

BRINGING PEACE INTO THE ROOM
How the Personal Qualities of the Mediator Impact the Process of
Conflict Resolution. Editors: Daniel Bowling & David Hoffman

Reviewed by Lynda J. Robbins

Even born "peacemakers" benefit from learning strategies and processes of mediation. Mediation as a profession is relatively young—it is a product of the baby-boomers' generation. As such, it is still developing and growing in quantity of practitioners as well as in quality.

Most professional mediators have thus far focused on developing their skills. This comes through learning and practice. As we grow and grow older, experience also affects our practice. Mediators and the profession of mediation are moving into the second generation. David Hoffman and Daniel Bowling help us move into this next phase with their collection of articles and essays that focus on the personal qualities of the mediator and how they impact the process.

David and Daniel brought these chapters together "for the ever-growing community of mediators in the United States and beyond who are seeking to enhance their ability to be dispute resolvers by moving beyond knowledge and skills to deeper levels of engagement in their work... The next task after knowledge and skills are acquired is developing a sense of identity with their role and responsibility of being a mediator."

Daniel and David and their contributors give us permission to be human and to acknowledge that our humanity shapes our mediations. From the physical affects and manners of the mediator to the personal experiences of the individual mediator, to the role of "mediator as trickster," our personal qualities effect us as mediators. And this is good. Clients want us to be human and super-human at the same time. These articles help us balance these demands in ways that ultimately assist in the conflict resolution.

In our skills classes, we are taught that mediators must be neutral, that we must follow proscribed processes depending on what school of thought we ascribe to in our practice and that we must not allow our personal beings to infiltrate our role as mediator. This book does not attempt to teach mediation skills, although wonderful "tidbits" are scattered throughout and each article is followed by several reflective practice questions that are designed to stimulate the application of what we have just read to our own practice.

Mediators have the reputation of being against conflict. David and Daniel acknowledge that conflict is a progenitor to change. Conflict, in context, can be good, and mediators must not shy away from conflict but learn to embrace it and facilitate the changes that conflict begs.

Mediation does not simply promote an end to conflict. It also promotes healing. Several essays address the "culture of healing" and the creation of a "sacred space." These approaches may be more comfortable for the therapist/mediators than attorney/mediators but the articles help put these theories into prospective and encourage us to try new approaches.

The articles also encourage us to develop our abilities to focus on the present in order to better assist our clients in their focus. We are also given permission to cry, maybe the ultimate recognition of our humanity.

Sara Cobb, in her article, "Creating Sacred Space—Toward a Second-Generation Dispute Resolution Practice," summarizes that "In the first-generation mediation practice, we learned that there was a formula that could be useful for resolving conflicts. We learned to bring parties to the table, to structure the process so each side had a turn to speak, and to help parties invent options on the basis of the elaboration of their interests. In the first-generation practice, practitioners clung to our belief that the process alone could yield outcomes that not only resolved disputes but also increased the humanity of those involved. We trusted neutrality as well as the ground rules of turn taking. We worked to witness the pain of the parties and struggled not to tamper with the content of their stories, as that was thought to constitute a violation of our practice as neutrals." She goes on to say "...in this second-generation practice, we are ...freed from the arbitrary constraints imposed by the secular discourse of mediation." By acknowledging what many experienced mediators have learned but, perhaps, been afraid to voice, the authors move us beyond the dogmatic to a deeper and fuller understanding and appreciation of how each of us brings peace into the room.

Lynda J. Robbins is a collaborative family lawyer and mediator who practices in Chelmsford. She can be contacted at (978) 256-8178, or by email at <LJRobbinsesq@verizon.net>.

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