ILCRG

Resolve

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The InterLocal Conflict Resolution Group (ILCRG) is a consortium of government agencies, labor unions, non-profits, and volunteer professionals jointly formed by King County and the King County Labor Council to offer mediation to its members at no cost.

This shared neutrals program affords the opportunity for member agencies and unions to draw from a pool of mediators who have no direct relationship to the disputes. As a result, sensitive issues that require confidentiality and neutrality can be mediated by qualified professionals.

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Stories That Lead

By Doug Nathan

> *Are you willing to reclaim time to think?*
> *Sit down and be quiet.*
> *You are drunk, and this is the Edge of the roof.*
> Rumi

When I began mediating eight years ago, I felt like a fish in familiar waters. I've attributed that feeling to my previous work as a writer and a teacher of creative writing. For many years I sat in circles with aspiring poets, essayists, and novelists as we shared and shaped our stories. Safety was created in those gatherings by listening with intent—not to judge or criticize, but to delight in what happens between and beneath the words; to discover our stories by exploring voice.

I was invited to share this voice-centric process with mediators at a recent Seattle Federal Executive Board quarterly meeting. As a mediator, you access the full range of voice if you hope to serve your clients well. You develop reflective and active responses that help you engage at the *edge of the roof*—aware of the dangers and opportunities: thinking, feeling, sensing; awake to the moments that can transform conflict into learning.

You also guide your clients to access their voices. By eliciting their stories, you help them move from fixed ideas to their deeper intentions. You listen to their words, and for the meaning beneath the words. You attend to the logical linkage of ideas, and attune with the emotional content of their language. You seek their concerns and hopes to bring them more clearly into the room. Your ability to hear those moments allows you to integrate their voices and shape stories that lead them forward.

How can you find stories that lead?

You can think of voice as similar to the slide of a trombone—only instead of moving horizontally to hit different notes, it moves vertically to play notes ranging from analytic (our heads), to plain spoken (our mouths), to deep voice (our bellies).

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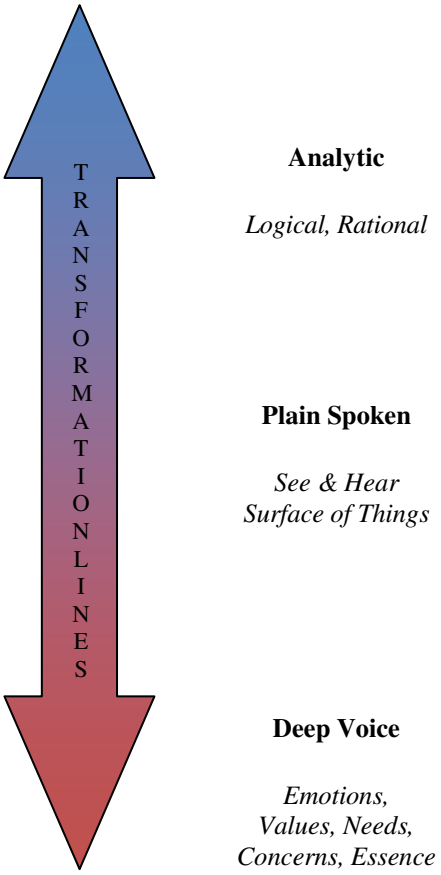
Stories That Lead continued

Most of us learn in school how to write with our analytic note, and then spend a lifetime polishing this note at work. We learn about *transition lines*. Transitions provide logical links between ideas.

But language contains both rational and emotional content. To explore the range of our voice, we can notice *transformation lines*. Transformation lines connect emotional states.

Transformation lines are like trap doors. When you find one and fall through, your voice drops. Now you have a new room to explore. And if you are lucky, you can find another trap door, and drop again to discover more of what might be revealed. But sometimes, when we drop, we feel too vulnerable, and our voice shoots up for safety.

With practice, you can intentionally hit notes from analytic to deep voice. You can share a thought, describe the surface of things, and reveal your fears and joys. You can even learn how to play several notes simultaneously, creating a felt sense of authenticity and truth. Think about the writers and story tellers you love. Their voices move and play their full range, and that's what keeps you engaged.



As a mediator, you translate technical (rational, logical) information into plain-speak quite often, whether rephrasing legalese between lawyers and non-lawyers, mediating contract disputes between union employees and management, or negotiating parenting plans with polarized ex-spouses. As you listen and learn to follow transformation lines, you can *drop* the conversation to explore issues and concerns from deeper perspectives as needed.

