



The Power of 'AND'

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The word 'and' is short but powerful. It connects as well as includes. It adds rather than negates. The word 'and' provides energy in collaboration and contributes momentum toward synergy. This word enables people with differing perspectives to find common ground. It can supply motivation when opposing parties may be losing hope of achieving their goal. When used effectively the word 'and' can move a disagreement toward resolution. This tiny word is one of the most important communication terms we can use when doing mediation.

Many of us use the word 'but' when attempting to compare two differing points of view. For example, "I understand what you are saying, **but** I don't agree with you." This statement focuses on the disparity between the two people and is likely to engender division and defensiveness. The word 'but' is sometimes called the 'eraser word' as it erases the phrase that came before it while focusing on the phrase that comes after it. This discounts the statement made by the first party in favor of that made by the second party. The result of responses that include the word 'but' are often unproductive.

The word 'and' is inclusive. It accepts that there may be some truth or validity in the first person's statement and then indicates that there are also other perspectives. This statement would go like this, "I understand what you are saying, **and** I don't agree with you." The change in one word, from use of the word 'but' to the word 'and' makes an important shift in the relationship by demonstrating an acceptance of the first person's statement while also indicating that there is a second point of view as well. It allows the person to be heard and understood, which is essential if efforts are being made to work together in resolving differences.

Ambivalence is a common characteristic in mediation - there are often mixed feelings and desires. The use of the word 'and' provides juxtaposition between the two simultaneous dynamics. "On the one hand you want to reach a quick decision to get this over with, **and** on the other hand you know that doing this too quickly may not get you what you want." Simply reflecting this duality can clarify the two competing perspectives and help determine the next steps to take in the process.

Use of the word 'and' allows for both support and confrontation in the course of collaboration or negotiation. Confrontation alone typically engenders resistance and rebuttal. An approach which starts with support will reduce defensiveness and open the door to exploration of alternatives. "I can tell that your beliefs are important to you from your perspective **and** I hope that you will be open to considering some additional ideas so that we can come up with the best possible plan."

This approach can be even more effective through use of pauses and reinforcement phrases such as, "I hear you saying that doing things your way will work best,.... I really do see how that makes sense for you based on the points you are making, **and** I have another way of looking at this which is different from yours. Can I explain more about my point of view?" There is an art in the use of reflective listening where the word 'and' can demonstrate empathy while also communicating a differing choice. Reflective statements that help the person feel truly understood will lower resistance and increase the likelihood that they will, in turn, try to understand an alternative. Using a question to seek permission to provide more information is also a helpful technique.

Using the word 'and' invites another person to add to your thoughts our ideas. Making a statement such as, "My preference is (...) **and** I want to hear yours" demonstrates receptivity to consideration and inclusion of another point of view. There is still room for comparison, debate or negotiation related to differences, only now the discussion contains a spirit of respect and openness which increases the likelihood of satisfactory resolution. It is also helpful to acknowledge thoughts that have merit while seeking additional ideas. "I like what you just said **and** I want to keep brainstorming to see what else we can discover. I am feeling very hopeful about where this is going."

Collaboration in managing differences is best achieved by focusing on both the issue/agenda and the relationship - the thoughts and the feelings. Communication that is accepting of the person and objective about the data will encourage creative and expansive thinking, leading to optimal outcomes. "I recognize that this plan is not what you initially desired **and** I want you to be satisfied. Now that we have had a chance to discuss the facts thoroughly, and examined the pros and cons of your ideas along with some new ones, I hope you can see the benefit in making some changes to your original proposal. What are your feelings about this now?"

As you can see, the use of the word 'and' can enhance problem solving by demonstrating inclusion while also serving to keep discussion open and progressive. It can be a powerful term in managing differences, creating openness to new ideas and movement toward resolution of conflict. Be mindful of incorporating this word into your mediation practice. Doing so will be helpful to your clients **and** to you.