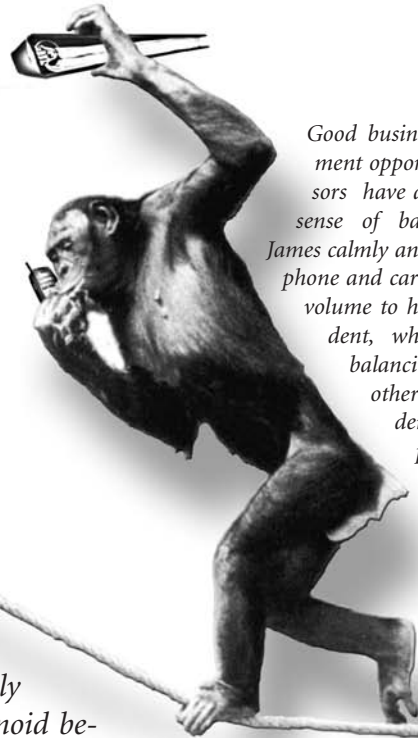


# The Proposal Professional as Primate:

## LESSONS FROM THE JUNGLE



*Good business Development opportunity sponsors have a remarkable sense of balance. Here James calmly answers his cell phone and carries a review volume to his vice president, while carefully balancing many other complicated demands of the proposal.*

By Jayme A. Sokolow, Ph.D

*I have often wondered what we can learn about proposal professionals from observing our fellow hominoids, those monkeys and apes we most closely resemble. Consider these two classic examples of hominoid behavior. The first comes from an episode of *The Honeymooners*, the classic television comedy that made Jackie Gleason famous. The second occurred among chimpanzees at the Arnhem Zoo in the Netherlands, which houses the world's largest captive chimpanzee colony living in a natural habitat rather than in cages.*

In a scene from *The Honeymooners*, Ralph Kramden, Ed Norton and their wives are sharing an apartment. A problem immediately arises over the question of food distribution.

Ralph: "When she put two potatoes on the table, one big one and one small one, you immediately took the big one without asking what I wanted."

Ed: "What would you have done?"

Ralph: "I would have taken the small one, of course."

Ed (in disbelief): "You would?"

Ralph: "Yes, I would!"

Ed: "So, what are you complaining about? You *got* the little one!"

In *The Honeymooners*, Ralph and Ed were dealing with a classic problem in all primate populations — sharing. The need for sharing is universal, but its logic must be worked out to everyone's satisfaction or else disputes may arise, even over the size of potatoes.

In the example from the Arnhem Zoo, two mother chimpanzees were sitting in the shade while their two children played around them. Another female, who was powerful and much older than the others, lay asleep nearby. When the children started screaming, hitting each other, and pulling each other's hair, one mother admonished them with a soft but threatening grunt while the other mother became anxious. The children again started quarreling loudly. This time, one of the mothers woke up the older female by poking her in the ribs and then pointed to the two noisy children. The oldest female took one step toward the children, waved an arm in the air and made loud noises. The children stopped quarreling. She then went back to sleep.

Here, the chimpanzees are dealing with another classic primate problem, the question of one's place in the hierarchical order. When the children started quarreling, their mothers found themselves in an awkward situation. In the past, neither one wanted to tell the other's child what to do. One mother

solved the problem diplomatically by asking a third party, who was the dominant female, to intervene and stop the fighting.

Ever since the great Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus considered classifying humans with monkeys and apes in 1758, we have gradually learned that we share many traits with our fellow hominoids. Especially in the twentieth century, the science of Ethology — the study of animal behavior — has linked our behavior, culture, and thinking more firmly to our evolutionary ancestors.

With a broad smile and a knowing wink, this author and article pioneer the field of Proposal Ethology — the study of the behavior of proposal professionals in their natural environments (organizations and proposal teams). We will begin by reviewing the evolutionary tree of proposal professionals. Then we will look at three lessons for proposal professionals that we can derive (or contrive) from studying other simians:

- Lesson #1: How to become the proposal team’s 800-pound gorilla.
- Lesson #2: Good ethics make good business.
- Lesson #3: Make peace, not war.

