

Workplace Mediation Skills Are Life Skills

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When HR professionals or managers attend a workplace mediation course, their aim is generally clear: they want to learn the skills to formally resolve workplace conflict. However, by the end of the training course, most delegates tell us that the course was life changing, and that they will apply the new skills they learned across many aspects of their work and personal lives. In this short article, we identify how the key principles and skills that drive workplace mediators are relevant beyond the formal setting of workplace mediation.

The mediation principles of impartiality, confidentiality, voluntariness and self-determination have far-reaching applications in any workplace. Allowing individuals to speak openly and honestly with each other, in a confidential space, where they aren't going to be judged or told what to do, can be extremely powerful. These principles help people to create a safe environment for a different and usually more useful type of conversation to happen.

In particular, learning the importance of impartiality enables delegates to reflect on how they may unconsciously filter messages according to their own biases, prejudices and past experiences. This new level of self-awareness fostered through mediation training helps individuals to reflect on how they can generally communicate more effectively.

Skillful communication is at the heart of what a mediator does, particularly in terms of facilitating a conversation between two or more people who are finding it difficult

to talk to each other. Many of us learn active listening skills as part of a management training programme or team building exercise, but mediation training takes these skills to a higher level. The ability to really listen to what is being said, as well as what is not being said, and how to summarise this back to the parties, is a skill that can be mastered through mediation training. Equally, the ability to show empathy, another key skill of a mediator, can facilitate a real shift in people's positions.

Finally, mediators help people move on from their entrenched positions, to understand what they really need to move forward. We all at times hold positions at work when challenged about something that is important to us. These situations can quickly escalate, and if left unchecked, the relationship may deteriorate. We have all seen an initial viewpoint of "I need to be involved in this project," move to "I am being purposely excluded," and then end up with someone going on sick leave or taking out a grievance. Helping people to verbalise their underlying needs and what motivates them is a core mediation skill, but can be used in any type of workplace or personal conversation.

We hope that more and more HR professionals will embrace the skills of workplace mediation, not just as a means to formally mediate within their organisations, but also to transform their own and their staff members' ability to more effectively deal with issues in their workplaces and beyond.

