

Many of us have fantasies of becoming *Survivor* contestants. Stephanie deLusé wishes to ensure that if we play, we'll play to win. She describes the important psychological processes of social comparison and attribution. From her reviews of these processes, deLusé develops ten concrete recommendations that will help the fortunate readers of this volume to become the next Sole Survivor.

## HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE VOTES

Tips and Tactics for Winning *Survivor*

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*For there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.*  
—ACT II, SCENE 2 OF SHAKESPEARE'S HAMLET

**A**dmit it: as you watch *Survivor* you've often wondered how you would do, haven't you? You've sat there in the comfort of your home and thought, "I could do that!" or "For heaven's sake, what a silly move, I'd have handled that better!" Well, let me tell you, fellow *Survivor* fan, that I certainly have. Perhaps you have prepared an audition tape and sent it in. I did. Deep inside, like me, you believe you could outwit, outplay, and outlast your way to being Sole Survivor. But could you? If you were selected, what would you do?

It's sad to admit, dear reader, but I was not accepted onto the show. I'm over the hurt and now spend as much time thinking about the interesting group dynamic twists the *Survivor* puppet masters could do than how I could personally survive on an island. No, I didn't let the rejection embitter me and now I leave it to you to claim one of the few seats on the special ride that is *Survivor*. Since I won't get to use them myself, let me share with you some psychological insights that may help you win

when you do get your ticket to ride (and aid in interpreting some subtleties should you decide to stay on the couch instead). Don't worry—while you're welcome to share the prize money with me, I'd be satisfied with your simply and graciously mentioning my name when you win.

There are so many insights to share but, space being limited, we'll talk about two areas of psychological principles—social comparison and attribution—that will help you go farther in, if not win, the social game of *Survivor*. We'll distill those down into specific tips to win the game. You'll note that most tips can be used positively or negatively. Positively, they can protect you and those you care about in the game with neutral to positive intent or impact. Negatively, they can be used as tactics to play dirty—to manipulate or subvert others as it suits your plans and your conscience.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL COMPARISON

Often in *Survivor*, you'll have some He-Man (not always but, yes, it is usually a man) tell the camera how he plans on winning his way to the million by feeding the troops or by leading the motley crew of contestants to domestic harmony and victory over their opponents. All too often, these self-proclaimed heroes go home or fall in pecking order because their confidence is read as cockiness or, more often, their skill and abilities threaten the others. Why, you might wonder, would a team of people want to get rid of or stop appreciating the person who organized them to build a shelter or win a victory? Why would they think they could get by without the fish he provides?

Social comparison, that's why. Social comparison, in psychology-speak, is evaluating one's self (abilities, opinions, beauty, utility, etc.) by comparing to others as opposed to an objective benchmark. This is a part of human nature. But it is whom we choose as a referent—the person or group to which we compare—that is the interesting part. You can either compare up to groups or people who are “better” than you or compare down to those over whom you feel you have some sort of advantage. It may not surprise you to learn that depressed people tend to compare up. They may see everyone as better than them, having more skills, attractiveness, friends, possessions, etc. Comparing up, however,

can also be a positive thing when your referent is, say, a role model or someone you aspire to be like. In that case, it can spur you to action and growth instead of depression or feeling “less than.” Comparing down, on the other hand, almost always makes us feel better as it reminds us of how lucky or fortunate we are to have something (over those who don't) or when we want to see how far we've come. These comparisons we humans so frequently make—whether we are conscious of it or not—can influence voting decisions.

In the case of *Survivor*, social comparison is at work in different ways as it may influence both 1) immediate pecking order, and 2) perceptions of deservedness of winning. Pecking order ties us back to the aforementioned perils of leadership. *Survivor* contestants are generally capable, non-depressed people. Capable people don't like to feel like chopped liver, so if a superstar player is always rising to the top (catching all the fish, winning all the immunities), social comparison makes the rest of them feel uncomfortable, if not threatened, leading to a desire to rid themselves of the leader. Many will diminish the good things the leader does or convince themselves—often erroneously—that they can do whatever the leader does equally well, to downplay the leader's contribution. They'll forget about loyalty and watch for opportunities to oust the leader by looking for another in the ranks who may want to mutiny, or by waiting for the leader to lose an individual Immunity Challenge to vote him or her off. A leader who manages to stick around will still wind up lower in the pecking order. In contrast, loafers—people who do nothing or next to nothing—are at risk because people will compare down and see themselves as more useful than the freeloaders, putting wind in their sails to argue for themselves as being higher in the pecking order and to get rid of those torpor-filled layabouts. The only time this starts to shift is toward the end of the game. If the go-getters and doers have, for whatever reason, kept a slacker in their midst until the final five or so, sometimes that person will suddenly be the preferred person to keep around because of, again, social comparison. At this point many assume that, all else being equal, having a slacker with you in the final two will result in the Jury rewarding the harder worker with the million dollars because the slacker will be lower in the pecking order. Brian (*Survivor: Thailand*) did this by taking good ol' boy Clay to the final two with him.

