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Health in the Midst of Conflict

Stress—it seems it's rarely missing from our lives these days. Now that the holidays are here, demands on our time and our wallets, increased calorie consumption, even increased family time can add to our already stressful lives. The added stress creates a perfect recipe for potentially increasing conflict.

While it's well known that the stress of conflict is an emotional experience, it's less often thought of as a physical experience. The adrenaline response to actual or even perceived threats can cause physical expressions of stress such as sweaty palms, increased heart rate, nausea, reddening of the face, shallow breathing, dry mouth, chills, cold hands and feet. Equally well recognized is that prolonged stress is detrimental to a person's long-term health.

As mediators, we often encounter parties whose involvement with a conflict is long-standing and deeply impactful. When discussing the situation in mediation, emotions can be triggered and, in addition to verbal expressions of emotion, parties will often exhibit one or more of the physical responses described above. Depending on the level of intensity, mediators can also experience such physical reactions to stress but we must do our best to maintain professional composure as managers of the mediation process.

Darrin Hotte, BA in Psychology/Sociology and certified family mediator and family business mediator based in Canada, warns that attention must be paid to these heightened states of stress. He points out that coping with stress in general as well as being prepared for critical conversations requires a person to be "healthy in every aspect of life." These aspects are social, physical, emotional, spiritual and mental.

A healthy social life includes developing close connections to family, friends and interest groups and finding time to have fun! Strategies for attaining physical health are well known and include regular exercise, healthy eating and getting adequate sleep. Mental health can be enhanced by being open to and learning about new ideas and cultures, making the choice to see things in a positive light and keeping our time and environment organized and uncluttered.

Engaging with the arts by attending performances, lectures, museums or movies can touch our emotions. Allowing ourselves to acknowledge and feel emotions and making an effort to understand rather than ignore them is essential to emotional health. We can attend to our spiritual well-being by turning off media, setting aside time to be alone and making friends with silence whether in a church, the outdoors or meditation. A little mindful time alone can be relaxing, even inspirational and provide for moments of clarity.

A mediator's job is based in difficult conversations. Whether mentally preparing for a mediation or for our own personal difficult conversation, we can take time to prepare by: collecting our thoughts, on paper if desired; remembering to consider everyone's perspective; arriving feeling adequately rested and having eaten well. If there's time prior to the conversation, take a walk or pick up a warm drink. If faced with unexpected confrontation, mindful attention to breathing is extremely beneficial as is good "self-talk", i.e., "I can handle this", "I am calm", etc. If necessary, let the other party know that, "I need a few minutes to respond since this situation is obviously important to both of us."

As with everything in mediation, or just in our everyday interactions with family, friends, or co-workers, these skills take practice **one conversation at a time**

(Adapted from "The Physiological Effects of Conflict and Stress", Darrin Hotte/New Solution Mediation 2013)

Beginning Mediation Training April 2018



The Neighborhood Mediation Center
in partnership with *UNR Extended Studies* will present a
40-Hour Beginning Mediation Training on April 17-21, 2018 at
UNR's Redfield Campus in South Reno

The course offers participants:

- Knowledge of the concepts and practices of mediation and its uses and limits
- Understanding of the core principles and values that guide mediation
- Instruction in and application through role play of mediation skills related to communication, listening, problem solving, cultural diversity and agreement writing
- Development of an awareness of participant's personal values and biases as they relate to working with people in conflict
- A Certificate of Completion from the University of Nevada, Reno and the Neighborhood Mediation Center

Participants successfully completing the class are encouraged to apply to become volunteer mediators for the Neighborhood Mediation Center.

The instructors for the class are Claudia Wahl, former Executive Director and Monica Kales, Executive Director of the Neighborhood Mediation Center.

The trainers have 25 combined years of experience in mediation.

Participant comments from previous trainings:

- ◇ "Both instructors were extremely knowledgeable about mediation"
- ◇ "Instructors were very comfortable with interaction and encouraged it."
 - ◇ "Great story telling and ability to model the concept."

For more information and to register, click the link on the NMC website:

www.mediatenmc.org

“The deep truth of listening is the willingness to be transformed by another’s story, truth or perspective.”

Ken Cloke, Mediator

1 Day Advanced Mediation Training

The Nevada Dispute Resolution Coalition (NDRC) will present a 6-hour Advanced Mediation training, *Mediation Renovation: Retooling Your Skills*, presented by trainer Lee Jay Berman of the American Institute of Mediation (AIM). The training will be held in Reno at the AGC building on Friday, February 2, 2018 from 8:30am-4:30pm.

NDRC is an association of mediators and ADR practitioners based in Northern Nevada. Training registration and membership information can be found at:

www.nvdrc.org

*Family and Child Custody
Advanced Mediation Training
May 8-11, 2018*

Carson Mediation Center is sponsoring a 30-hour Advanced Family/Child Custody Mediation training which will include 4 hours of domestic violence training and 2 hours of ethics. The training will take place in Carson City with trainers Kathrine Berning, MA, JD and Nancy Cleaves, MSLA. ***Attendees must have completed a 40-hour Beginning Mediation training as a prerequisite.*** Class size is limited to 12.