In each case, we will first examine simian behavior and then draw appropriate lessons for proposal professionals. We will conclude with an examination of the probable evolutionary origins of our behavior as proposal professionals.

## The Hominoid Family and Proposal Professionals

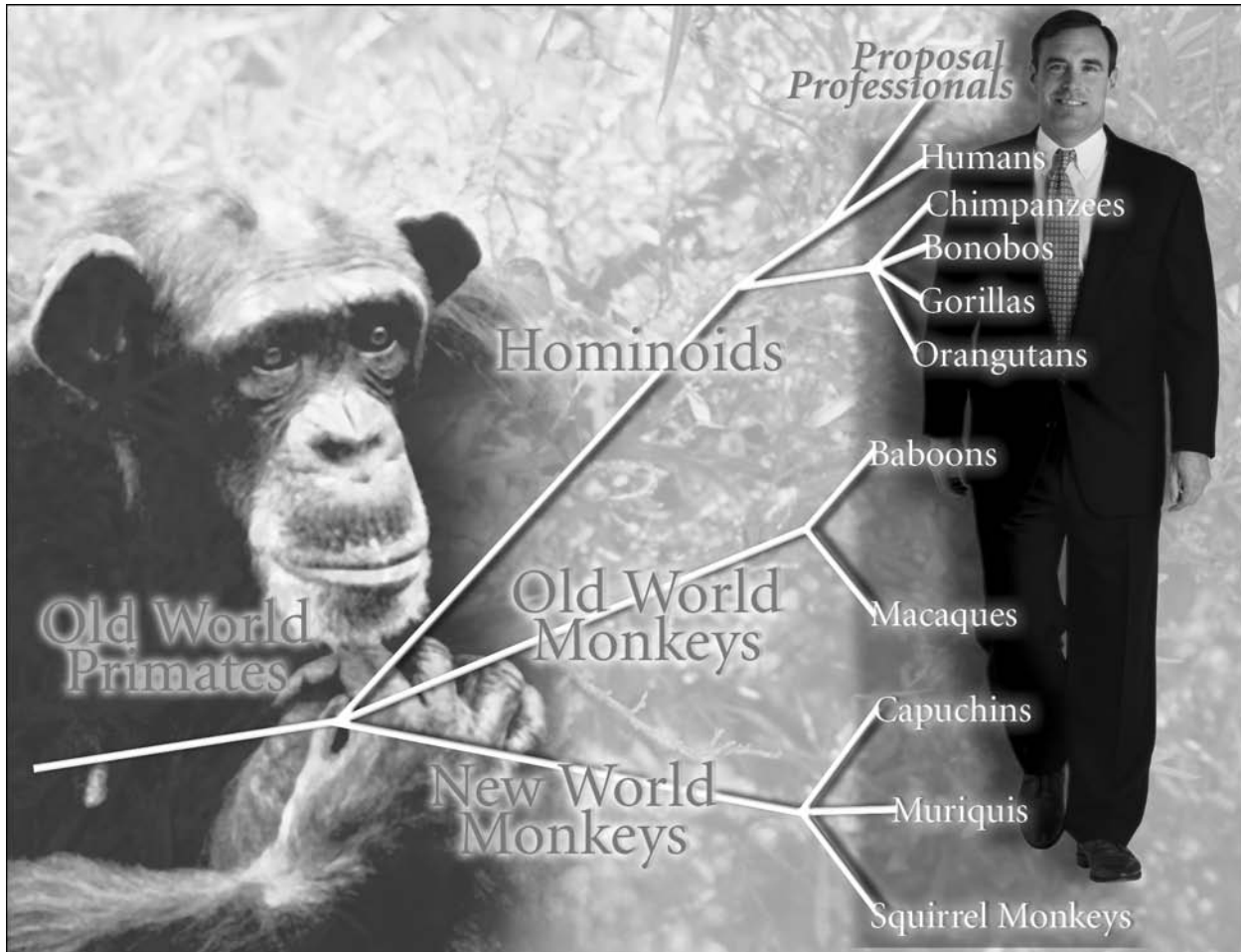
Today, comparisons between humans and other primates usually take two forms. In the social sciences and humanities,

the focus is on the uniqueness of the human species. In contrast, ever since the publication of Charles Darwin’s epochal book, *Origins of the Species* (1859), many scientists have argued that evolution by natural selection is the common thread that unites all forms of life. Human and animal behavior can therefore be best explained as the product of evolution.