Clay had ridden on Brian's coattails most of the season and Brian pointed out how little effort Clay made to help in camp compared to himself. Even though Brian had betrayed several people along the way, his having worked harder than Clay helped him win the million in the final comparison.

Related to pecking order is deservedness. Deservedness is different in that it has less to do with how the contestants perform on the island and more to do with what each person comes to *Survivor* with from his or her personal life and background. Social comparison suggests that players will feel those who are neutral to needy deserve the money more than those who have, or are assumed to have, a lot of money or have had some nifty professional career. This is a moving target, of course, as how one personally compares will, until group processes take over, be initially based on one's own income. That said, birds of a feather recognize each other and there can quickly be some unspoken understanding that "we are all similar—just working stiffs with everyday problems—while *that* person has had a good life already and is just in this for the adventure. He (or she) doesn't need it." If you happen to be *that* person, this is not good. But even though we can't *really* tell how financially secure others are just based on what they do (medical problems, divorce, poor money choices in the past, etc., can decimate a "good" income), people go by this cognitive shortcut and decide who is more deserving based on precious little data. Remember how Gary Hogeboom a.k.a Hawkins (*Survivor: Guatemala*) decided not to tell people he used to be an NFL football hero? In the terms discussed here, his choice made sense to reduce how threatening a competitor he'd be seen as, comparatively speaking, and to not undermine his deservedness. He could be financially solid now in his landscape business or he could be on the brink of homelessness—but that he used to be something special could cause people to compare up to him, then feel less good about themselves in contrast, and cope with it by deeming Gary less deserving.

Likewise with astronaut Dan (*Survivor: Panama*), who only strategically shared his unique career history. At first he only told fighter-pilot Terry, swearing him to secrecy, to bond with him based upon the fact they both had exciting and intellectually advanced/challenging backgrounds in common. Sometime later he shared it with the remaining

others when he started feeling he might be next to go, hoping the respect he might garner would save him. Sadly, it didn't. Pecking order based on contribution at camp and, in his case, the most recent Challenge did him in. On the flip side, people will share their hard-luck stories of ill health, single parenthood, or other struggles to curry comparative favor and appear more deserving of the money than others. Surprisingly, this doesn't happen as often as one might think, at least not on the edited bits we see on the show. I believe this is for two reasons: the first is pride, and the second is that fostering effective downward comparisons in others is challenging to manipulate. People don't want to seem too needy or it weakens them, making them seem something of a pathetic, rather than sympathetic, figure. So as a general rule, dear future contestant, if you are going to strum this chord, do it artfully, lightly, and strategically, rather than, say, making a heavy emotional confession or breaking down in front of the whole group, or it may backfire. Likewise, there can be people or situations that can get complicated in terms of leveraging comparisons. For example, the deaf Christy (*Survivor: Amazon*) and Chad, the cancer-survivor with one artificial leg (*Survivor: Vanuatu*), come to mind. On the one hand, many would downward compare to them (seeing themselves as "better" or more capable of winning) but also upward compare—realizing that the contestants with disabilities are elevated by comparison for overcoming their obstacles and still contributing and succeeding, which makes them a threat in terms of generating sympathy or admiration for both pecking order and deservedness.

## SOCIAL COMPARISON TIPS AND TACTICS

So what does more consciously knowing a bit about social comparison mean to the *Survivor* contestant? You may not like this, but it means to cultivate *strategic mediocrity*. Perhaps you'd prefer to think of it as "finding the middle way" that is an important part of many spiritual traditions, particularly Buddhism. Let's put this into some specific tips and tactics so you remember them when you get to the beautiful, bug-ridden island.

