

# Why Emotional Intelligence is Critical for Mediators

By Maureen F. Fitzgerald

It goes without saying that emotions significantly impact mediations. As mediators, we see emotional reactions to all sorts of situations and understand that people are influenced both positively and negatively by their emotions.

## Four Ways for Mediators to Augment Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence includes several of the skills that we use as mediators, such as interpersonal relationships and empathy. But it also includes a whole bundle of "intra-personal" skills that most definitely have an impact on mediations. For example, I suspect that most good mediators have a great deal of emotional self-awareness, assertiveness and self-regard. Emotional intelligence also includes some qualities such as stress tolerance and impulse control that are most definitely useful when managing conflict.

The following four contexts provide specific examples of how mediators can draw on their emotional intelligence in mediation.

### 1. Before mediation even begins

During my training as a mediator, one of my mentors told me that his only preparation for mediation was an exercise to help him to get centered. He felt that he needed to block out the other things that might be going through his mind so that he could be present for the mediation.

All good mediators should be aware that they come to the mediation with other things on their mind and that those other things can impact the mediation. They must also be aware of things that might be triggers for them and how they can manage their emotions raised by these triggers.

In his recent book, *Mediating Dangerously*, Kenneth Cloke goes even

further by suggesting that mediators examine their inner processes that limit their effectiveness. He urges mediators to avoid the easy route to a quick compromise and take a more impactful; but "dangerous," route of exploring the real centre of conflict, including fear, revenge and oppression. This requires courage, honesty and self-knowledge.

### 2. Setting the tone

As most mediators know, a critical first step in any mediation is setting the tone. This involves developing rapport with the parties so that they feel comfortable enough to be able to engage in an open conversation with the mediator and the other parties.

Mediators should be aware of the emotions that a new participant in the mediation process might be feeling. These emotions would likely be compounded by the physical presence of the disputing party. A mediator might notice, for example, that both parties start with their arms folded in front of their chests. A mediator should know that the tone of his or her voice has an impact on the conversation. A mediator must also maintain a general tone of optimism throughout the mediation and believe at a fairly deep level that resolution is possible.

### 3. Listening to the parties

As suggested above, one of the keys to active listening is the ability to listen not just with your ears but also with your heart. Binder, Bergman & Price describe a good listener:

Just what is it a good listener will hear? Of course a good listener will hear factual content. But a good listener will also hear feelings that accompany that content. (Binder, Bergman & Price, 1991: 20)

We learn as mediators to listen for specific words that reflect emotions. For example, we learn to delve deeper

## Are Emotions Universal?

Coming to a common understanding in conflict is sometimes difficult, but we do share the common experience of the following emotions with every other human being. According to Paul Ekman, Professor of Psychology at University of California, there are ten emotions that are universal and experienced by all human societies. They are:

1. **SURPRISE**
2. **ENJOYMENT**
3. **ANGER**
4. **FEAR**
5. **SADNESS**
6. **DISGUST**
7. **CONTEMPT**
8. **EMBARRASSMENT**
9. **GUILT**
10. **SHAME**

Source: *Destructive Emotions: How Can We Overcome Them? A Scientific Dialogue with the Dalai Lama*, Narrated by Daniel Goleman, Random House, 2003



Some other key points...

**EMOTIONS NOT EMOTIONALITY**

Don't confuse emotionality with emotional intelligence. Understanding and expressing your feelings is important, but not as important as deciding when, how and with whom to express them.

**CON-ARTISTS AND CULT LEADERS**

Emotional intelligence, unfortunately, does not always mean it will be used to build better relationships. Con artists and cult leaders rely on their abilities to read the emotions of an individual or group, in order to manipulate them.

if we hear phrases such as:

- I was really upset at the time
- Thinking about it makes me mad
- I am nervous about settling
- I feel overwhelmed
- I was shocked and surprised

A good mediator will detect emotions from words, body language, eye movement and other clues. I surmise that some of the exceptional mediators develop a sixth sense around emotions and intuitively know when feelings are impacting the mediation. They then use their skills to delve deeper.

