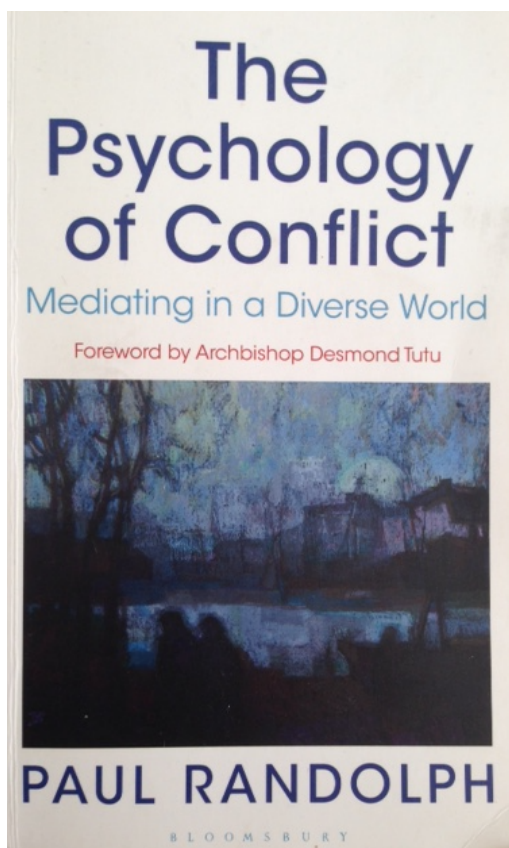




Who is mediator?

They are all around us and here's what the effective ones have in common:

Paul Randolph's book, "The Psychology of Conflict – Mediating in a Diverse World", (Bloomsbury 2016) offers an invaluable insight to this topic.



The term "mediator" may be used to encompass lawyers, diplomats, politicians and national leaders, HR executives, police officers, hostage negotiators and any others who are called upon to assist or intervene in, negotiate or manage conflict.

The most fundamental aspect of the mediator's objective is to secure an attitude shift on the part of one or more of the parties. Without this, the parties are likely to remain in the same entrenched positions as when they entered the conflict, creating little prospect of settling their dispute.

"We cannot change the dispute but we can change our attitude towards it".

Or put another way: *"If we change the way we look at things, the things we look at change".*

It is telling that these wisdoms are attributed both to an ancient Tao observation and also to Max Planck, 20th Century German physicist.

Paul Randolph opens his insightful book by observing that "conflict takes place in a diverse world – a world of ethnic, national, geographical, cultural, economic, social, religious and legal differences. This presents a daunting challenge to those who deal with conflict, whether in its avoidance, management or resolution."

Yet all human beings .. share a vast majority of identical characteristics and qualities. There are many commonalities that demonstrate the extent to which we are all alike, and are therefore a key to understanding our behavior in conflict.

For example, all those in conflict have the following in common. They:

- must both contend with time and temporality;
- experience the anxiety and distress of uncertainty;
- are each driven by self-esteem;
- together have a need for interpersonal relationships;
- each create values by which they feel they must live; and
- all enjoy freedom of choice albeit exercised with responsibility.

It is these **human traits** which, though shared, can nevertheless create psychological blockages to the resolution of disputes.

A clear insight into these shared attributes and a comprehension of the behavioural strategies adopted by those in dispute are invaluable to a mediator and to those involved in managing or resolving conflict.

By identifying and recognising them, a mediator can consider how best to work with them, so as to bring about a material change in attitude and secure that all-important shift in perceptions and expectations as to the outcome of the dispute.

A mediator's communication skills are important in building trust and establishing rapport, but they are vital in allowing each party to feel properly listened to and heard.

"Many disputes are a result of people feeling that no one is listening; that they have no proper voice, and they simply have not been heard. Consequently, the only option that invariably appears available to them is to enter into 'dispute mode'.

"Whether it is a consumer making a complaint, neighbours arguing over a party wall, a corporate entity negotiating in respect of a broken contract, or a political entity manoeuvring for recognition – if any of them believe they are deprived of a voice, or if given a voice, one to which they feel no one is listening, they will find themselves in a conflict situation and may resort to the traditional means of resolution: litigation or war.

"The magical power of mediation lies in the ability of the mediator to allow parties to feel truly heard. In many instances, the party at the mediation table will experience for the very first time in his or her life, the true nature and value of *really being listened to*.

"A party who feels heard can rarely sustain that anger for any length of time: the concentrated listening skills of the mediator will defuse the anger. The party in dispute who feels he or she has been undervalued, taken for granted, or ignored will blissfully appreciate the fact that, at last, the mediator is respecting them and taking them seriously.

There can be no greater catalyst to the creation of trust and rapport than to allow a person to feel thoroughly and empathically heard.”

As a 20 year litigator-turned-mediator and indeed personally in every-day life: I believe firmly in the power and healing effect of enabling each party to feel properly listened to and heard. I’ve witnessed it time and time again and I believe truly that it works.

Paul Randolph’s provides an insightful yet “back to basics” common-sense approach to understanding conflict and what is required to achieve that crucial attitude shift so that the problems may be resolved. Randolph’s book is highly recommended for any “mediator” – ie any of us in life who are called upon to assist or intervene in, negotiate or manage conflict.