**We share about 20 million years of evolution with gibbons, gorillas, chimpanzees, orangutans, and bonobos.**

All 200 primate species are commonly called monkeys, but hominoids are a distinct group. They have relatively large bodies (especially if they are proposal professionals who have spent too many late evenings at work munching on pizza and chicken wings), flat chests, no tails, and shoulders that they can rotate. Chimpanzees, not gorillas, are our closest relatives because they share about 99 percent of our DNA. In fact, bonobos (found only in Zaire), chimpanzees and humans are more closely related to each other than bonobos and chimpanzees are related to gorillas and orangutans.

Scientists estimate that primates appeared on earth about 30 million years ago. Around 20 million years ago, the hominoid family emerged, and then the common ancestors of humans and African apes appeared about 8 million years ago. As a result, we share about 20 million years of evolution with gibbons, gorillas, chimpanzees, orangutans and bonobos.



Characteristic	Description
Formalization	Ranks are formalized. When they become unclear, a struggle for dominance occurs that only ends when a leader's status is formally recognized.
Influence	Usually the individuals at the top are most influential, but an individual's influence on the group does not always correspond to his or her rank position.
Coalitions	Intervention in conflicts is designed to either help friends or build powerful coalitions.
Balance	Males tend to form strong social bonds among themselves.
Stability	Relationships among females are less hierarchically organized and more stable than among males.
Exchanges	Hierarchies are based on the reciprocal exchange of social favors or goods. For the leader, these exchanges boost prestige and provide security to the group.
Manipulation	Individuals use others as social instruments.
Rational strategies	Individuals plan their strategies to maintain or improve their position in the hierarchy.
Privileges	Those at the top have more privileges than those below them.

**Common Characteristics of Proposal Professional and Hominoid Hierarchies**—*Proposal professionals and hominoids have similar kinds of hierarchies. Their most important functions are described above.*

*Homo sapiens* may be several million years old, but the subspecies of proposal professionals is of more recent vintage. While proposals are an ancient art, the profession of proposal development only emerged in the twentieth century. Thus, of all hominoids, proposal professionals may be among the most recent and, hence, arguably the most refined. However, proposal professionals should keep in mind that during this same evolutionary period there emerged professional wedding planners, closet organizers and personal fitness coaches.

Although most of us do not consider comparisons to chimpanzees flattering, we cannot deny that they are anatomically and physiologically much closer to humans than to other species. Chimpanzees also are similar to us in their longevity.

Chimpanzees also resemble us in another significant way—they possess a culture. By culture, ethologists such as Frans de Waal mean that chimpanzees and other species can acquire new knowledge and habits from each other. Although they have no language or abstract symbols, chimpanzees can develop new tools to hunt, food preferences, communication gestures and environmental adaptations based on the transmission of accumulated knowledge. This means that groups of chimpanzees may behave differently depending on what they have learned.

## Securing Your Place in the Hominoid Hierarchy

In Aristotle's *Politics*, humans are famously defined as political animals. Political activity may be part of our evolutionary heritage, for chimpanzees also engage in constant political behavior. Like many proposal professionals, they are continually trying to secure, maintain and improve their positions within the group.

For example, every evening at the Arnhem Zoo the chimpanzees are called inside their building for dinner. The chimpanzees have learned that dinner will not be served until all of them have entered their quarters. One day, two obstinate adolescent females refused to enter the building. Two hours later, they relented and finally entered. The zookeeper gave them a separate bedroom because he feared bloody reprisals. The next morning, the chimpanzee colony physically attacked the culprits. That evening, the two chastened chimpanzees were the first to enter the building.

