

The 3rd Voice



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In conflict there are usually two points of view that cannot be reconciled. Whether embroiled in a business or personal conflict each party believes their point of view is right. To that end the Court system in our country is designed to prove which view point is right. As a society we are very competitive, competition is the epitome of capitalism, ergo our Court system is a win-lose proposition. Thus, the Court system decides which of the two voices they hear should prevail. In mediation (along with the two voices entrenched in conflict) there is a distinct difference from the Court system.

In Mediation Smith Kearns Mediation considers the Mediator to be the “3rd Voice”. The Mediator becomes the voice that allows each party to hear each other’s view point. The “3rd Voice” is not a judge or advocate but rather a Mediator. He or she is the conduit to help the parties look objectively at the other persons view point.

It reminds me of the story I love to tell when talking about my training at The Understanding in Conflict. Jack Himmelstein tells a story of the Elder Statesman and his pupil. The Elder Statesman was in essence a Mediator in a small village in Europe. Many years ago that was able to help resolve conflicts among its citizens. One day a young person in the village went to the Rabbi and asked the Rabbi if he would train him. The Great Rabbi agreed and taught the young man until it was time for him to leave his village to become Rabbi of another village. The

pupil settled into a village and became excellent at resolving conflicts among its citizens. However, there was one conflict in the village he could not resolve. This issue polarized the village.

The Statesman decided that his teacher the Elder Statesman would be able to solve this conflict. The Rabbi packed up the village and they traveled to see the Elder Statesman. The Elder Statesman asked each side of the issue to explain their position with respect to the conflict. A representative from one side of the issue stood and told the statesman their position. After he was finished, the Elder Statesman proclaimed he was right. The half of the village that he supported was ecstatic the Elder Statesman thought they were right.

The Elder Statesman then asked a representative from the other side of the issue to make a statement. After the representative finished his statement, the Elder said he was right. His side of the village was ecstatic as well. However, the whole village and his pupil were confused. How could both sides be right? The pupil spoke to the teacher and said, “Teacher I am totally confused by your reaction to the two sides of the story. I do not understand how both sides can be right”.

The teacher looked at his student and said, “You’re right”!!

In essence, it is the role of the mediator for each side to understand the other’s viewpoint. Once this is accomplished, a brainstorming session will enable each party to search for a resolution that will meet the interests of both parties.

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