

MEDIATION CHANGES PEOPLE

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When people turn to a mediator for help, it is often helpful for the mediator to remember that conflict often takes a *personal* toll on people. People caught in difficult and long lasting conflict have often lost some self-confidence, clarity, openness to new approaches, and inner strength.

Often people coming to mediation have been in a difficult or hostile setting where they have argued, spoken to deaf ears, felt insecure or confused, or have themselves listened, not to hear, but to frame a self serving response, all of which leads to frustration and escalation. It is this experience that takes a toll on the people perhaps as great as the conflict itself.

How can change take place in mediation? Although I wish I could say the mediator changes people, this is not the case. Mediators don't change people. Mediators' presence and interventions change the setting for conflict; people themselves bring about change.

A mediator is someone who will not argue with parties but will attentively listen; who will show them respect and encouragement; a person in the room whom they can trust; a person who makes it safe for them to say what is on their minds and in their hearts; as well as a person who can keep track of the themes, ideas, and "willingness" to consider other possibilities.

Given a supportive and encouraging setting, parties can rise to the occasion and get to a place where they find workable answers to their crises. Parties often find ways to interrelate even with someone they don't agree with. This not only makes it possible for them to solve their immediate problem, it also gives them needed self confidence and equips them to better deal with whatever new problems the future brings them. Two important achievements!

The mediator, seeing good things happen in the mediation room, keeps being reminded that what she or he is doing is more than just a job, it is a special career, worthwhile and satisfying. It makes a difference in people's lives where a difference is urgently needed. Because of what it does for the people and of what it does for me, I love mediation. It's worth saying again, I love mediation.