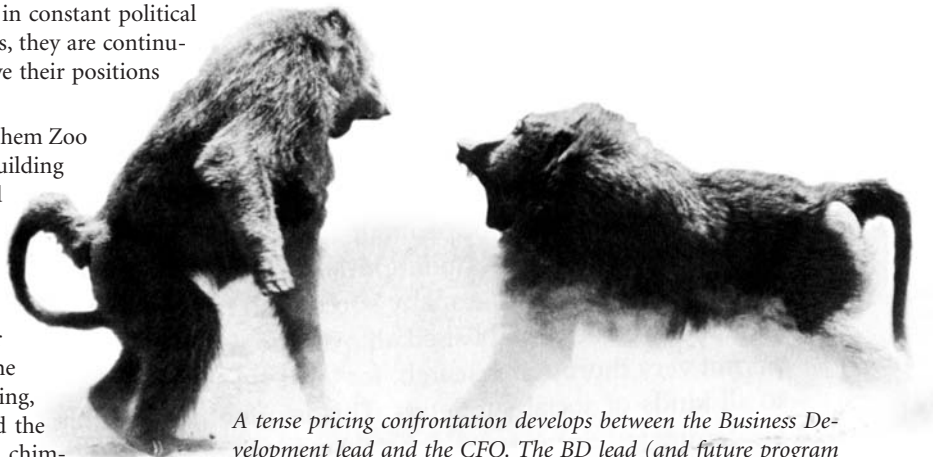
Chimpanzees and other hominoids follow rules and have a strong sense of social regularity. They also attach great significance to relations of dominance and submission. As a result, they group themselves into formal social hierarchies.

Chimpanzees' ability to build and maintain stable hierarchical relationships is based on the fundamental ability to recognize others individually and to remember them. Animals that lack these capacities can forge hierarchical relationships, but they must be rebuilt whenever meetings occur. Chimpanzees have the further ability to form triangular relationships, which means that chimpanzee A not only has a relationship with chimpanzees B and C but also allows chimpanzees B and C to have a relationship with each other.

In chimpanzee societies, sex, size and social characteristics determine the hierarchy. The alpha male is usually older and bigger than his male rivals, and he maintains his leadership position in three ways:

- First, he builds coalitions with other males to support him.
- Second, he tends to be generous with material goods, except to his rivals.
- Third, by giving protection to his group, he receives respect and support in return.

Leadership is not based on mere dominance but on the esteem earned through service to the group.



*A tense pricing confrontation develops between the Business Development lead and the CFO. The BD lead (and future program manager, if there is a win) has job security at stake, while the CFO wants to ensure profitability.*

Male chimpanzees focus on power and winning, and they spend a great deal of time developing strategies to improve their status. Females, in contrast, are more interested in interpersonal contacts and form coalitions only with their friends. In a chimpanzee hierarchy, there will be many male/male conflicts, fewer male/female conflicts and rare female/female conflicts. Because female chimpanzees are not as aggressive as males, their hierarchies are more stable and also less clearly defined. In chimpanzee groups, however, males reconcile more quickly after fighting than females.

## Lesson #1: How to Become the Proposal Team’s 800-pound Gorilla

The parallels between simian and proposal professional hierarchies are astonishing. In the office environment, proposal teams occupy a defined position in a company’s organization. In some organizations, this defined rank may be very low indeed. Proposal professionals are formally recognized by titles, pay scales, the size and location of offices, access to prestigious colleagues, and invitations to status-enhancing senior staff meetings. They are acutely aware of their place in the hierarchy, everyone else’s place in relation to themselves, and as good hominoids spend a considerable amount of time trying to improve their standing.

