

Mediation Musings

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Processions

Thrum. Thrum. Bong. Bong. Step. Step. The sounds of the Queen of England's funeral events had a somber musical score to match the occasion. A riveting theme for Britain and around the world. Throngs of well-wishers lined the avenues. Some commented that, despite the deep divides in that country and the vestiges of the colonial empire, the event of her death was uniting. At least for a historical moment.

The procession of the forty-eight migrants who arrived on Martha's Vineyard lacked pomp, pageantry, as well as the precision planning such as that involved in the royal ceremonies on the other side of the Atlantic. I imagine the quiet of an Island late afternoon with birds chirping and leaves rustling as these displaced humans arrived, unannounced, at the Community Services campus. Within hours, though, scores of Islanders learned about these people who needed help. United around an unforeseen set of events, locals saw to it that emergency arrangements were made, Spanish speakers enlisted. Food, shelter, medical attention, and legal help were organized. It took no time at all to create bonds of human kindness. As they left three days later, a throng of well-wishers lined up to say goodbye, one by one, to each of the visitors.

The juxtaposition of these two current events has stayed with me. As I have taught, mediated, facilitated, and administrated this week I've held on to the idea of creating a community of kindness and service. It's not unrelated to conflict resolution work. We humans yearn to be part of a community to which we belong. Conflict can be avoided when a bonded group can unite around a common purpose and see themselves as part of an *us*--instead of distancing from others and sorting those others into a *them*.

Community of Belonging

This week I sat together with two small groups. One was made up of office workers who work together. As with any group, conflict had been inevitable. My goal was to attempt to assist them to find the human bonds that could help to re-unite the group. We talked, planned, considered, and listened deeply to one another. On my way out I heard: "This was productive. I liked the hot button exercise and I'm going to use it. We can do this." One by one each participant said goodbye to me and to each other. As I left, I saw two of them hug each other. It looked like a community of belonging was on the mend.

The second group was the MV Mediation book group celebrating working together for a year. We have read Peter Coleman's [The Way Out: How to Overcome Toxic Polarization](#) and Milton Mazur's [People and Predicaments](#). We chose these two books with the uniting purpose of bridging the political and cultural divides around us. We watched William [Ury's](#) talk and learned about building a Golden Bridge and connecting around commonalities. The group learned from each other, had varied perspectives and even during this meeting found that we differed on recent events. We talked, planned, considered, and listened to one another. "Of course, you had that perspective," said one participant to another, "I never even would have considered that train of thought." The group was able to build community over time, staying carefully convicted so that each participant felt that they belonged, and that the *us* would stay intact.

Optimism

One of our staff recently asked me, after I had recounted conflict resolution work that I had participated in during the early 1980s that remains undone to this day, "How do you stay optimistic? Why do you still do the work after all this time? Aren't you frustrated? Demoralized?" It was hard to get up again today and do this work. I thought about deciding to stop, to find something else to occupy my time. Then I think about the community that we have all built together.

The community made up of those who put their heft behind the mill stone to turn it forward and work to unite around resolving conflicts, creating kindness and building a culture of belonging.

September 19, 2022



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