

I Can Relate!
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The Monthly Missalette on Relational Practice

Tribe Think

I am just returning from a conference with the International Academy of Mediators in Scotland. I always feel like I'm with my tribe when I am among IAM practitioners. You know what I mean, that feeling you have too when you resonate with a group of people, a group that is easy to be with because you experience resonance, you vibe with each other, you like each other, you have things in common. I bet at least one personal or professional group comes to mind for you when you think about your tribe(s). Of course at the IAM, there was a good deal of discussion about US President Trump and the EU and China and Russia as well as about Prime Minister Theresa May and Brexit and Scotland. And there was a good deal of resonance and unison. Afterall, as a group of mediators, we shared many similar views. But. Not but. And. And, as a group of mediators from around the world, we also shared divergent views.

Yes, the views expressed were similar *and* divergent. And it was interesting, stimulating, thoughtful and thought provoking. And I was still resonating with my tribe! And indeed, even more so because of the similar and divergent. But wait! Have you ever been with one of your tribes, and you're feeling that closeness, that coziness, with similar views... but there is no divergence? Everyone just chimes in and thinks the same way? When this happens your tribe can lose its dynamism among members as it begins to conform and it can lose its ability for creative problem solving within the group. As if this is not enough to be on alert for, I think there is something even more insidious that happens all around us in what I will call **Tribe Think**. Just as any of us might start feeling good and our little grasshopper legs seemingly in chorus with each other in our tribes, we must be on guard for Tribe Think. None of us is immune from Tribe Think. ADR practitioners are not immune from Tribe Think.

What is Tribe Think? First of all, finding your tribe and having the experience of being part of a tribe is a very warm, comfortable and often inclusive experience. So what's wrong with that? Nothing. Nothing at all...until.... the coziness of the tribe becomes resistant to views outside the tribe or not held by the majority of the tribe. These views might not only better inform the tribe but they could help with better problem solving within the tribe, and just as importantly, with better relations between those in the tribe and those not in the tribe. This is critical to society.

Tribe Think is also the togetherness of alliances in opposition to a third view that create triangles that tear down communities both within the tribe and outside the tribe in the short and long run. For instance, ever been in a group, even a gathering of colleagues or friends, where even the acknowledgement of the existence of an outside differing view was found unacceptable or trivialized or put down? Where there was an inability to have curious inquiry into outside views? Where the wall came down and there was no ability

to offer any respect for an opposing view? When there was a knee jerk type response that quickly diminished an opposing view or even vilified it? Or when the very tribe you found yourself in was formed to oppose someone external to the tribe and when asked later no one can even explain the why anymore with any real sense but they know they are against someone? That is Tribe Think.

Sure, we can think similarly and find others who share our views; that's how we often form many of our communities, and that's how we move ideas forward. But our views will likely not be fully informed or propel greater **well-being** if we are not able to bring in other voices of those who disagree with us or who simply have a different experience. Indeed, if we were to inquire with respect and curiosity, we may not even be as opposed to the other in the way Tribe Think wants us to be. Tribe Think can be dangerous for our relationships. Tribe Think can be dangerous for our Tribes! Tribe Think can be dangerous for our communities. Tribe Think can stifle our ability to engage as a society.

Over the next month, notice your tribes. Notice if you are part of a tribe that has lost its ability to think independently within the tribe. Notice if your tribe is not able to acknowledge, with respect, a view that differs from the tribe's stated view. Notice if you are part of a tribe that formed its identity on being against something or someone. Can you think of a group you've been in where you became aware of Tribe Think? What were the clues?

Not perpetuating Tribe Think is another aspect of a relational practice. What if you were the courageous voice to model relational engagement of an unpopular view?

If you have any reactions or stories you'd like to share regarding this article, please send them to Louise@BaltimoreMediation.com. Your views and stories are welcomed.

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