

Resolution Reflections: Letting Go

by
Jay Uhler

Let us think together about *letting go* and the impact of loss on the resolution process. To **let go** is essential if a dispute is to reach resolution. Parties to a conflict must let go of something or many things: their pride, their spite, their view of the situation, their own rigid solution, their fears, their desire to get even, their view of the other party (ies), the excitement or drama of the conflict, the fear of ending attachment with the other party, and on and on. Resistance in the form of “holding on” is often the barrier to resolution. (Resolution here refers to an end to the conflict.)

Letting go involves dealing with emotions. The mediator who addresses emotions and assists the party(ies) to deal with their feelings can make the difference between reaching resolution or adding to the helplessness and antagonism of the disputants.

Conflict is often begun because of some loss on the part of one or both parties. Conflict can also occur because of the fear of losing someone or something. There may be loss of trust, loss related to unfulfilled expectations, loss of relationships, loss of finances, loss due to the failure to fulfill a contract, and loss of shared success. In divorce there may also be the loss of time with one's children, loss of money, loss of emotional support, loss of sex, or the loss of companionship. When a person will not face loss, they can stay stuck in their pain which they cover with anger focused at the other party(ies) and therefore block progress.

Letting go involves loss. As disputants proceed through the conflict resolution process, there may be loss of face or of self-esteem, especially if they are willing to face their own negative contribution to the conflict. There is loss as they make concessions. In domestic situations, there can be the need to let go of the other party (mate or family member) or to release control of the children.

Difficulty letting go can be a major block to resolution.

The mediator who is willing to assist the disputants to deal with the feelings that accompany loss will provide an important service and will receive the satisfaction of helping people to find workable solutions to end their conflict.

Letting go involves facing feelings of anger toward others, anger turned toward oneself as guilt, fear, helplessness and pain.

Space for this Resolution Reflection limits us to addressing one of the above•the impact of pain. Pain related to loss takes the form of sadness. There is sadness that the lost person or object will not be a part of our life. The way to move through the feeling of sadness is to talk about that which was/is/will be lost. Sharing memories, especially the pleasurable ones, helps to focus the loss and the feelings of sadness. Crying is the ultimate release. Crying is not simply allowing a tear to trickle down a cheek. Sobbing is the ultimate release and leads to letting go and moving on. "Crying is not breaking down. It is letting go."¹

When mediation is blocked, it can be useful to ask, "What is the person holding on to?" or "What does the person need to let go of in order to resolve the conflict for them?" "Is the process blocked because the person needs to face a loss so they can let go of the conflict?" "What do they need from me, the mediator, to help them resolve this?"

The answer may be that they need to face a loss and release their sadness•that they need an understanding "shoulder" to cry on.

There are mediations where crying on the part of a disputant can be manipulative and therefore create justifiable discomfort for the mediator. When the discomfort is in response to the natural release of sadness, it is time for the mediator to do some self-searching so that s/he can provide the assistance disputants need to face their loss, to let go and to move through and beyond their conflict.

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SIDEBAR QUOTE: **The mediator who is willing to assist the disputants to deal with the feelings that accompany loss will provide an important service....** (The editor pulled this out as a sidebar.)

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