### 1. *Don't be the overt leader.*

No matter how much you may want to be or are capable of being the

leader, don't step into the role overtly. Be the emergent leader on a case-specific basis. Pull strings and nudge decisions on a subtler level. Due to social comparison, the overt leaders often get picked off by disgruntled or threatened others. The emergent leaders, however, just come to the rescue to lead in a moment of crisis, when everyone else is in disarray or arguing and/or the overt leader has made a mistake. The emergent leader then shines, helping to bring resolution, just long enough to be appreciated but not long enough to be threatening. Thus he or she garners the benefits of "leadership" without the costs. Ozzy (*Survivor: Cook Islands*, second place) emerged as a leader on several occasions. In one instance, the tribe was spending too much time and energy talking about how to get coconuts instead of doing or even trying anything. He cut to the chase and climbed up the tree, voila!, to get the coconuts. The deed was done and there was a collective sigh of relief and positive comments to or about Ozzy. This is a low-risk example, but I trust you take the point: emergent leaders are more action-oriented than talk-oriented (words can come back to bite you), and they engage in what I call *stealth leadership* where they make themselves useful—but only carefully so in the overall pursuit of strategic mediocrity and winning the prize.

In terms of using this tip against others as more of a tactic, allow (or even privately encourage) someone else to take the lead—someone who you think would be either bad or good to the point of self-destruction. Then, strategically with selected others, subtly comment on this person's words or actions to increase the perception that this leader has to go. I say "subtly" so that the seed is planted but it isn't so overt as to come back and bite you in some embarrassing direct quote to your fellow players or filmed footage in the reunion show. For instance, Sekou (*Survivor: Cook Islands*) considered himself the leader and immediately set about bossing others around, but didn't have enough skills to compensate for his over-direction of others. The others let him go on "leading" with his scattered approach and his taking frequent breaks while others were doing what he ordered them to do. But, despite his having an ally, it's no surprise his teammates decided they were better off without his "leadership," and he was the first to be voted off from that tribe.

## 2. *Win bread, but don't be the main breadwinner . . .*

. . . or the fish-catcher, as is more often the case in *Survivor*. If you have the skill, catch enough to earn your keep and be of value to the group, but not enough to engender jealousy. Consider teaching willing others how to fish so that you may be seen as magnanimous and not hoarding of the power of bringing in the scarce resources. If you aren't a breadwinner, always publicly show gratitude for the breadwinner's efforts—but in an effort to undermine him or her, mention in passing to strategic others that the breadwinner has a little bit of an attitude, that he or she is too proud, or remind them that the breadwinner has some other annoying habits that don't compensate for the food he or she provides. Especially if it is getting closer to the end of the thirty-nine days, let it slip how, with the end in sight, that person's support is no longer critical to survival.

## 3. *Don't work too much or too little.*

While some will appreciate the person who works all the time, it isn't worth the risk. Work enough, maybe even a tad more than enough, but also take adequate strategic breaks to hang with the lethargic or lazy. If you have taken care to be seen, or acknowledged, by other workers to be doing more than sufficient work, it is relatively safe to announce that you are taking a brief break. The other hard workers will forgive you, and the slackers will think you're a little more like them (and as you sit there with them you'll build relationships). This way, you'll curry favor in both camps (the givers and the takers) without alienating either. Ah, but I can't help showing my bias, being a worker bee myself—if you, dear friend, want to win and happen to be one of the torpor-filled layabouts, get up off your fanny and do a bit more or at least help those that are doing! Don't let others see you as a laggard or you'll lose pecking order status.

To use this tip as more of a negative tactic, subtly draw attention—usually in one-on-one conversations—to the failings of others in a "Gee, I sure wish we'd had another hand with the wood collecting today. . . . I guess Jane just didn't feel up to helping" kind of way. But don't let others do this to you or yours. If someone starts to say things about you or someone with whom you have an alliance, be sure to intercept or deflect

the thought with “You’re right, Jane wasn’t feeling up to it today and yet remember how yesterday she helped so much with . . .” and finish appropriately. Consider the case of Billy (*Survivor: Cook Islands*) who was a textbook example of a layabout as he so often slumbered and neglected to pull his weight around camp that his teammates intentionally lost an Immunity Challenge for the opportunity to get rid of him. Now in this case, it was Ozzy who suggested to the team that they throw the Challenge. Throwing a Challenge is a risky move, much riskier than simply scurrying up a tree for coconuts. And to be the one to suggest it is even riskier, but this ties back to the idea of stealth leadership—offering another example of how Ozzy watched and waited for the right moment in group mood to emerge with an idea or action that helped make clear what others were feeling or wanting done but were afraid to say or act about themselves. Once the seed was planted, subtly or not, Ozzy stealthily faded back a bit and didn’t push too hard, lest he make himself the target.