They may wear clothes and walk erect, but male and female proposal professionals behave much like the chimpanzees at the Arnhem zoo. Proposal teams typically organize themselves into groups and a hierarchy with the Proposal Manager as the leader. Under him or her might be Volume Managers, Volume Writers, Graphic Artists and Administrative Support. These relationships can be represented in a vertical organization chart, just like in chimpanzee groups. This hierarchy is not based on size or age but rather experience, knowledge, skills, and the right connections with senior staff.

Hierarchies are absolutely necessary to both chimpanzees and proposal professionals for the same reasons. Despite the continuing jockeying for positions that occurs in all power structures, they promote cooperation and dampen destructive competition.

Of all the organizational possibilities, hierarchy seems to be the best tool for promoting social integration and teamwork.

The major difference between proposal team hierarchies and those of other hominoid groups is that humans tend to be more flexible and creative, although unfortunately there are many examples to the contrary.

*They may wear clothes and walk erect, but male and female proposal professionals behave much like chimpanzees.*

To become the proposal team’s 800-pound gorilla, take the following steps:

- Show up for meals and meetings on time.
- Learn the identities of your fellow team members and effusively greet them by name whenever you make eye contact.
- If you are a male, build strong relationships with other males, be generous with your time to all team members except your male rivals, and act bravely by always publicly defending the proposal team to your superiors, regardless of impending deadlines and an alarming rate of progress. Avoid fights with females. Remember, being on the team is not about proposal development; it is about power and winning. If you get into a fight, show how tough you are by magnanimously reconciling.
- If you are a female, focus on strong interpersonal relationships with proposal team members of both sexes. Ignore your enemies, especially if they are males. Avoid fights with them. If you get into a fight, show how tough you are by slowly reconciling.

### Acting Ethically in a Hominoid Environment

Under what conditions can ethical values emerge in a world of self-seeking individuals? How can ethical values develop in an environment that may be predominantly competitive or non-cooperative? What strategies to promote ethical values can thrive in each type of environment? In addition, under what conditions can ethical values, once fully established, successfully resist invasion by less ethical strategies? The answers to these questions are very much the same for hominoid cultures and proposal professionals.

Characteristic	Description
Sympathy-related Traits	Attachment Emotional empathy Cognitive empathy Learned adjustment to individuals with different needs
Norm-related Characteristics	Social rules Internalization of social rules Ability and willingness to punish rule violators
Reciprocity	Cooperation Giving and trading Aggression against violators of rules
Getting Along	Avoidance of conflicts Reconciliation Group concern for harmony Accommodation of disparate interests through compromise

**Common Ethical Characteristics of Proposal Professionals and Hominoids**—*Proposal professionals and hominoids have similar ethical values because they both must balance individual self-interest with group interests. Their most important characteristics are described in the table above.*

Darwin argued that ethical values evolve because species are better off with them than without them. Until recently, however, many of his followers argued that human ethics was a triumph of morality over brute animal instincts. Over the last few decades, this perspective has been seriously challenged by ethologists' study of hominoid societies, which like human communities are based on clear notions of right and wrong.

There is a profound ethical paradox in evolution: genetic self-advancement, which is the centerpiece of evolution, seems to have helped hominoids develop remarkable capacities for caring, sympathy and understanding. Ethical values are not a unique human cultural construct that defies evolution or that separates us from other primates. They are a product of evolution that widely exists throughout the hominoid world.

## *Reciprocal altruism may appear idealistic, but it is actually very pragmatic social behavior.*

Examples of caring, sympathy, cooperation and mutual aid abound among hominoids. For example, in one chimpanzee group there were two females called Gwinnie and Mai. When Gwinnie had food, she would go to an isolated location and share it only with her offspring. Mai, in contrast, consumed her food in a more public location, and thus she had to share it with others. One day when Gwinnie and Mai needed food, their fellow chimpanzees responded to them quite differently. They willingly shared their food with Mai, but Gwinnie encountered threats and stinginess when she extended her open hand. These chimpanzees were telling Gwinnie, "You never share food with us. Why should we share ours with you?"

