

Mediator Self Awareness and Emotional Intelligence

Consider a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces are sometimes changing shape. The person who tries to solve the puzzle imagines how the pieces will fit together. The mediator has a similar task. To be fluid and detached to the extent necessary to put the pieces together while at the same time being mindful of changes. According to Phipps Senft (2004), Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is an important skill that is part of the ongoing development and competence of the mediator.

Emotional Intelligence (different from IQ) is defined as "the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of other, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships" (Bowling & Hoffmann, p. 152). EQ in mediation is derived from four key competencies:

- Self Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Social Skills

Phipps Senft proposes that mediators strive to better the skills that heighten their EQ. The mediator's EQ is what provides the mediator with a sense of timing, knowing when, and when not, to intervene during an unfolding conflict. These skills surface by exploring one's own awareness that will allow the mediator to be fully present during the interaction. "Developing these qualities requires focus and intention. As we focus on understanding and interpreting our own depths, we develop a greater ability to be present with a wider and wider variety of conflicts. We develop a mastery of ourselves and therefore over the process of supporting the resolution of conflict" (Bowling & Hoffmann, pp. 42-43).

Self awareness is an essential first step in becoming an integrated mediator. Bowling and Hoffman (2003) point out that it is often easier to gain awareness of emotion in others than in ourselves. "Until we develop emotional self awareness, we will project our own unrecognized emotions onto others" (p. 156). One key component of self awareness is self confidence. One cannot project self confidence without self awareness.

Second, self-management gives one greater emotional control. An emotionally competent mediator is able to *choose* responses instead of being led by emotion. If the mediator does not have self-management skills, he/she may respond inappropriately to an outburst of emotion from the parties.

Social awareness is the third measure of EQ. This competency includes two of the most important skills that mediators acquire for empathy: active listening and reading nonverbal cues. The hope is that feeling empathy for the parties will be a guide for parties to feel empathy for each other.

Social skills is the last competency that builds on the other three competencies. Social skills, such as effective communication, are what the parties see when the mediator speaks and moves. Social skills guide the process and help the mediator to gently influence the parties while also signaling appropriate ways of communicating. Mediator social skills further hone ways our self- awareness and EQ.

Mediators with high EQ can also be positive role models for the parties and can help the parties move more positively through the process. During the mediation process the relationships of the parties to each other and the mediator are in constant flux. The mediator relies on his/her own perceptions and worldviews to mentally recreate the dispute, which is only a version of the conflict and not the actual

conflict. To understand the conflict, the mediator, at an early stage in the mediation process, tries to build a trusting and nonjudgmental relationship with the parties.

Emotional Intelligence serves to improve the process of mediation by honing mediator awareness. The mediator recognizes that learning the skills of mediation is not sufficient. Furthering intuitive self-knowledge enhances positive interaction between parties.

Bowling, D., & Hoffmann, D. (Eds.). (2003). *Bridging peace in the room*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Phipps Senft, L. (2004, Spring). The interrelationship of Ethics, Emotional Intelligence and Self Awareness. *ACRresolution*, 20-21.

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