Listening animates what you think, feel, and sense. When you listen as if stories matter, your awareness focuses on the dimensionality of others' voices. You get curious when a rational voice drops, if only momentarily, and wonder what unspoken meaning might be revealed. So you ask a question from that lower voice, and an opening begins.

Rock Your Mock!

putting it all together

This is a great tool to use when preparing for your mock mediation. It covers allof the elements that staff observers will be looking for!

Case Development

- ◊ Educate yourself about the dispute.
- ◊ Educate the participants about the process.
- ◊ Educate the participants about yourself.

Opening Statement

- ◊ Describe the process.
- ◊ Describe the roles.
- ◊ Set the tone.
- ◊ Create an environment of cooperation.

Participant Statements

- ◊ Attend
- ◊ Active listen
- ◊ Reflect
- ◊ Restate
- ◊ Summarize the dispute.
- ◊ Identify agreements in principle.

Agenda Building

- ◊ Clarify issues.
- ◊ Assist in prioritizing.
- ◊ Reduce confusion.

Negotiation

- ◊ Identify interests.
- ◊ Develop options.
- ◊ Evaluate options.
- ◊ Summarize agreements.
- ◊ Find Common Ground
- ◊ Break deadlocks.
- ◊ Sit back and observe.

Caucus

- ◊ Allow parties to elaborate on their story.
- ◊ Build rapport and trust.
- ◊ Help parties acknowledge the other person's interest.
- ◊ Secure potential concessions and agreements.
- ◊ Pose questions for homework.
- ◊ Help parties word questions, concessions and requests.

Agreements

- ◊ Identify areas of agreement.
- ◊ Help nail down specifics.
- ◊ Look for time lines and durability.
- ◊ Ask "what if" questions.

Improving Outcomes in Entrenched Interpersonal Workplace Conflict

Based on emerging research findings, the InterLocal Conflict Resolution Group is looking for new approaches to help parties who are involved in deeply entrenched and highly emotional work place conflict. We are asking our mediators to structure conversations that have the best chance to improve relationships and bring lasting resolution and reconciliation in very difficult situations. That might mean a variation on the 8 Step Model.

When opening statements become venting sessions, participants often say things that linger in the mind of the other person in their dispute. Even if the mediation ends in a "settlement," in our follow up evaluations it's sometimes evident that one or more of the participants have been chewing on something that was said during the mediation session that keeps the conflict very much alive.

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ILCRG 2013 TRAINING CALENDAR

Date	Room(s)	Time	Session
April 10	Chinook Rm.123	9:00 - noon 1:00 – 3:00	Negotiation Phase Pre-Mediation Caucus
May 8	Chinook Rm.123	11:30 – 1:00	Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon
June 14	Chinook Rm. 123	9:00 – noon 1:00 – 3:00	Active Listening Eye of the Storm
July 24	Chinook Rm.123	8:30 – 4:30	ESJ/Cross Cultural
September 11	Chinook Rm.123	9:00 – noon 1:00 – 3:00	Co-Mediation TBD
November 20	Chinook Rm. 123	9:00 – noon 1:00 – 3:00	Really Great Questions TBD

All training sessions will be held in the King County Chinook Building, Room 123, located at 401 5th Ave., Seattle

Improving Outcomes. . . . . .

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Pre-mediation caucus is a mediation option that can help participants identify their concerns, focus on their goals and ready themselves for the mediation. The mediator uses this time to coach participants about how they want to present in their opening statements, and the potential effect on the other . This initial engagement has the potential to influence the tone and content of the participants' opening statements during the mediation. As mediators, we can help curb the harsh criticism and defensive responses, and create an atmosphere where transformative possibilities may be more likely to arise.

What work can mediators do in pre-mediation caucus?

- Clarify the issues, interests and goals that each person brings to the mediation.
- Determine how the individual wants to appear in the mediation session, and help them rehearse their message and delivery.
- Build rapport with the individual.
- Surface from the person how they might have contributed to the conflict situation.
- Help the parties identify strengths of the other person.

Also bring your calendars with you schedule a follow up mediation session before you leave the mediation. This way, the participants have a check in point and know they can come back and make adjustments if needed. Studies show that people are more likely to keep the agreements and develop lasting new patterns of interaction if they know they will be reporting back to the mediator. You can normalize the follow-up mediation by saying it is standard practice and that people find it really helpful in making continued improvements in their work environment.

The ILCRG will be experimenting and evaluating the use of these tools over the coming year. Come to the training on Pre-mediation Caucus so you will be able to use this strategy effectively!