#### 4. Play some or most of your cards close to your chest.

As mentioned about Gary (the former football star) or Dan (the former astronaut), watch what you divulge about yourself and when. Don’t overtly lie upon direct questioning (lest you get caught!), but don’t tell everything about your personal life or work history. I know, it can get boring on the island and you may be tempted to ramble on about your life as an open book, but the more skilled players will listen more than they talk. They’ll show interest in others and ask questions of them (to gain insights possibly to use later) but not over-volunteer key information about themselves. And, as a related aside, remember to enjoy peaceful silences. Realizing we only get to see a snippet of edited footage each week of the season, it would appear that those whose mouths drone on endlessly (think Cao Boi, *Survivor: Cook Islands*) are often seen as annoying and are at risk of being voted off to keep the peace.

As a tactic, draw others out about their voting plans but don’t divulge your own plans too readily. Talking too much or too often about voting allows for dangerous forms of comparison and speculation about alliances. Don’t volunteer whom you’re voting off to just anyone unless you really need to. And, if you ever wind up in the middle (two groups

wanting you to vote their way), don’t seem too on-the-fence or you’ll be seen, compared to those who haven’t waffled, as either wishy-washy or unable to be influenced or counted on. The uncertainty will get you gone as it did, for instance, with Christy (*Survivor: Amazon*) and Dolly (*Survivor: Vanuatu*). If you can’t agree, or don’t want to lie that you agree just to protect yourself (as *Survivor: Vanuatu* winner Chris did), simply nod like you mean it as you listen and say “I see your point,” and let them assume you agree. Hopefully you can leave it at that. If pressed to offer assurances that you will vote someone off, try a phrase like “that sounds like a plan” that implies consent but doesn’t truly offer it. If push comes to shove, you may need to lie (if you are open to it) and give a firm answer to get them off your back and secure yourself as *not* being the swing vote. Then use your free time until the betrayal is revealed to think about how you can explain that, say, something important came up that changed your mind yet there was no time to talk about it again, you knew they’d understand it was for the good of the group (or alliance), and that you’d never lied before and don’t intend to lie again (this kind of spin will be discussed in more depth in a later tip).

#### 5. Counsel your family on the kind of family home video to make.

Think positively! You’ll make it far enough to see the heart-wrenching video sent from home. So plan ahead and avoid the kind of video Brian (winner, *Survivor: Thailand*) was sent; as I recall, it showed his beautiful wife strolling past the big pool or grand piano in the large house and featured the fancy sports car he missed driving. Beautiful wife aside, this clearly allowed people to compare up to his already-existent wealth and feel discouraged about their own lot in life. Such videos allow people to see the one who “has it all” as less deserving of the prize. Instead, have a video with family showing your soft, human side (maybe with the family pet), talking about how much they miss you, and portraying something quirky and endearing about you or your family. That builds the good feelings other contestants will have about you. But, you may be thinking, Brian *won* season five. Yes, he did, but he won because he was a truly masterful player (even though, no, he didn’t see an advance draft of this chapter), and he built relationships with people that he used to his advantage and then discarded. Still, Brian’s video nearly cost him his

win as people commented on how much he already had—enough so that Brian even commented (in a sidebar after the videos were viewed) that his video might have led the others to think he didn't "need" the money. So don't take a chance on it.

Naturally, as a negative tactic you'd use other people's videos against them. If you do, be sure to do it with tact so as not to seem unnecessarily critical or conniving. As before, it is usually best to do this with one or two key people at a time as opposed to publicly to the whole group—for if it is not skillfully done it could engender a defensive response, and you only want to risk that in small doses. Indeed, don't cause scenes that allow someone else to gain social plaudits, taking such from you by putting out a social fire you started.

#### THE WISDOM OF A SOCIAL COMPARISON APPROACH

To emphasize the wisdom of using your new hyper-awareness for social comparison, and to underscore the value in cultivating strategic mediocrity in general, simply look at the *Survivor* winning history. With the exception of fireman Tom (*Survivor: Palau*), I'd argue that none of the winners were consistently overt leaders or the hardest workers. And none of them had fancy-pants careers. In contrast, several terrific potential leaders or skilled outdoorspeople were voted off "too" early, such as Hunter (*Survivor: Marquesas*) and lumberjill Tina (*Survivor: Panama*). Tina, for instance, was clearly an outdoor-skilled boon to her group, doing everything from starting and maintaining the fire to catching fish with her bare hands. But the more people-skilled Cirie orchestrated Tina's exit by encouraging people to socially compare to Tina, emphasizing the threat she represented with her myriad skills, and suggesting that they'd never be able to beat her in a Challenge (despite the fact that personal-level Challenges were weeks away). Goodbye, Tina, we hardly knew you. Social skills trumped genuine outdoor survival skills, and it was Cirie who made it to the final four despite being deemed the weakest link with her initial outdoor ineptitude, including a fear of leaves.

