

We Are Creators of Possibility

Remarks From the President at the 2020 TAM Conference

Kim Sullivan

I want to thank TAM and its members for the opportunity to serve this organization as the next President. I am so honored and excited to step into this important role.

When I first moved to Texas from Massachusetts over five years ago, I didn't know anyone in the state, let alone any people who shared my passion. I just happened to meet a UT professor in the airport who put me in touch with Suzanne Schwartz, Susan Schultz, and Walter Wright. All torchbearers for mediation in this state. They said three letters to me: T-A-M. February. Be there. And I was.

What I found was far more than a conference for mediators. I found my home.

I remember meeting Melissa at the conference for the first time when I was a labor attorney for a federal union and asked her- do you think I can get into mediation full-time? Is it possible to do this as a first rather than second or third career? I actually don't remember what she said. But her eyes and her smile said HELL YES you can.

A year and a half later I was so grateful to be working at the University of Texas as a full-time mediator, running the dispute resolution office. My work at UT changed my life. Mediation becoming my career changed my life. Now I am starting a new adventure at a large tech company here in Austin, helping them design an alternative conflict resolution system for their workplace disputes and I wake up a lot of days asking myself-did this all really happen?

I want mediators of all ages, all professions, and all backgrounds to know that if you truly love this work, then anything, and I mean anything is possible. We are the Creators of possibility. We do it for other people every day. And we can do it for ourselves in our own lives too. It is such a privilege to do what we all do. To sit with other people who bare their hearts and souls to us. And we listen. And it's as if we have given them gold.

Given our current political and social climate, I believe we as mediators have a unique opportunity to help create positive ripple effects with every party we touch.

Whether we are committed public servants serving our governments or communities, private mediators helping parties to maintain their dignity through life's most difficult moments, or teachers and trainers sharing our knowledge and expertise with the next generation, we are all peacemakers. Our work allows us to model effective communication, empathetic listening, and collaborative problem solving to all those that request our

services. Beyond that one dispute, we are actually empowering humans everywhere with new communication and conflict management tools that can not only resolve the issue before them, but also empower them in every new moment of the future. We inject creativity where positions have hardened. We hold people's emotions with care and compassion. We listen to those who have not yet been heard. And most importantly, we help heal and restore relationships. And relationships are the foundation and lifeblood of being human.

My personal intention in this work is that every organization creates alternative options for conflict resolution that strengthen communication and relationships, get us back in touch with our humanness, and generate peace within our organizations and for the world.

That's a big intention for one person. That's why it takes all of you to carry that intention out in the work you are lucky to perform each and every day. And you all can do it. You DO do it. Anyone who does this work is BIG enough to carry any intention forward into existence.

During my time in this role, I look forward to building and strengthening our connections. I want us to continue to recruit and support new mediators and students and connect them with our experienced members who have been committed to this field for decades. We can build a bridge between mediators and other ADR practitioners doing important work in fields like restorative justice. We can share our practices and support one another in our peace-making work.

Finally, and most importantly, are the relationships we have with one another. We can continue to cultivate new ideas and partnerships between our mediators who are attorneys and mediators from other professional backgrounds.

I want TAM to use me up during my time as President. Like the George Bernard Shaw quote- "I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live...Life is no "brief candle to me. It is sort of a splendid torch which I have a hold of for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it over to future generations."

Together, in each new moment, we have the chance to shift our world in a different direction; a direction that moves us closer to unconditional love, true empathy for those that are different from us, and towards the creation of new possibilities.

We are all mediators. We can change the world in so many positive ways. Together.