**4. Uncovering interests**

In addition to listening, mediators must be continually trying to uncover

hidden interests. Mediators must be empathetic communicators. They must ensure that the parties feel heard, understood and accepted.

This is not simply an exercise in nodding your head or selecting the best word – although this is part of it. Empathetic listening involves the whole body – mind, heart and soul. It involves the capacity to truly feel what another person is feeling. I suspect that if we worked harder at developing empathy, the communication techniques that we learn as mediators, such as paraphrasing, summarizing and re-framing would become second nature or simply an extension of a curiosity that arises when in an empathic state of mind.

In conclusion, I recommend that mediators do four things:

- learn more about emotional intelligence,
- investigate how emotional intelligence can enhance their abilities as mediators,
- measure their own emotional intelligence (a few simple tests are available), and
- continue to develop their emotional intelligence through reading and training.

I am convinced that if we learn more about our own emotions and the

Some EQ Web sites...

**iVillage – EQ Test**

[http://quiz.ivillage.co.uk/uk\\_work/tests/eqtest.htm](http://quiz.ivillage.co.uk/uk_work/tests/eqtest.htm)

**Guardian Unlimited – EQ Test (FLASH)**

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/life/flash/page/0,13249,937836,00.html>

**John Mayer's Web site**

[http://www.unh.edu/emotional\\_intelligence/](http://www.unh.edu/emotional_intelligence/)

**Salovey & Mayer's 1990 article (PDF)**

[http://www.unh.edu/emotional\\_intelligence/EIAssets/EmotionalIntelligenceProper/EI1990%20Emotional%20Intelligence.pdf](http://www.unh.edu/emotional_intelligence/EIAssets/EmotionalIntelligenceProper/EI1990%20Emotional%20Intelligence.pdf)

**Six Seconds – Emotional Intelligence Network**

<http://www.6seconds.org/>

emotions of others, we will be more prepared to embrace them in mediation. ♠

*This is an excerpt from a longer article by Maureen Fitzgerald, available on her Web site at [www.maureenfitzgerald.com](http://www.maureenfitzgerald.com)*

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Get Straight As in Emotional Intelligence

Would you like to be a straight-A student of Emotional Intelligence? Here are some suggestions:

**ATTITUDE**

Before examining your own particular way of dealing with emotions, you should try to be aware of the cultural context you find yourself in. Emotions are universal; culturally acceptable ways to appropriately deal with emotions are not. If you are Aboriginal-Canadian you may have been taught that the most important way to understand life is to listen to your "heart," if you are British-Canadian, you may feel that emotions should be ignored and one should "keep a stiff upper lip." Gender can affect how you deal with emotions, as can family patterns and previous experiences. Examine your cultural bias towards emotions.

**AWARENESS**

Becoming aware of what you are feeling is a very important component of dealing intelligently with emotions. Many people are not aware they are feeling something until the emotions are so strong that they are impossible to ignore, which can sometimes feel overwhelming. Some people are more attuned to their emotions than others. If you are not, make sure you find someone in your life who can help you with this important skill.

**ACCEPTANCE**

Once you have identified your emotion, it is important to accept the emotion as it is. For example, you may be sad instead of happy after an important event, such as the birth of a baby. Accepting negative emotions doesn't mean you have to wallow in them. When you accurately reflect on your real emotions, you have an easier time dealing with them.

**ACTION**

Once you are aware of your emotions and accept them accurately for what they are, you may wish to act on them. For example, you may realize that you are frustrated with one of your staff because it seems like they are doing less than their required amount of work. You accept that you are frustrated, but before acting on the frustration in an angry or dismissive way, you may choose to gather more information. Your emotions have given you an important signal to do something, it is up to your finely honed management skills to determine what that is.