So you might be thinking, "I'm just going to be me! I'm going to do my best and I hate this idea of being mediocre." Listen, if you're good enough to be another Tom, go ahead and go for being the overt leader—

he pulled it off. If you aren't, give it your honest all on each Challenge, but around the camp find the middle way and you'll be there longer. Yes, if you have to err on one side or the other do more rather than less as the lazier folks are at risk until, if they are lucky, the very end; but if you are strategically mediocre around camp—shining only when a hero is needed—you'll garner more influence through people liking you and perceiving similarity with you. Whether you should be or not, you'll be more trusted and appreciated by more people so you can influence their votes and win them in the end.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF ATTRIBUTION

We all attribute. We do it all the time. Attributing, in this case, is psychology-speak for how we explain other people's behavior. Of course other people are making attributions about us at the same time, too, and it is important to understand how that may affect situations on *Survivor*. The kinds of attributions people make about their fellow contestants can make or break relationships and could cost the game.

As we go through the day we attempt to understand not just ourselves, but also what others do. We make judgments in hopes of finding a pattern or consistency in what someone does or how something happens. A big piece of this has to do with where we place cause or, put differently, where we place blame or control. Another piece is whether that cause seems typical (normal) or atypical (unusual). Let me explain by starting with how we attribute about our own behaviors, and then we'll talk about how it works in pairs of people or groups.

When we attribute inside ourselves about happenings in our life, or our own behaviors or the results thereof, we locate a causal explanation along three different dimensions. Without even consciously thinking of it our brain calculates, "This action or event's cause or impact is . . .":

1. *global* (this changes everything; it's a house of cards about to fall down) vs. *specific* (this impacts only this situation or a narrow set of situations);
2. *internal* (it's me that caused this) vs. *external* (there are other factors outside myself involved here); and

3. *stable* (this always happens; it's going to be this way forever; it's permanent, or very hard to change) vs. *unstable* (this is unusual; this too shall pass; this is temporary or mutable).

To the degree and frequency that individuals interpret their worlds by making global, internal, and stable attributions for negative life events, they will be less happy and may be depressed or predisposed to depression (arguments of causal direction notwithstanding). Non-depressed people tend more often to interpret events in ways that maintain or elevate their own self-concept or self-esteem. Even if it is wrong, it helps them not get stuck in an unhappy place. When you're on *Survivor*, you'll want to be very careful about whether you are making global or specific, stable or unstable, and internal or external attributions about yourself and others—and how others are attributing about you. Because we often make mistakes. . . .

#### BEWARE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION ERROR WHEN DEALING WITH OTHERS

PLAYER 1: "Dude, you're a liar!"

PLAYER 2: "Oh yeah? Well, you're sneaky!"

INSIDE PLAYER 1'S MIND: "I'm no liar; I'm simply playing the game."

INSIDE PLAYER 2'S MIND: "I'm not sneaky; I'm simply strategic."

This hypothetical exchange represents how people point fingers and make judgments but don't necessarily see that their actions are actually similar. They judge themselves by a different standard, and excuse their own behavior while vilifying another who quite often did a variant of the same thing. While these exact words may not have been uttered on *Survivor*, almost any fan knows the sentiment is expressed often enough. Often back at camp (when someone who thought they were in an alliance was blindsided by how the vote went down, or at the post-vote confessional) contestants will lament that they couldn't trust anyone even though they themselves were not trustworthy (or perhaps they were on the fence so often no one could believe where they stood).

This is an example of what social psychologists call "the fundamental

attribution error." As we go through the world trying to understand and explain other people's behavior, we usually attribute what someone does to either internal causes (personality, mood, disposition) or to external causes (situational, physical, or social circumstances). So an attribution is how we make sense of what someone said or did; it's where we assign credit for their actions. The error comes in when we realize that some of the "logical" ways we do this aren't that logical at all. The fundamental attribution error we often make in judging *others* is to underestimate the effect of external causes and overestimate the effect of internal causes. In contrast, when explaining our own behavior we typically do just the opposite: we blame the circumstances we are in or something external to us. So if you trip on the sidewalk, I call you a klutz (I make an internal attribution about you that is somewhat stable in nature). In contrast, if I trip on the sidewalk I claim it's because of the uneven or slippery surface (I make an external attribution about myself that is temporary in nature).

