

# I am Honest; He is Brutal

**BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE**

"Judge everyone favorably," teaches the Mishna. In my years in the rabbinate I have found this is a principle we observe very strictly when it comes to ourselves. We always put our own actions in a favorable light. "I was only trying to help!" "I only said it out of concern." "I'm not mean—you are too sensitive!" But when it comes to others, we are too willing, even eager, to assume unflattering motivations.

I am scrupulous; he is compulsive. I am honest; he is brutal. I am forgiving; he is weak. The ways in which we interpret the same qualities differently are legion.

There is no way to avoid judging others. We all have to make decisions in business, in friendship, in love. But we should be aware of the built-in bias to afford ourselves more latitude than we offer to others. When we try the exercise of interpreting another's actions favorably, it is sometimes startling to discover how much insight we gain.

Emerson offers the analogy to a museum: "We must be as courteous to a man as we are to a picture, which we are willing to give the advantage of a good light. Indeed, when we are well thought of we often manage to live up to expectations."