

Healing The Rift Between Meghan, Harry, And The Royals Will Require New Perspectives

By Anna Shields, Consensio, 12 March 2021

This week, millions of people watched Oprah Winfrey interview Prince Harry and Meghan, The Duke and Duchess of Sussex. Family relationships were laid bare; there were serious allegations of racism and candid disclosures about the impact this all had on Meghan's mental health.

Sharing personal details of conflict on primetime TV may seem like an extreme option, especially in contrast to the royal response. The Queen's short statement notes that 'recollections may vary' and that the issues will be dealt with privately by the royal family. The story continues to make headlines, with Prince William responding to reporters that his family is not racist and that he has not yet spoken to his brother since the interview.

As someone who works with conflict on a daily basis, my job as a workplace mediator is to enable all parties in a dispute to see each other's perspective, so they can try to find a path forward. Even though we work in confidential, private settings – not a TV studio – could recent events achieve some higher-level awareness between the royal parties?

Hear me, help me, heal me

It's not known why the Duke and Duchess of Sussex decided to do the Oprah Winfrey interview. However, drawing on many years of experience dealing with parties in workplace conflict, plus insights from veteran-interviewer Oprah, there are some common drivers for why people decide to speak out.

Earlier this year, when Oprah reflected on interviewing over 37,000 people, she said, "Everyone you meet just wants to be seen and heard." Winfrey went on to expand this into the workplace and beyond, "I can tell you, in your daily encounters, in your kitchen, in your conference rooms, in your work, in all of your relationships... that is what every person you encounter is looking to know. Did you see me? Do you hear me? And every argument is about that." This observation is borne out in many workplace mediations, where parties often say they most value the opportunity to be listened to and to express their point of view.

Harry also voiced his hopes of healing his relationship with his brother Prince William, a common desire when people address unresolved disputes. Harry said he loved his brother "to bits" and wanted to heal his relationship with him and with his father. During workplace mediations, parties often describe how they want to move on from the hurt and rebuild trust.

Focus on feelings, not facts

It was not a surprise that the interview placed a lot of emphasis on stating or correcting facts. Whose decision was it not to give Archie a title? Did they 'blindsided' the Queen regarding their departure?

Meghan was keen to correct an incident reported in the press which stated that she had made her sister-in-law, Kate Middleton, cry shortly before the Sussexes' 2018 wedding. Meghan said the reverse happened, and it was she who was in tears.

This episode was a 'turning point' for Meghan in her relationship with the royals and the media, who, she said, were looking for 'a narrative of a hero and a villain.' However, no matter what turns out to be 'the truth' or who is right or wrong, it is likely that both Meghan and Kate were hurting. In order to move forward, the focus will need to shift to the lived experiences and feelings.

The need for multiple perspectives

In relation to his father, Harry said, "I feel really let down because he's been through something similar," indicating that he hoped Prince Charles could relate to his position. Regardless of where one's sympathies lie, when people are in conflict, it's common to see the issues through an egocentric lens, to see one's own viewpoint as 'right' and the other as 'wrong.'

This binary way of thinking limits the possibility for change. Taking the time to explore and recognize multiple perspectives and try to relate to others and their experiences can heal and ultimately strengthen relationships. As Stephen Covey, in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, states: "Seek first to understand, then to be understood."

In this very public royal conflict, there are multiple broken relationships, and it may appear difficult, or even impossible, to heal them. The Oprah interview showed one perspective amongst many. It is unlikely others will be shared in the same way, if at all. Tellingly, in a YouGov poll this week, only 8% of respondents said they had sympathy for both sides. Perhaps the responsibility to visualize a different perspective lies with all of us because our opinion of what happened and who is right or wrong is unlikely to have changed.