Experiments have demonstrated that we make this attributional thinking error very often, so much so that it became considered and named "fundamental." It is so consistent that even when we are explicitly told that someone's behavior is fake, forced, or situationally driven, we tend to disregard that information. For instance, even if we know for a fact that someone has been told to act very friendly or was paid to be nice, we disregard the situational aspect (he was under orders to be friendly) and believe instead that the person is indeed friendly (when he may really be rotten or hate your guts). For ourselves, on the other hand, we may snap at someone and never take responsibility for the fact that we may often be a bit edgy and, instead, immediately write it off to any available external factor (the fact that it's hot, we just battled traffic, we need a cup of coffee, or we skipped a meal).

Why do we do this? Why is the fundamental attribution error so, well, fundamental? Besides being adaptive in helping us keep our self-esteem intact, it happens to be a quite natural perceptual cognitive shortcut that is related to whose eyes you are looking through. As you inhabit your body and look out your own eyes, what you see around you are the environmental/situational factors. You are, in essence, an *observer* of your environment . . . you see the crack in the sidewalk and the slippery surface, you feel the weight of the heavy bag you are carrying,

you know you are hot, thirsty, and tired, and you are painfully aware that the heel of your shoe is wobbly. You don't see yourself as the *actor* in the situation but are focused on what you are observing in the situation you are dealing with, so it is easy to blame the situational, external factors. When you are looking at someone else, however, that person is the focus—they are clearly the *actor* on the stage. The person is in the foreground of your visual field and your mind, while the background or external factors fall away. So it is easy to blame the person's characteristics. That same person, looking out of his or her own eyes at the situation, sees something different than you do. Research experiments have demonstrated, for example, that you can even impact who an observer will consider in control of a conversation simply by how you place them in the room and whom they primarily see.

### ATTRIBUTIONS: TIPS AND TACTICS

How will knowing a bit about attribution and the fundamental attribution error help you win *Survivor*? Simply recognizing that there are three basic dimensions along which we explain behavior and how easily we make mistakes is potentially powerful. Much of it comes down to the accuracy of the explanations you make about yourself and others. Think for a moment, for instance, about how many times you have had a fight with a family member or friend because you had wildly different interpretations of the same event. It is easy to assume that what we see or "know" is true because we trust our senses and perception when, in fact, if we take the time to explore it, the other person's perception was quite different. Often we quickly polarize our thoughts and dig our heels into our position when it would be more productive to take a moment to engage in "perspective-taking" and put ourselves in that other person's shoes, see momentarily through their eyes. This increases one's empathy for how or why they did what they did. It is always wise—in *Survivor* as well as life outside the game—to seek first to understand, *then* react.

So, say you do spend a moment stepping out of yourself to understand other people's perspectives and choices; by no means does this mean you have to agree with or endorse what they did, but at least you understand it and may be better prepared to understand, explain, or predict their

behavior in the future and possibly prevent further hassles. As touchy-feely as this may sound to some, it's just good advice. You'll hear people on *Survivor* say "I'm not here to make friends. I'm here to win a million bucks." But making friends, or at least being perceived as fair and possibly friendly, is the way to the million bucks à la previously mentioned winners Brian and Chris as well as winner Tina (*Survivor: Australian Outback*). You'll also hear people say, "I'm not going to let my values go; I'd rather have this potentially lifelong friend than win the million dollars." Situations are powerful and yet, despite the power of the competitive game and tantalizing prize, not everyone will play by the same rules and one's personality sometimes stands strong even against a very powerful situation. Whichever camp you fall in—money motivated or values motivated—use these attribution-related tips to help you succeed:

#### 1. *Manage your own moods via wise use of attributions.*

I know this is tough when you may not be eating enough or drinking enough water. I know it is a challenge to handle the bugs, the weather, the constant people, and the incessant scheming. Still, to the degree that you can, re-frame things to keep your mood lifted. Keep a close eye on your own thinking about your own behavior; be aware of if you are making internal or external, global or specific, and stable or unstable attributions. How you explain your ups and downs to yourself and others (as we'll get to shortly) could mean the difference in whether you stay or go. Are you having a bad day because you think you are tired (a temporary attribution, for tonight your fatigue may let you sleep better) or because you think you are irretrievably exhausted (a stable/permanent explanation)? Did you do poorly on that Challenge because you think you really have bad aim (a specific shortcoming) or because you think you're a "loser" who can't contribute anything to any Challenge ever (a global attribution)? And so on. Don't descend into the pit of a pessimistic explanatory style or, if you do, don't stay there for long. If you need to beat yourself up or cry, wait until you are alone or maybe talking to the camera in one of those private sidebars. Remember the *Hamlet* quotation this chapter started with: "For there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." It's true. Something can be objectively icky—such as a



huge rainstorm or losing a Challenge—but don't let emotions take over or blow something out of proportion.

