



## ADR Perspectives *Perspectives PRD*

September 2014 / septembre 2014

### A Journey Worth Taking

Mireille Allain, Q.Med

**Mireille writes about one of her experiences co-facilitating a large group ADR process. It's a journey that challenges both the perspectives of the client and the fortitude of the practitioner. While it may be a difficult journey, the outcomes can be extraordinary.**

Group process is one of many Alternate Dispute Resolution tools. It can be an opportunity for witnessing powerful position abandonment and working environment improvement where common values are acknowledged and respected. I had an opportunity to be involved in a team process where I got a front row seat to exactly that.

Most members on this team would be described as task oriented and driven individuals who have the ability to manage a large workload. Conflict existed amongst the team and the issues, which were deep rooted, had never been addressed over the years. There also appeared to be a line between management and subordinates. Not uncommon in any team dynamic, there existed alliances and loyalties within the group. Although the team agreed that they were proud of their work, by their own admission, they indicated that they did not "gel" well together and the "Esprit de Corps" was low.

The process used with this team was the five values of a functional team and their hierarchy, also known as the V3 process. This five-step process focuses on trust, dialogue, commitment, accountability and focus. The team had been mandated to take part in this process, creating a challenge for the facilitators as some participants had low expectations of a positive outcome. The initial environment was tense, cold and challenging and I could sense the apprehension in the air.

As a facilitator, the most significant lesson I learned from this journey is this: if you have a good process, stick with it, no matter how difficult or challenging it may be. It is emotionally draining and requires complete attention to all channels of communication (verbal, para-language, body language and the emotional field). As long as the team is moving forward, it is worth investing time to continue exploring the values outlined in the process.

In this group process, the first ray of hope in terms of mood shifting was observed when participants shared something about themselves unknown to the others. This was an opportunity to understand how working with someone doesn't necessarily mean you know who they are and what personal challenges they may face. It allowed for "humanizing" the individual, including those in the deep-rooted conflicts.

Early in the process, I was able to witness one individual in particular find her voice. She was able to speak up and discuss impact on her productivity, her sense of accomplishment and team belonging. For the overall process, it was a small step headed in the direction. It was what we needed to move the team forward and keep forging ahead in anticipation of seeing more transformation.

What I've learned from this experience is that it's not for clients or practitioners who are weak at heart. The process continuously challenges the participants' comfort zone as long-standing realities are being challenged. For some, it created animosity towards the one of the facilitators who was seen as the "challenger". We are asking them to abandon positions that they have occupied for a very long time. We are asking them to trust us in creating a safe and welcoming environment that allows for sharing, learning and growth. Some came from a place of fear where vulnerability was seen as a weakness and not part of the individual make-up. This changed as the process moved forward and evolved.

When relationships are strengthened by deeply exploring common values, it sets the tone required for team building by creating the environment sought. Up to the point where all participants felt safe, not everyone benefited from the process. I learned throughout the journey that participants find extreme discomfort in certain steps. The shift is certainly not universal but every small victory has to be recognized and acknowledged. The facilitator's role is to find a gentle way to guide the group through the rough waters and help them navigate to the best of everyone's ability. Even in the stormiest of times, the end goal was too important to throw in the towel.

Another observation that stuck with me is, if you're looking for someone else to change, you're looking in the wrong direction. The only person you have the power to change is you and you alone. It is difficult yet extremely courageous to ask yourself "what is my role in this conflict". When all the participants were able to ask themselves that question, even the most positional ones, we really saw a shift. We were able to witness a team come together, not individuals being mandated to attend a process. It was a beautiful opportunity to witness human growth and see some of the walls come down. By continuing with the process when it was challenging made these moments appreciated.

I believe another key to success for this group was having management participate. True Leadership is allowing your team to see vulnerability, not as a weakness but as an authenticity. Leaders are empowering and open minded. These types of Leaders make group work much more beneficial and are a welcome presence to the facilitators. For this team, leadership's presence seemed to be comforting as the transformation was taking place. Perhaps transformation was able to take place because of leadership's presence.

Conflict is never easy but it is an opportunity for learning and growing. At the end of the day, we ask ourselves what is important. Answers will vary. In this team, they seem to have reached a point where the answers will be respected and perhaps understood, even if not agreed with. Not unlike most families, any team can face challenges and struggles. What is important is how we deal them, both as individuals and as active team members. What I've been privileged to witness is that people can have a better appreciation when they have a better understanding of both their capabilities and shortcomings as well as those their colleagues. Acceptance, change and improvement are then easier to achieve. By following the guidelines of the process, it allowed for making a positive difference with a struggling team. It is now a team that can work towards common goals in a mutually respected environment.

This five day process included tears, a lot of humor, fear, blaming, understanding and appreciation. It equipped the players with the necessary tools to achieve growth and gain mutual respect of each other. I cannot say that a perfect team left us on day 5 but I can say that it was a team who understood each other better than the one walking in on day 1. It was an absolute privilege and gift to be able to witness their journey.

*Mireille is an HR coordinator with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, currently working out of Fredericton, NB. Her work entails assisting with ADR processes within the work environment. She can be reached at:*

[Mireille.Allain@RCMP-GRC.gc.ca](mailto:Mireille.Allain@RCMP-GRC.gc.ca)

