

Disinterested

Disinterestedness is the mindset of standing apart from what you are observing. This can be what we call a 'scientific' attitude, the view that valid thinking involves withdrawing yourself from what you are considering. You may be interested in what you are considering, in the sense of curious about it, but you are not interested in the sense of having something at stake in what you are considering. Disinterest is a virtue in judges.

Examples

1 When I direct a doctoral dissertation I try to inculcate in the graduate student a disinterested stance toward his or her material. My motto would be: pursue your material to the furthest extent possible, and let it teach you. Do not have anything at stake, yourself, in the outcome of your search—except to present the truth. At the same, however, I want my student to be interested in what he is researching, in the sense of curious about it, drawn into it. A fine blend of interest and disinterest makes for good scholarship.

2 Disinterestedness can be difficult to achieve, when you are asked for advice by children or lovers. Should I go into banking? Should I pursue a degree in entomology? Should I get a facelift? To respond effectively to these questions means to adopt a disinterested attitude toward the question posed. Your comments should reflect what is good for the loved one and not what makes you happy as a thought of what would be good for the loved one.