

Mediation: A Quick and Easy Solution to Conflict

"I hate mediation!" said the man sitting across from me.

I had been invited to speak to a small group of business leaders about the advantages of mediation. It was early in the morning and the guests were arriving. Obviously this man did not know I was the speaker!

His comments, however, reminded me that many people have preconceived notions about what mediation is. Others have had not-so-great experiences with mediation. These assumptions unfortunately prevent them from using this quick and easy conflict resolution technique.

So here is a primer about what mediation is and how mediation works. Then you can decide if mediation is right for you. Although mediation can resolve many disputes and reduce headaches, you have to know when to use it and how.

What is mediation?

Mediation is a process in which two or more people are brought together to discuss and resolve a dispute. The discussion is facilitated by a mediator who helps the parties communicate more effectively. The aim is to come to a mutually agreeable solution. However, mediation can also result in developing a better understanding of the dispute and rebuilding relationships. Mediation can be used in personal, corporate and community disputes.

Does it really Help?

Mediation is useful in a wide variety of conflicts, particularly after a fight or when something bad has happened. The participants can resolve their problems, let go of their anger and mend a relationship. On rare occasions, however, mediation can fail. There is no guarantee that the parties will be able to come to an agreement. At the minimum, each person

walks away with a better understanding of what is going on in the situation and how others perceive the dispute.

Why does mediation work?

Mediation gives people a chance to air their opinions and concerns. Conflict can cause misunderstandings and suspicion. When the parties are able to talk, many of these misunderstandings disappear. Because mediation is not bound by any formal rules (like the courts) the participants can talk about anything they think is relevant. The parties also control the outcome. They either agree to a solution or agree not to agree. They also decide how to implement their solution.

How does mediation work?

You can mediate at any time. You simply phone a mediator and ask her to help. The mediator will describe her services and fees. She will usually meet with those people involved in the dispute and set a meeting time for everyone to get together to discuss the situation and possible solutions. The process is entirely voluntary. In some cases, the parties never meet face to face and the mediator plays a go-between.

Why a mediator is necessary

The truth is that it's hard to talk to others when you are in conflict with them. The situation is often too hot to handle and emotions are on the edge. A skilled mediator can help make your exchange of positions safe and will endeavor to make your conversation meaningful and respectful. The success of mediation depends on the skill of the mediator but also on the readiness of the parties.

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