Perhaps reconciliation gestures are the most obvious and touching examples of hominoid ethics. After threats, fights and bites, golden monkeys make up by holding hands, chimpanzees kiss each other on the mouth, bonobos engage in repeated orgasmic sex, and tonkeana macaques hold each other and smack their lips. Among primates, reconciliation gestures often involve mutual grooming or a subordinate individual presenting himself or herself to the dominant individual, who responds peacefully.

Generally, behavior in stable hominoid groups is based on the concept of reciprocal altruism. Reciprocal altruism differs from cooperation, which is based on immediate rewards such as sharing food found by the group. In contrast, reciprocal altruism costs an individual something before any benefits are delivered. It is composed of three basic elements:

- The acts of exchange are costly to the performer but beneficial to the recipient.

- There is a time lag between giving and receiving.
- Giving is contingent on receiving.

Reciprocal altruism works among individuals that meet each other frequently, that remember each other, and that have the capacity to base their future behaviors on previous acts. For primates, reciprocal altruism starts with families and kin, and spreads outward to encompass larger groups. Behaviorally, it means that primates seek the company of others with whom they can form mutually profitable relationships, ones that will provide them with the food, protection and emotional support they need to survive.

## **Lesson #2: Good Ethics Make Good Business**

Proposal professionals face the same ethical challenges in the workplace as hominoids face in the jungle. Over time, most proposal professionals learn to work effectively with each other through trial-and-error learning about the possibilities for mutual rewards. On the most basic level, this involves cooperation. On the highest level, however, a more demanding form of behavior is necessary — reciprocal altruism. Once individuals realize that reciprocity works, it can become a norm that withstands the defections and betrayals that are an everyday part of primate life.

When members of a proposal team find ways to agree on narrative protocols for a Technical Proposal, when they publicly thank each other for good suggestions, and when they all agree to work together over a weekend to finish a task, they are engaging in the same kinds of reciprocal behavior as other hominoids. These behaviors enhance an individual's status, privileges and access to resources. Reciprocal altruism may appear idealistic, but it is actually very pragmatic social behavior.

Like the chimpanzee Mai, most proposal professionals learn to cooperate and share resources. They also have developed a wide repertoire of reconciliation gestures. Some hold hands, others kiss, and many individuals frequently smack their lips. Bouts of orgasmic sex seem questionable, but more systematic research needs to be done on this subject.

To act ethically as a proposal professional, take the following steps:

- Share your food with fellow team members. Some day, you may forget your lunch or be short of cash.
- Offer to groom others but never do so without their permission. For example, you can inform a same-sex colleague that there are specks of salad in his or her teeth, but do not try to remove them yourself.
- Engage in cooperation and reciprocal altruism. It is the best way to enhance your status, privileges, and access to paper supplies.
- After an argument with your colleagues, hold hands, kiss on the mouth or engage in repeated orgasmic sex if they are willing but never do so without their consent. You may find that your teammates consider these behaviors inappropriate reconciliation gestures.

*Here is a row of huddled, grooming engineers working at writing the technical volume, where they must propose a quality solution that may be too expensive. Social cohesiveness may be of vital importance for this species in the wilds of proposal development.*



Aggressive Behavior	Problems Caused
Harm to Specific Relationships	You cannot fight without losing a colleague, friend or a coalition partner.
Harm to Group Unity	Members who disrupt group life usually damage their own interests along with everybody else's.
Bodily and Psychological Harm to Others	Group members who are injured or disaffected compromise the quality of the social environment upon which the group's success depends.

**Common Dangers of Aggressive Behavior in Hominoid Groups and Proposal Teams**—Like hominoid groups, proposal teams are based on a strong sense of hierarchy and a shared sense of values (cooperation and reciprocal altruism). As a result, they usually devise ways to lessen aggressive behavior and promote reconciliation, as illustrated in the table below.

## Learning Hominoid Peacemaking Strategies

In 1963, the famous Austrian ethologist Konrad Lorenz wrote the best seller, *On Aggression*. Lorenz argued that humans possess a killer instinct and have few inhibitions to using it. Lorenz's book is part of a long scientific tradition that describes evolution as a ruthless and often violent struggle for existence leading to the survival of the fittest.

