



ADR Perspectives *Perspectives PRD*

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The Value of Transformational Coaching in Workplace Mediations

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Kevin writes about the value of transformational process within an organizational setting. He posits that there is greater value in focussing on the learning that conflict offers than simply resolving the conflict in a collaborative way. By delving deeper into the personality of the players involved and their own core values we can introduce a capacity of resilience.

As an integral ADR practitioner working within a federal government organization, I am often called upon to work with clients who are immersed in toxic conflict situations. There is a strong desire among the parties and the supervisors and co-workers of those parties to have the dispute managed in a timely fashion. I imagine them all saying virtually in unison, "this feels icky...make it stop...NOW!". When the focus is on ending the dispute, or in other terms negotiating towards settlement, there is the potential for something very valuable to be lost: the ability to build resilience among the players.

As an internal ADR practitioner, I see my role as less about being a 'crutch' to the organization and the clients I serve and more about building true conflict resilience that will fend off future conflict situations in addition to addressing those that are part of the presenting issue. That resilience can only come from one place, transformative learning.

It should not come as a surprise to know that the vast majority of my time and energy is spent in training or 'prevention'. Many practitioners scoff at this, preferring instead the 'Gucci' aspect of intervention. How important we often feel when we swoop in, superhero cape flapping in the breeze, and save the day with our clever mediation skills. For me, true power comes from empowering others to overcome their own adversity and learn, in the process, new skills and perspectives that will fend off future adversity as well. And when that learning happens together with their antagonist, there is a cohesion built through process, and the start of that elusive trust that will build bridges of understanding and collaboration.

Whenever I am engaged in a consultation or intake with clients, my mind is always focused on the learning that the client is missing in order to understand and employ different ways of approaching their situation. Is it that they don't get the 'intent/action/impact' model, or that their internal way of being is every bit as important as the outward manifestations of their communication skills and techniques. Many a client has suffered through a teach piece on 'heart at peace' a concept I embrace from the work of the Arbing Institute that I truly believe is central to all interpersonal conflict.

Case in point, a recent mediation that I conducted between two parties who had gotten to the very pinnacle of the conflict tornado. Party A was beyond positional and was seemingly trying to utilize my ICM process to further bolster his right's-based plan of attack. Dozens of coaching sessions with multiple learning applications and this member's presence at a two-day ICM workshop finally helped to prepare him for the mediation. Equivalent efforts were required to also prepare party B, who was less positional, but also equally unwilling at the beginning of our coaching sessions to see humanity in party A.

Although I had previously successfully mediated dozens of cases, this particular case seemed to be my nemesis. Even on the day of the first stage of mediation, I was not willing to bet the farm on a positive outcome. It felt like it was a 'sink or swim' moment and I just gave it my best shot and relied on a sense of optimism born of experience and gut feeling to move forward. I should have known to rely on my gut and my certainty of the value of transformative coaching to win the day.

These two parties struggled for a couple of hours to vent their frustrations before being gently guided through their familiarity with the concepts reinforced during the transformative coaching to apply their learning in productive and collaborative ways. Constantly being re-grounded in a 'heart at peace' way of being, they eventually found a way to move forward. Eventually I was able to just sit back and watch them build not just a functioning working relationship but one that has grown and become exemplary to all those around them.

I share this story in the hopes that you might see the value in utilizing the ADR intervention process as a means of truly transforming relationships and building resilience. To do any less feels to me like missing a golden opportunity.

Kevin McDonald has been an internal mediator working within the Federal Government for almost ten years. He is currently responsible for providing service to all of Ontario, excluding the National Capital Region, for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

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