

# Opinion: Dealing With Your Enemies After You Win

By Paul Glen

The great office politics battle is over, and you stand victorious. This was no minor skirmish, but an important philosophical battle, one that will determine the future direction of the technology, strategy or organization of your group. Your foes fought bravely, but some combination of the force of your arguments, the virtue of your personality and the cunning of your maneuvers overwhelmed them. Now that the vanquished lie at your feet, what do you do with them?

First, let's assume that you have fought for a noble cause and that you were motivated not by personal gain, but by what you truly believed was best for the organization and its members. Next, let's also assume that what you do now will be motivated not by malice or a need for vengeance, but by a desire to maximize progress for the whole group.

In general, you have four choices of what to do with your former opponents. Depending on your circumstances, some of them may not be possible because of legal concerns, cultural constraints, corporate policies or threats of lawsuits.

**1. Slaughter your enemy.** This is what Machiavelli probably would have advocated: After completing your [victory over your foes](#), make sure that you eliminate them. In the office context, this would probably mean having someone fired. Although it may seem cruel, there are occasions when this might be appropriate.

If your enemy demonstrated bad faith in the battle -- advocating a point of view with an eye toward personal gain and nothing more, or adopting a position merely to oppose you -- then he may not be able to support the new strategy and should be removed for the good of the group. This will protect you from potential retaliation or an attempt to overturn your victory. It can also serve as a warning to others about the perils of playing politics for the wrong reasons.

**2. Banish your enemy.** Less extreme than trying to get someone fired is attempting to transfer her to another area. If your opponent fought for the right reasons and genuinely disagreed with your approach, she may have difficulty adapting to the new environment. If she fought for a principle but lost, she may have trouble accepting the new reality. She may consider it a moral duty to continue opposing you.

In these cases, goodwill should not be punished, but rather harnessed elsewhere in the organization. Find your enemy a good home -- somewhere far away.

**3. Spare your enemy.** If you believe that your enemy fought nobly, was motivated by goodwill and can adapt to the loss, then it may be appropriate to keep him around. Presumably, this is a person of conviction and skill, someone who will provide future value and perspective. You don't want to purge all of the people who disagree with you. That produces an environment in which people don't feel safe expressing their opinions, and it becomes easy to lose touch with reality.

**4. Adopt your enemy.** More than just sparing your enemy, you can adopt her as your right hand.

There are two scenarios in which this could be a good idea. One is when your enemy, beyond just admitting defeat, accepts the rightness of your position. As a convert, she may become your greatest advocate and a good friend.

The other scenario in which it may be useful to adopt your enemy is when eliminating or banishing him is not an option and you want to keep a close eye on his work and machinations.

Remember: It's not just winning a battle of [office politics](#) that will make you successful. Success requires knowing what to do after the victory to consolidate your gains and ensure future support.

*Paul Glen is a consultant who helps technical organizations improve productivity through leadership, and the author of the award-winning book [Leading Geeks](#) (Jossey-Bass, 2003). You can contact him at [info@paulglen.com](mailto:info@paulglen.com).*