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Not Everything in Today's Society Needs to be a Competition

By Narvin Chhay
UCF Forum columnist
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We need to work harder to understand each other because acting like cavemen fighting for firewood will not save us.



In the course of competition, losing feels awful no matter the contest, says columnist Narvin Chhay. (Photo by Chris Chow on Unsplash)

I am a competitor. We all are to some extent—some more than others. We all have something ingrained in our primitive brains: We love to win.

This is the reason when I wake up every morning that I pick my feet up no matter how heavy they may feel. Whether it's a game of rock-paper-scissors or a championship game, victory feels so good. It's like there is a fire within us that can only be fed by one thing: winning.

But, is this always really a good thing?

The competitive instinct most of us have is likely a result of the way our distant ancestors had to act. If they did not get more food or supplies than their peers, they would starve and die. Nearly every competition for them would decide if they would live to see another day.

I have seen many people get into arguments just to feel a sense of victory.

This has evolved into the curse of competition in the modern human. No matter the importance of the contest, losing still feels awful.

I have a brother who is four years older, and he was much bigger than me when we were younger. Since both of us are athletes, we constantly competed with each other. We butted heads at home, having arguments ranging from backyard football to video games. Even when I beat him in something like a video game, he always had another way he could beat me—in a physical altercation. No matter how many times I tried, it felt like I could never beat him in a fight.

So, as the years went on, I challenged him less and less. I started to realize that this just wasn't a competition I really needed to win, especially because it was a really hard one. This may seem like a crazy story but it taught me one important lesson: Being the "winner" doesn't always mean you won.

Let me explain. If my brother and I disagreed, I could try to explain myself peacefully or I could insult him and eventually we would get into a fight. Even if I somehow beat him up, he would resent me and would fail to listen to my argument. Due to his physical advantage, I chose the peaceful route more often and I noticed that we wouldn't fight as much. Any disagreements we had could be settled with a peaceful conversation.

As much as I wanted to prove he was wrong and rub it in his face, that was just unnecessary drama. I learned that I would not be the loser in a competition if there never were a competition. I could achieve my goal of proving I was right to my brother without even having to win an argument, because there never was one.

Through this ideology I have found it much easier to be persuasive in life and more effectively influence others.

I have been thinking about the concept of competition a lot because of the current events we are facing as a society. With the recent elections, events surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and the social unrest we are seeing as a result of racial injustice, I

have never seen such a polarized population. I blame social media for a lot of this, as things seem to escalate at the speed of light nowadays.

I have seen many people get into arguments just to feel a sense of victory.

I am not saying having arguments is necessarily bad; we are fortunate to have the right to disagree in America. What I am saying is that we should all step back and think about better ways to achieve our goals as a society.

Almost like the way athletes compete to prove who is the best, many people argue their political beliefs just to feel like they are the best or the smartest, and they could never be wrong. We need to work harder to understand each other and remember that not everything needs to be a competition.

Unlike our ancient ancestors who were constantly competing, often in life-or-death situations, in our society this is not the case.

So why must we act like it? Yes, there may be a lot to argue about right now as our world is in turmoil, but acting like cavemen fighting for firewood will not save us.

If we are unable to grasp this concept soon, our behavior will destroy us.

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