Unfortunately, humans have supplied ample evidence to support Lorenz's argument. The murderous 20th century should make us all ashamed of our species. Primates fare no better in the ethological literature. We have learned that gorillas and chimpanzees kill each other and that chimpanzees in their natural environments will occasionally hunt for meat and even eat each other. The aggressive and often violent nature of hominoids cannot be denied.

However, as Frans de Waal has argued, even though aggressive behavior is a fundamental characteristic of hominoid life, "this trait cannot be understood in isolation from the powerful checks and balances that evolved to mitigate its effects." In the hominoid world, groups find ways to reduce destructive competition, reconcile differences, and repair the damage caused by fighting. Making peace is just as natural as fighting.

Examples of peacemaking among primates vary, but the process follows predictable paths. For example, Frans de Waal once observed a chimpanzee fight at the Arnhem Zoo. As a dominant male attacked a female, other chimpanzees rushed to her defense. Soon they all calmed down, then suddenly they began hooting and one male chimpanzee began banging on large metal drums. What caused the excitement? The male who had attacked the female was now kissing and embracing her.

According to de Waal, when disputes occur, both the dominant and the subordinate chimpanzees may serve as peacemakers. Among males, the pro-

cess may take several months and includes frequent displays of intimidation, aggressive exchanges, and perhaps even physical attacks. Once the subordinate chimpanzee formally recognizes his rival's superior status, however, both chimpanzees can begin relaxing around each other. The key to reconciliation is the formal acknowledgment of inferior status, which is signified by grunting, bowing low, and the holding out of hands in a begging position.

As one might expect, the situation is different among female chimpanzees. Their coalitions are based less on dominance and more on personal preferences and kinship bonds. When females fight, they are less likely to make up than their male counterparts. Perhaps because bonding and solidarity are stronger among females than males, it is more difficult for them to reconcile. Coalition politics are also different. Male chimpanzees resist making enemies because they need the support of as many other males as possible.

Aggression is common among other hominoid species too. At the Yerkes Regional Primate Center, researchers observed a group of rhesus monkeys. For every ten hours of observation, they counted an average of eighteen aggressive acts for each monkey. In the wild, many of these monkeys have scratches, missing limbs, and permanent scars from fighting.

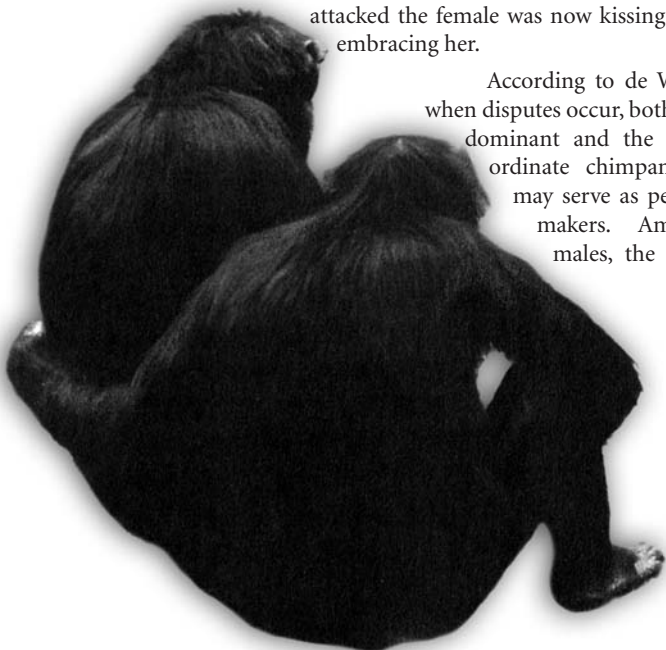
Yet, stump-tailed monkeys reconcile very quickly, usually within one or two minutes after a tense confrontation. Bonobos frequently use sexual relations as a form of reconciliation. One monkey named Sam had sexual intercourse 59 times in just six hours.

