

I want to talk to you about games. Not the Saturday afternoon sort, played out with mud and rugby balls, but the 'games people play' sort.

We all play these kinds of games. Babies quickly learn to play the game of getting what they want by screaming, and parents quickly learn how to comfort the screaming child (who is otherwise perfectly happy), by distraction.

Salespeople play games to earn a living. Obviously nobody really believes all the sales patter. Its just a diversionary tactic played while each side psyches out precisely what their opponent wants, ie. their position and gameplan. And, in a sense, we're all salespeople, whether we tramp from door to door with a box of brooms, or help represent one's company or organisation at Open Day etc.

Games are also played by politicians, and in some sense perhaps, they are the master players, freely and seamlessly skipping from one set of tactics and rules to another, in order to achieve their endgame. Games are also played out by corporate executives and lawyers, and in committees, action groups, lobby groups, political and nonpolitical groups. Lets be blunt about this, games are about getting your own way.

But it is also good to realise, that most things are just a game. It helps you feel less angry and frustrated when perhaps "the game is not going well", leaving you better able to play the shots and improve your prospect of winning.

Its what Don Corleone refers to in The Godfather when he says "its not personal, its business". Don't take losing personally, instead, invest your energies into calculating better tactics. After all, tricking an opponent into taking things personally, is just the tactic used by skillful players to win games. So don't fall for it. Avoid the red mist. Stay cool and calculate!

And, as we all know, males and females play games. Each gender has its own agenda, its own mutually conflicting rules of the game, thinly disguised as needs, aspirations and feelings. This has to be. After all, it would be pointless for mother nature to spend 3 billion years designing and perfecting two distinct sexes of each lifeform, if they turned out to be effectively identical clones, with identical strengths and weaknesses. Relationships is the game by which people agree a working compromise set of rules, enabling them to win more games together as a team, than perhaps they would singly.

There's no getting away from games really. We're all in the game of getting along with each other, although we're probably all playing under slightly different rules. The precise rules we each decide to adopt is a very personal and philosophical thing. We all like to feel, don't we, that we've chosen the best rules, and that if only everyone else were playing by our rules, the world would be a much better place (especially for us!!!)

Games can be very serious though. Winning some games is so important, that opponents dare not even acknowledge that, "it's all a game". In a sense, letting people know it is all a game, can give the whole game away.

And sometimes, as in war, the consequences of loosing are so horrendous, that we find it hard to speak of it as "a game". Yet, a game is what it is, and if we are serious about winning, then we would probably want our leaders to stay calm and rational, to analyse clearly and play the best shots, without distraction.

At another level, every schoolchild works out for themselves, eventually, a strategy of how to always win the game of "naughts and crosses" (or at least, never lose). Well, it might interest you to learn that there is a branch of mathematics called "Game Theory", which is all about calculating winning strategies for playing different kinds of games, based on a logical analysis of the rules of that game. Game Theory has in fact arrived as part of the maths syllabus in some schools.

Computers are also very good at Game Theory. Already, computers are so good at playing chess, that only International Grand Masters stand any chance of beating them, and only then by 'psyching out' specific, tactical weaknesses in the computer's program, which interestingly, is the only human aspect of the computer.

Computer power and capacity in fact has been doubling nearly every year now, since they were first produced, and its a bit worrying to find that, at this rate, they will overtake humans in terms of raw neuron capacity and speed in about 30 years time. At the moment its just chess, but one day maybe, we could all wake up to find they've decided to play other games. Those of you who have seen Stanley Kubricks chilling film, "AI", will have had, perhaps, a glimpse of the future of Artificial Intelligence.

Finally, even speakers play games. Who knows, perhaps this talk is just a game. A game to trick you into thinking about some things you might not have wanted to think about, and a game to trick employers in keeping me in gainful employment. Thank you.