For more information, contact Nancy Cleaves at 775-887-0303 or email carsonmediationcenter@gmail.com

From the Program Director's Corner.....

"Silence is a source of Great Strength." - Lao Tzu

"I've begun to realize that you can listen to silence and learn from it. It has a quality and a dimension all its own." - Chaim Potok, The Chosen

Parents/Grandparents can think of silence as a wonderful thing or a clue that mischief may be lurking around the corner. In the wilderness, the absence of human voices and ambient noise can be a means to hear the true wonder of nature at work: leaves falling, bees buzzing, etc. In some countries and cultures silence is respected and not uncommon, but in the United States this can cause some discomfort: language and actions help individuals sort out the region, culture, or nationalities of individuals they may be encountering.

Mediators have many tools to use in mediation; some are intuitive and some are learned. Silence, even for a few seconds, is one of those tools that can produce unexpected, and at times, positive results. Although mediators hope participants will actively listen and this will eventually lead them to come to an agreement they craft, sign, and endures over time, getting parties to listen and reflect on the entire process is not always easy. Oftentimes, participants are too busy wanting to be right, trying to make sure their point-of-view is being heard, or crafting a response to the opposing side. Silence in this case may allow parties time to reflect on what is really taking place.

In many cases, mediators, too, feel the need to say something in the absence of speaking. If opposing parties are making progress, the use of silence may be a good thing but the temptation to step in is strong. Instead of giving in to the temptation, go with the silence, as appropriate. It could potentially have unintended, but positive effects by affording one or both of the parties space to reflect on the discussion and move the process in a new and productive direction.

Mediation is many things but, in one sense, it can be thought of as facilitated negotiation. The mediator is not one of the negotiators but is present to help parties have a productive conversation. Depending on the subject matter, the conversation can look and feel a lot like negotiation. In a straight negotiation, the purposeful use of silence can indicate power and strength. In mediation, silence can often indicate impasse but may just as easily be strategic. Active listening on the mediator's part can help discern whether or not a pause is intentional or indicative of the parties being stuck.

As a mediator, you can decide if, when and where to use the tool of silence: a few seconds void of talking may be resounding in its benefits.

"Never miss a good chance to shut up." - Will Rogers

Mediator Profile: *Nancy Haug*

“NMC’s work in Reno and Sparks Justice courts really sets the example for what trained and compassionate mediators can do—help people struggling with an issue, reduce case loads at court, and applaud parties for doing the hard work of finding solutions to difficult situations. In many ways, this is community service at its best.”



Nancy Haug has been volunteering with NMC since she obtained her mediation certificate from University of Nevada, Reno Extended Studies in 2015. She has recently become one of NMC’s court coordinators. Nancy is passionate about mediation and its potential for resolving disputes, as well as repairing and enhancing relationships. She jokingly keeps statistics of her “wins and losses,” feeling most satisfied, successful and gratified when she can help parties achieve an outcome they can embrace. Nancy believes that NMC’s work at Reno and Sparks Justice courts sets the example for what trained and compassionate mediators can do, and that it is community service at its best.

Nancy is a trained facilitator and a career coach and mentor. During the last few years of her career, Nancy worked with the Department of the Interior’s Office of Collaborative Action and Dispute Resolution. Nancy is currently pursuing her master’s degree in dispute resolution and hopes to expand her work and experience in various types and techniques of conflict resolution.

Nancy retired from the federal Bureau of Land Management at the end of 2016 after a 32-year stint with the agency. She started her career by entering soils data into the computer and progressing to a writer-editor and then a secretarial position. Upon completion of her communications/journalism degree, Nancy moved into public affairs and helped educate the public and media about issues and events related to natural resources and wildland fire. She worked in an interagency environment coordinating information and projects among federal, state, local and private fire and natural resource organizations. From there Nancy advanced into leadership and management working at the field, state, national and departmental levels. Her experience internally with employees and externally with other agency personnel, organizations and the public and media, has helped her in both the mediation and facilitation fields.

After she retired, Nancy started a web blog entitled “Relevant Retiree” to feed her passion for creative writing. This blog (relevantretiree.com) chronicles the challenges Nancy has faced and her journey during her transition from career professional to retiree.

To celebrate her retirement and mark the transition, Nancy traveled to Nepal where she spent several weeks teaching English to 80 young monks living near Pokhara. The students’ abilities to speak English were as varied as their ages, which ranged from 5 to 16. The students were eager to learn about America and loved talking about Buddhism and their responsibility to emanate grace and love. The capstone of her trip to Nepal was a four-day Himalayan trek, where she traveled through villages, ate many varieties of dal bhat, and basked in the generosity and warmth of the Nepalese people.

When she’s not volunteering with NMC or doing schoolwork, Nancy spends time with her husband and rescued Australian Shepherd hiking, camping, fishing, taking pictures and writing. She has two grown children and five grandchildren.