Bonobos are the original "make love, not war" hominoids. Females are sexually receptive throughout their cycles, so sex is not simply for reproduction. However, neither is it merely for fun, as with other primates. For bonobos, sexual relations are usually an alternative to hostile behavior and a way to reduce tensions over competition for food. Unlike other monkeys, they copulate face-to-face and in so many unusual positions that they put the *Kama Sutra* to shame. Sexual intercourse, however, is very brief. Sam's athletic performance only lasted a total of about 15 minutes.

## Lesson #3: Make Peace, Not War

Unfortunately, conflict resolution does not seem to be a highly developed trait among humans in this country. The huge number of lawyers (Washington, DC has 26 lawyers per 100 residents!), the willingness of Americans to litigate and sue each other for trivial reasons, and our high murder rate suggest that

*An adolescent proposal coordinator (right) seeks reassurance from her mentor, the proposal manager, while watching a tense conflict in the community.*



our peacemaking skills could use some improvement. Nonetheless, even in such a contentious society as ours, proposal professionals usually find ways to discourage overt conflict.

Among hominoids and proposal professionals, aggression is only one form of conflict resolution. Tolerance, compromise and peacemaking are also considered honorable steps because we must take into account how much we need our opponents. In interdependent groups such as chimpanzee colonies and proposal teams, winning is rarely absolute. Group behavior need not be a zero-sum game where your loss is my gain.

On most proposal teams, physically incapacitating fights are not the norm. When disputes arise, most proposal professionals find ways to resolve them without too much loss of blood. Like chimpanzees, dominant and subordinate team members may act as peacemakers. Among males, the process may take several months and includes frequent displays of intimidation, aggressive exchanges and perhaps even not returning a stapler. Once the subordinate proposal professional formally recognizes his rival's superior status, however, both of them can relax around each other again and the stapler will be miraculously found.

## In interdependent groups such as chimpanzee colonies and proposal teams, winning is rarely absolute.

To make peace, not war, on proposal teams, take the following steps:

- Keep in mind that a sizable minority of proposal professionals avoid spending their days fighting or bickering with colleagues.
- When making peace with someone lower or at the same level as you in the hierarchy, smile, shake hands and share food.
- When making peace with someone higher than you in the hierarchy, always remember to grovel in these appealing ways: grunt, bow low and hold out your hands in a begging position.
- If you are a male, fight hard but make peace quickly. If you are a female, take your time and keep 'em guessing. It is your evolutionary right.
- While daydreaming on the job, undertake a dispassionate cost/benefit analysis of bonobos' sexual behavior as a means to develop proposal team camaraderie.
- When a colleague raises your ire, try one of two proven calming techniques from the genetic grab bag of your evolutionary heritage: indifference and *ennui*.
- Keep repeating to yourself, "If it took humans millions of years to evolve, I can learn to tolerate my colleagues until the proposal is packaged for delivery."

## Conclusion

When did man emerge from the primates? The question is really irrelevant. He was there from the beginning," wrote one sage scientist. Much of our behavior as proposal professionals, as the term suggests, apes our hominoid colleagues. This is not surprising, nor should it be a cause for alarm. Over millions of years, hominoids have devised hierarchies, ethical systems and peacekeeping strategies to ensure their survival.

Proposal professionals could probably learn a great deal about themselves by closely observing chimpanzees, or more wistfully, bonobos. Conversely, hominoids might learn a great deal about themselves if they could closely observe the readers of this journal. I find this a bracing, rather than a depressing, idea. It is comforting to know that some of our best traits as proposal professionals are shared by other species, and that they are the result of billions of social encounters, both friendly and hostile.

Clearly, our fellow primates can teach us many lessons about what it means to be a proposal professional. After all, life is all about proposals — written or otherwise.

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All pictures taken from: Wall, Frans de. *Peacemaking Among Primates*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1989. Each photo has credits to individual photographers, museums, etc. within the book. Photo captions by Rich Freeman.

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