malhotra is a professor at the Harvard Business School where he teaches negotiation, deal-making and diplomacy. Those involved in conflict resolution have probably read another of his books such as *Negotiating the Impossible* and *Negotiation Genius*. Yet in 2021, he published another piece that was completely out of his usual genre. *The Peacemaker's Code* is a sort of political sci-fi thriller. And before you will be discouraged from reading on be advised: I am not a huge sci-fi fan and yet I really enjoyed it.

Now to give you a glimpse of the story, I will briefly summarize the plot. When doing so, I will try to evade all spoilers, yet if you want to be completely surprised, skip the following paragraph. Even if you go through the summary, you will not be short of surprises for everything will be different and completely twisted at the end of the day.

— — — **Beginning of Possible Spoilers Zone** — — —

D. Kilmer is a renowned professor of history and diplomacy. We meet him as he is invited by the CIA to give a consultancy service on a situation that is very much threatening the existence of our world. Yes, the Earth is approached by Aliens and it pretty much looks like they want to destroy it... or at least mankind dwelling on it. Unlike in many Hollywood movies, they seem to be much better equipped than any human army at hand and – in general – the Aliens' knowledge and technical advancement seem to be on a completely different level. As pointed out in the book, this sour conclusion is not a huge surprise given the fact all the spaceships have travelled millions of kilometres to reach our planet. To make a long story short, any military encounter would probably turn into a complete disaster with truly epic consequences for mankind. To make the situation worse, the human side is far from being united and thus, the only hope is... to negotiate.

— — — **End of Possible Spoilers Zone** — — —

## Every Problem Wants to Be Solved



The greater part of the negotiation in the Peacemaker's Code happens in the White House Oval Office

Source: Wikipedia Commons

What is making this book unique is that Deepak Malhotra uses his narrative not only to entertain the readers but also to educate them. The story is full of little and discrete hints about communication, negotiation and decision making. If you like you can pick them up. If you took the journey only to watch an excellent and educated professor saving the planet and human civilisation, suit yourself – no need to go any deeper. In both ways, you will not be disappointed.

If you opted for the more focused approach, you will be well rewarded. I have selected a couple of examples of those enlightenments. One to start with is the big picture mantra professor Kilmer follows up throughout the whole story: *Every problem wants to be solved*. Professor reminds himself of this rule anytime he encounters troubles or deadlock. This already is a great mindset for every negotiation and a great lesson learned.

To comply with this golden rule, professor Kilmer deals with presumptions and perceptions accordingly. It is quite refreshing that the main character happens to *not* know what to do from time to time. At any stage, he is keeping a tight grip on the situation as illustrated by the following quote:

I am not sure yet. I need to think about it some more and I want to hear from everyone in the meeting. I do not mind making a call with too little information, but I do mind making it with less than I can get.

## Ice-braking of Applied Theory

The book is full of casual examples of applied negotiation theory. For instance, Deepak Malhotra is using the scene when professor Kilmer is meeting with US President Marianne J. Whitman for the first time to masterly illustrate the art of small talk and ice breaking.

[The vice-president Zach] Nielsen suggested that they sit. President Whitman looked around at the options.

‘There is no way I am digging through those pillows to find a few inches of coach, Zach. I will take one of the chairs.’

Nielsen's reactions suggested that this was an ongoing joke between the two of them. Kilmer resisted the urge to laugh. The President took Nielsen's chair and the VP

switched over to one of the couches. Whitman was about to reach for some coffee when she noticed that all three cups had already been used.

‘Seriously Zach? No cup for me?’

Kilmer froze. There had never been an extra cup – I’m an idiot.

Nielsen came to the rescue: ‘I’m sorry about that madam president. My mistake we’ll get another one right away, along with some more hot coffee.’ He gave Kilmer a nod that seems to say: ‘Don’t worry Prof, I’ll cover for you.’

Kilmer smiled back thanks. Then with a grin on his face, Nielsen continued: ‘As you can see madam President, I ordered three cups but professor Kilmer felt that he deserved at least two of them for coming all this way to help us. I think it shows courage actually. Not too many people would have the guts to steal a cup from the person who has access to our nuclear launch codes.’

What the hell? Thanks for nothing Zach. Kilmer tried to think of something witty to say. He came up with: ‘Sorry about that...’

Whitman laughed: ‘Zach! Be nice! It’s okay Professor. If you can help us get out of this mess I’ll gladly send you every piece of China in the White House. I even throw in some of Nielsen’s pillows. She gave Kilmer a pat on the shoulder as if to make it clear that she was taking his side and that she was not in the least bit offended.

Kilmer found a bit of footing.

‘I’m happy to take on the aliens Madam President, but asking me to take these pillows of your hands is little much.’

‘Et tu, professor?’, said Nielsen as Whitman laughed. Nielsen looked over at Kilmer and gave him a wink. That’s when Kilmer realised that Nielsen had actually done him a favour by throwing him under the bus. It had broken the ice and engendered a more informal atmosphere. Nielsen had even managed to get president Whitman to come to Kilmer’s defence. It was a small gesture on her part and entirely in jest, but it created a moment of camaraderie. A basis for rapport between Whitman and Kilmer that would otherwise have taken much longer to build.

## The Heirs of Herodotus



Herodotus – The father of historians is frequently mentioned by prof. Kilmer in

Another bright idea of how to bring in more negotiation theory in a very informal and entertaining way is to use excerpts of Kilmer's Book *The Heirs of Herodotus*. They are scattered throughout the Peacemaker's Code and they give the reader an interesting intermezzo. Grippingly, it also gives more credibility to Kilmer's character at the same time. You will get the impression that he is a real professor since you have read parts of his work.

The Heirs of Herodotus, by D. Kilmer, excerpt from Chapter 1: 'Society cannot afford to forget the lessons of the past, nor to learn the wrong lessons. But there is a third danger and it is the greatest threat of all. If only because it is the least well recognised. Humanity can no longer afford to have only a handful of its citizens of leaders understand the lessons of history. We cannot count on a select few to be the caretakers of knowledge. The elite guardians of wisdom will be rendered useless if the masses are incapable of understanding their language and able to appreciate their concerns or uninterested even in considering their advice.'

Those words prove to be more up-to-date than it seems at the first sight. And they point us to another problem in the dispute resolution field. Are we capable of providing the general public with enough understandable explanations why to negotiate and mediate their conflicts? This is a real challenge to be tackled. Deepak Malhotra supplies us with a way to go – to illustrate the principles of consensual negotiation using different tools that may reach the broader public.

One of many reflections upon finishing the book was whether Deepak Malhotra will actually finish *The Heirs of Herodotus*. I think it would be worth the effort. On a cheerful note, he would have to use the pseudonym of D. Kilmer. Anyway, I would like to thank him for this wonderful book for another reason too. Since 2017, I have been typewriting a crime fiction set in old Prague. Page by page in spared time. I always considered that as a kind of hobby or even therapy after mediating difficult cases. After finishing *The Peacemaker's Code*, I decided to give it another look and publish it. Of course, I will let you know about the progress.

## Must-Read Books for Every Negotiator

1. [The Man Who Planted Trees](#).
2. **The Peacemaker's Code**

Have you read *The Peacemaker's Code*: Let me know your thoughts in the comments. Also, what would be your 5 Every Negotiator Must-Read Books?

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