

Minutes of October IMBA General Meeting October 27, 2015

Present: Edith K Politis , Nathan Cobert ,Stefan Benton, Don Blythe, Avvi Mar, Kris Stewart, Susannah Malek, Rob Rosborough, Eileen Barker, Kelly Mason, Martie Leys, Terry Sklar, Chuck Amital (Steve's guest), Susan Pease Gadoua, Vivian Holley, Kamela Laird (by phone)

Notices of upcoming events:

December 15, 2015 Holiday Lunch
March 18, 2016 General Training
March 19, 2016 Advanced Training
November 13, 2015 Ken Cloke training

Presentation: *Vulnerability, Forgiveness, Closure: How Integrative Mediators Can Help Their Clients Dissolve Impasse and Heal*, a conversation hosted by Steve Sulmeyer and Eileen Barker

Disputes are human events. Not just legal and financial issues. Not just looking for a judgment. There is also the possibility of doing repair work, healing, and helping the clients leave more whole.

Eileen emphasized the role forgiveness can play in mediation; Steve focused on the importance of mourning.

Cases often settle, but if there's no healing, parties don't necessarily do well. This prompted Eileen to ask, what else can we do? Ken Cloke was inspirational in showing that people can have resolution, but until they forgive, they don't have completion. In some cases, people can be even angrier after divorce even though the case settled.

Eileen sees a paradigm shift happening toward more a holistic approach.

In almost every case, people come to the table wounded.

How and when to bring forgiveness in. Martie shared about people getting stuck in the process and making it impossible to proceed. Susan shared about starting a session by asking people to say what the *other* person needed, which created magical change because the parties felt "heard." Vivian asked: once you get forgiveness, how do you keep it? She shared a story of a family that seemed to have resolution in a session, but fell back into their usual disputatious style shortly afterwards. Eileen concurred that there were deeper issues that didn't get healed but stated that they can get to deeper forgiveness. Steve pointed out that it's tough to get to this level of forgiveness in the mediation setting. We can recommend that they continue after papers are signed in counseling. Eileen commented that it's when they are open that we suggest that people go deeper later and predict that they may not have healed all the wounds that need to be healed.

Steve talked about the "Missing Conversation" and "Refusal to Grieve." Whatever the cause of the impasse or dispute, people tend to protect their vulnerability. They need to be willing to be vulnerable in order to have deeper healing. What does it take in order for people to be willing to be vulnerable? Steve shared a story about his first mediation in which there was a missing

conversation. He recognized that the woman felt betrayed because she thought her husband was her knight in shining armor. Once he named it, they were able to have a deeper conversation about the "real" issue. Many people fear that if they don't have protect themselves with the armor of their anger, they'll open themselves to getting hurt again. As a result, such defended people tend to "stay in their head," and don't drop down into their heart or gut. As Eileen pointed out, "you can't heal through your head."

Our challenge is to support people in naming the grief when appropriate. Steve quoted Francis Weller: "the heart familiar with loss is able to recognize a still deeper grief...a sadness at the very heart of things that binds us with the world. Without this awareness and willingness to be shaped by life, we remain caught in the adolescent strategies of avoidance and heroic striving."

Steve shared a story in which he told an extremely defended client, trying to solve an emotional hurt with a legal solution is not going to work. He got it, and was able to soften.

In a case where the husband wants his wife to forgive him for having an affair, it will be best for him to work on apologizing more and taking responsibility for his actions and ultimately forgiving himself.

Stefan recommended Sue Johnson's book, *Love Sense*, that addresses the "protest polka."

Steve and Eileen talk about forgiveness and its relationship to closure. Forgiveness is NOT just apologies. It's much deeper. Look at what got triggered inside of them. Recognize the pattern of hurt and distinguish the message from the messenger. Once people start doing that work, helping them dismiss the messenger so they can keep the focus on the wound they carry that is theirs alone, that predates the marriage.

90% of time, people misconstrue what forgiveness is and isn't. She gives them a handout to make distinction. She acknowledged that not everyone can do this. And that timing is an important factor in if people can forgive.

Just putting forgiveness on the "menu" in a very neutral way can help parties be more focused in this direction. People often want to forgive, they just don't know how. "How to forgive" is most searched term on Google. People have to make an informed choice whether to keep things as they are (which has a cost) or work toward forgiveness.

Essential for professionals to learn skills in order to be able to hold this kind of healing space for clients. Eileen hopes every conflict resolution professional would know enough to at least recommend that clients do the work. It's profound healing.

Steve said that, for him, closure includes grieving the loss of marriage, loss of roles/identity, etc. Without that willingness to feel the pain of the loss, and mourn that loss, there can be no closure, no completion.

Steve said he had always been curious about the tendency of parties to attack and blame the other. Always so much more going on. He wondered, what's wrong with vulnerability? The answer he found was that people are generally terrified of feeling the feelings of grief, loss, and pain. And the unconscious message they're telling themselves is: "I can't handle it." This is an infantile belief back to when we truly couldn't handle it. This points to the aspect of this work

that is about becoming an adult. There is a natural healing process in play; our job is to bring ourselves into harmony with that process.

Martie talked about the more we can model being able to handle the intense emotions or unknowns, the more we help our clients do the same.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Pease Gadoua,
IMBA secretary