An example of this comes from Stephannie (*Survivor: Cook Islands*) who unwisely publicly declared herself as the weakest link and deserving to be voted off after her tribe lost an Immunity Challenge. She may as well have painted a target on her back with this global, internal, stable attribution ("I'm the weakest link"). She'd have been much better off to spin the loss as a shared defeat and stress how hard she worked and that her poor performance was unusual (specific and temporary) and could have been suffered by any of the others who had to deal with such stress and materials (external). They were about to vote her off based on her *statement*, not her performance, but her demise was delayed when the tribe opted to get rid of another cocky leader (J. P.) first. With that gift of time she could have recovered her standing, but she sealed her fate when, after the next failed Immunity Challenge, she once again made a remark that was interpreted as self-defeating, and thus team-defeating by extension. It was a silly throwaway remark about how maybe mashed potatoes would taste good that night if she went home but, taken together with her earlier remark, it put her torch out. So watch how you talk about yourself and the attributions you lead others to make about you. Remember that there is a fine line between being modest, humble, and accepting some little bit of responsibility for an outcome, and full-on self-destructive statements.

### 2. *Strategically manage the moods of others.*

Do so such that you support your friends and tear down your enemies. If someone you'd like to see gone mentions his own fatigue in subtle passing or open whining, build on it. Agree with the person and offer additional evidence, ever so kindly or not, of his previous failures or upcoming insurmountable obstacles: "Jack, you are tired, aren't you, buddy? Yes, and just think how beat you'll feel after a few more days and a couple more Challenges!" Paint the darker picture for that person's ears alone. Encourage Jack to do his best on the Challenges for the good of the team (assuming it is still at the team immunity stage of play) but then, when it is safe to do so, nudge his thinking to attributions that negatively affect his mood and increase his perception of fatigue.

In contrast, if you've made an alliance with someone who is starting to feel emotionally or mentally weak or physically tired, gently determine if there is something in how he is thinking about himself that is contributing to this. If so, help him re-frame his attributions to buck up and see another day, assuming you want to keep this alliance. If someone is truly fatigued beyond recovery and hints he may want to go, let him go peacefully and with grace. Use your head about where the balance is but, in my humble opinion, it is not worth over-persuading someone who dramatically and publicly does the "I can't handle it anymore, please vote me off" spiel (Shane, *Survivor: Panama*, and a few others before him). If close allies are speaking privately in a moment of trust, perhaps attempt to encourage them, in order to preserve the alliance. Otherwise let them go (as they did with Stephannie, above).

### 3. *Don't let people jump to conclusions about you.*

Now that you understand the fundamental attribution error, you know people are going to attribute anything you do to *you* instead of whatever circumstances you were dealing with. In a game like *Survivor*, they probably won't stop at simply overestimating your personal control and underestimating the situation, they'll probably also make global and stable/permanent conclusions about you—as they did with Stephannie (*Survivor: Cook Islands*), who claimed she wanted to stay despite her self-defeating comments. Don't let this happen. Manage your image by educating them about the situational factors you faced—it was something specific and temporary that caused you to do what you did, not a lack of personal character ("Wow, that rope was covered in algae or something. I'm strong but I just couldn't get a grip on that dang rope"). Mention in passing that this is the first time you ever made that mistake and don't anticipate making it again. How you explain your behavior to others will help persuade them that you either have outlived your usefulness or have just had a momentary lapse.

### 4. *Don't jump to conclusions about others.*

Realize that you may be assuming something quite incorrect about others too—that you may have made a fundamental attribution error about them. It is particularly useful to stop and think it through a minute

before you spout off and make broad sweeping generalizations about someone, whether in your thoughts or publicly. You may, upon reflection or conversation, realize there were mitigating situational circumstances that impacted an individual's behavior and stop short of scuttling a good deal with this person.

#### 5. Lead people to conclude what you wish about others.

Based on what we've just covered, it follows logically to lead people to conclude negative things about people you don't like. Manipulate attributional awareness to remind of, emphasize, or lead people to uncharitable conclusions about other players, saying quietly to the right people how "Jane makes mistakes at everything and it seems like at every Challenge" (global and stable) or "That guy's a jerk and he's never going to change" (stable and internal). Likewise, don't let others jump to conclusions about someone you want to keep around. Stay alert and you can do some "image management" for someone in your alliance or for someone you are hoping to sway later—completely re-spinning the situation. If someone is speaking negatively about an ally in words that indicate stable, internal, and global attributions, you gently come back with counter-examples that are temporary, external, and specific. For instance, "She's messed up a couple times, sure, but remember that Jane was right on target when she . . ." or "John, a jerk? Not all the time, just when he's lost a Challenge . . ." and so on.

