

Shaking My Magic 8 Ball Looking Into the Future of Mediation

by Leslie Short



I have shaken my magic 8 ball and it landed on Conflict Coaching. Some of you may say nothing “*futuristic*” about that I've been doing that for years. I believe it may be used in private practice, but not in community centers.

Community mediators are trained to listen equally to both parties and to be neutral. Let's be honest that's great if both parties show up. More times than not the complainant shows up, ready to go to battle with things they have said, want to say and imaging what the respondent will say. They are ready to battle. They sit, they wait, and nothing! No paperwork, no respondent just wasted time. They do get a letter if they would like to say they appeared and then are asked would they like to reschedule. No emotions were released; issues or matters have been discussed. They leave frustrated and they think mediation doesn't work.

If community mediators are trained to also be prepared to use conflict coaching this can and will change the future of mediation and how parties approach mediation.

IMCR community mediation center in Bronx, NY recently held an in service training to work with their mediators to add this as part of the mediation practice. The practice of conflict coaching in community mediation centers is part of the future of Mediation.

Below is an outline on how conflict coaching can be used in mediation centers.

Concept:

Mediator takes the time to hold a confidential meeting with the one party that has arrived.

- *Gain insight into the impact of the dispute
- *Engage, manage or address their disputes
- *Increase effectiveness at resolving disputes
- *Example possible options
- *Choose alternative course of actions

Why Conflict Coaching:

- *Parties' frustration as a result of “no shows” is reduced
- *Opportunity for parties to share information
- *Gain new insight on new issues addressed
- *Development of active listening techniques
- *Possibility of decreasing violent outcomes
- *Parties choice to end or future pursue matters

Roles of the Conflict Coach:

- *Meet privately with the party
- *Keep neutral but build trust
- *Disclose confidentiality of the process
- *Engage the party to share information about the dispute
- *Ask questions that can help the party see different perspectives
- *Provide feedback and insights
- *Support the creation of options
- *Explore and test options
- *Assist the party with his/her future plans
- *Meet people where they are!

Benefits of Conflict Coaching:

- *Heard and Validated
- *Identification of issues needs and interest
- *Discovery of possible solutions
- *Address goals and objectivities
- *Select tools to manage and resolve disputes
- *Develop a course of action and implementation
- *Strengthening the community centers

Allowing a mediator to speak with the one party that does appear for the case (knowing if the case comes back they can not be the mediator for that case) allows the community center to open their services and creating a safe environment in the community to hear and handle disputes. It is still about the parties and not the mediator's thoughts and opinions but still asking the questions that lead the parties to see new options for themselves and the situation.

Why is this the future of mediation? Because it allows those parties that come in hoping for a full mediation session to still be heard and allow mediators to expand their skills on a one on one basis using additional communication and personal improvement, developments and understand triggers for themselves and client/s. Mediators in the future will be stronger and will develop additional skills outside of dealing with large parties but have to look within themselves to assure they don't allow their personal triggers to influence the parties for future mediation sessions. If mediators do not learn conflict coaching, mediation as we know it could be extinct in community centers. Why would someone keep coming back with no results or future plans to resolve their issues?

People will feel less frustrated about the process of mediation and know if they extend themselves to come to mediation they can get results. Allowing people to leave with the feeling of some type of satisfaction and next steps and with clarity on what to expect and prepare them to use their communications skills when they enter into a mediation session. Therefore allowing the process to be a successful and giving mediation a positive outcome.

Conflict Coaching empowers the parties to leave with new skills that they may not have had the opportunity to receive in a full mediation session.

It expands the field of mediation and opens the door for additional people to understand what mediation is and builds the industry as a one that problem solves still giving the power to the client. Conflict coaching is a viable solution for understanding present and future conflict within oneself and community.

If we do not relay this message as an industry, the future of community mediation centers could be closed. Mediation and conflict coaching will be available to only those who can afford it in the private sector. The result would be the elimination of the community mediation center and future resources for those centers. Conflict Coaching allows the center to have more than one direct service and allows the organization to grow and be an asset to the community and its partners.

Leslie Short biography and additional articles: <http://www.mediate.com/people/personprofile.cfm?auid=1603>

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