### THE WISDOM OF AN ATTRIBUTIONAL APPROACH

Permit me to anticipate and address potential hesitations about this set of tips. You may say, "Wait a minute! Isn't this just making excuses or doing damage control?" or "Isn't this just a spin game?" Well, no and yes. The attribution process and the fundamental attribution error are real aspects of human thinking—it's a big part of how we think about our lives and make sense of others' behavior. Understanding that you and others do this gives you a tool for influencing your own and others' moods and for influencing perception or correcting the mistaken conclusions to which someone may jump. Done poorly it could come off as "making excuses," but done properly it comes off as "offering reasons,"

as clarifying or explaining. Your attitude, vocal tone, posture, and timing make a difference here. Are these tips "spin game"? They don't have to be, but certainly can be. Read on.

### A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE

How you use the attribution and/or the social comparison tips and tactics is up to you and how you choose to play the game of *Survivor*. You can spin something—most would say that's fair, while others would say it isn't. You can bend the truth or outright lie—some would consider that fair as it is, after all, a game that invites if not expects it. Indeed, we could have an entire chapter on lying through commission (what you say) or omission (what you don't say). Three of the *Survivor* winners I mentioned here would likely have a different take on such matters. For instance, Brian (*Survivor: Thailand*) and Chris (*Survivor: Vanuatu*) took what we'll call a less-straightforward approach to winning. Tom (*Survivor: Palau*) was more straightforward—he left himself wiggle-room in how he made or explored what may be considered side deals from his initial alliance. That's the way to make both winning friends and influencing votes easier to do at the same time—take care that you word your conversations to help protect people's perception of you in case something turns out differently than they'd hoped. If you word it well, anticipate and appreciate their perspective, alert them in passing that you've chatted with so-and-so, they are "primed," if you will, to receive a bit better whatever happens at the next shake-up which, in turn, reduces shock, betrayal, and finger-pointing.

So who are you and how do you want to play as you outwit, outplay, and outlast? To which voice do you listen more often—the angel on your right shoulder or the devil on your left? How do you blend them to form your conscience—to form your personality?

You could use these tips and tactics, say, to bring someone down in mood and mismanage his image in the eyes of others, you could use your understanding to keep someone's mood up or properly manage or even enhance your own or another's image, or you could simply use these tools when you have a genuine situation to clarify. I present the ideas simply to raise your awareness so you can practice now in seeing

these principles at work and how to work with them in yourself and others. Then you'll be all ready when you hit *Survivor*. My personal preference would be to use your knowledge and skills to be positive and supportive of self and others on your way to the win. But whether you use your knowledge or skills for "good" or "evil" is up to you, because behavior is a function of both personality and environment. All the contestants are in an environment that is largely similar (though camp sites and team dynamics will vary) but the personality you go in with will interact with those external influences in a new and interestingly different way than anyone who came before. If you choose to go in planning on using deception like self-named Jonny "Fairplay" (*Survivor: Pearl Islands*, third place) who lied often, planned ahead to get fake news on his grandma's death for sympathy, went in with the intention to be the "dirtiest player ever" and left proclaiming he was proud he "didn't play fair and didn't plan on it," then that's your choice and you'll be using my tips and tactics for manipulation.

Other people will—like most *Survivor* players—choose to go in and play in as aboveboard a way as possible, and then feel considerable guilt if they stray from their principles in any way or misplay their cards. For instance, Ian (*Survivor: Palau*) let missteps and emotions get to him but chose to handle it nobly in the end by quitting the last Immunity Challenge to let the final two whom he felt deserved it (for whatever his public and personal reasons) go forward. Similarly, Rafe (*Survivor: Guatemala*) kindly released Danni from her promise to take him to the final two so he'd have a clean conscience that she had chosen for the right reasons. Well, she chose Stephenie. So did Rafe make a smart move or a dumb move? You decide. Either way, we can respect that his personality led him to act above the situational variables even in the face of the powerful and tempting opportunity to be either the one who will win \$1 million or \$100,000. I suspect the Ians and Rafes of this world would use the knowledge of these tips in an honorable way to secure stronger relationships when they, hopefully, show up on the next *Survivor: All-Stars*. When they do, or when you, dear reader, win in a future *Survivor*, remember me on my couch thinking up new twists for the yet-to-request-my-input *Survivor* puppet masters, and my living vicariously through you as you used these tips to secure your success.

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