

A Mediator's Path

By David Hoffman



Making My Way Toward Mediation

How, exactly, does one gets drawn into being a mediator—and why on earth would someone choose to be immersed in painful, messy, and sometimes intractable conflict as their day job?

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My first steps on the winding path to becoming a mediator began at the dinner table, in a comfortable upper-middle-class home in a mostly White, largely Jewish suburb of Baltimore, Maryland. Conflict at dinnertime bristled all around me. The quiet, not-so-subtle intensity of my father's criticism of my mother and everyone else at the table (including the maid who made our dinner and therefore made cameo appearances in the dining room) set my teeth on edge. Dad's habit—probably unconscious—of interrupting me and my brother made me feel unimportant, unworthy of adult attention. His criticism of our mother sometimes led to her retreating to their bedroom in tears. It was 1954, and I was 7—just becoming conscious of the negativity that filled the air after my father got home from work, often with a drink in hand.

As I think back to that time—and the way my father's stern demeanor and occasional anger-management problems sucked the oxygen out of our house from 5:30 p.m. until my bedtime—I can understand why I used to score high on “conflict avoidance” on the Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode test. More recently, I have asked other mediators about their scores on this test and found that a surprisingly high percentage of the people in our field have similar stories of family tensions that caused a part of them to recoil from conflict. Like moths drawn to the flame, however, those mediators and I found our way to a profession in which we plunge daily into the fire of conflict.

This no longer seems paradoxical or perverse to me. I think many people choose occupations that address core conflicts or traumas from their childhood. This is the narrative I hear, for example, from many psychotherapists. In my case, the conflicts were not always overt. There was simply an underlying thrum of unresolved tension in the house—the tension between my father's chronic irritability and incessant criticism on the one hand, and on the other,

my mother's chronic sadness, which resulted in several psychiatric hospitalizations.

But those were not the only conflicts that surrounded me. The nightly TV news brought images of racial conflict: White police officers with dogs, billy clubs, and tear gas, trying to suppress the civil rights movement. My parents supported liberal causes, including racial integration, and yet I heard my father talk about people of color in derogatory Yiddish terms. My parents' espousing liberal views was not insincere. They sent my brother and me to public schools, which were integrated. As victims of anti-Semitism when they were growing up and with vivid memories of the Holocaust that was then only a decade behind us, my parents recognized that bigotry was both ubiquitous and dangerous. And yet we lived in a city that practiced apartheid. The African American maid who cooked and cleaned for us, Naomi Harris, lined up at the bus stop each evening—along with other African American women working in homes nearby—to return to the West Baltimore ghetto in which the residents were, as far as I could tell, exclusively Black.

Although I could not have given it a name then, I recognize in those early impressions of bigotry the beginnings of guilt and shame about the hypocrisy of growing up in a family that opposed race discrimination but enjoyed the material benefits that flowed from it. An important influence for me with regard to these tensions about race came from the rabbi in my synagogue, Abe Shusterman, who was one of the leaders of civil rights marches to desegregate Baltimore's public facilities. He became one of my heroes. In Sunday school he told us about the Holocaust and said we should tell our parents not to have Christmas trees, out of respect for our Jewish relatives who had died in Nazi concentration camps.

These two impulses—to honor the dead and fight for the living—set the tone at my synagogue, imprinting my friends and me with an indelible message: our highest purpose in life was *tikkun olam* (to heal the world). I found it unsurprising that a passionate commitment to healing the world was woven into the fabric of Judaism, since Jews are a tiny minority of the world's population that has generally been despised and persecuted throughout recorded history. My grandparents and their parents fled Eastern Europe because of pogroms, and I inherited from them the abiding fear (present more in the 1950s than now) that the Holocaust could happen again.

During my high school years, 1961 to 1965, my brother, my friends, and I marched in picket lines with CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality) on the streets on downtown Baltimore, trying to persuade department stores to hire African Americans. As we marched, we learned the songs of the civil rights movement from the Black people who led these protests. “We Shall Overcome,” “We Shall Not Be Moved,” and “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize” rocked my soul.

In 1965, as the Vietnam War heated up, I co-founded a small antiwar group, High School Students for Peace, and wrote editorials for my high school newspaper denouncing the war. As an undergraduate at Princeton in the late 1960s, I joined the radical group SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and majored in political protest. I was motivated partly by idealism and partly by a rising tide of guilt over the comfort and privilege I had enjoyed my whole life. (I also minored in controlled substances, thinking that psychedelics would give me a direct experience of the divine, a spiritual yearning that was also a rising tide for me and many other hippies of that era.)

On graduation day 1970, I sat on the sidelines while my classmates got their diplomas. I, along with a handful of other Princeton students, had been disciplined for raucous

heckling of a Nixon administration official, Walter Hickel, who had come to campus to speak, and therefore I had to wait an extra six months to officially graduate. But Cornell allowed me to begin doctoral studies in American Studies in the fall of 1970. I needed that degree to teach, which I had hoped to do at college campuses, which had become one of the epicenters of protest activities and the home of movements for peace, racial justice, and women's rights. Although my primary motivation was political, there was a part of me that felt drawn to teaching *per se*. But in 1973, when I completed my doctoral exams and started writing a dissertation that I never finished, the market for teachers in American Studies was nearly nonexistent. I put my academic career on hold because the only two entry-level teaching jobs in American Studies were in remote locations, my first marriage had ended, and I was co-parenting our daughter with my ex, who was not interested in leaving Ithaca, New York.

Instead I launched a woodworking business, using hand-me-down tools from my father, who was a dentist by day and skilled craftsman at night. For seven years, I grew my wood shop into a small cottage industry called "Knock on Wood," cranking out handmade toys, games, and kitchenwares while I waited for the market in American Studies to improve.

It never did, and so I toyed with the idea of making woodworking a lifetime career. I liked the authenticity of woodworking, but with each passing year I found myself yearning for an occupation that was both more political and more intellectual. Honest assessment also compelled me to admit that I was only a so-so woodworker—good enough to make a living, but not sufficiently skilled or passionate about it to feel that it was a calling, which is what I yearned for.

At this point, in the late 1970s, two paths beckoned: becoming a psychotherapist or going to law school. None of my studies to date pointed in either of these directions. But with the break-up of my first marriage, I became an avid consumer of psychotherapy, both individual and group, and I found it fascinating. And my interest in law was sparked by seeing the remarkable work of “movement” lawyers who were fighting for civil rights and civil liberties and challenging the authority of our courts to punish Vietnam protesters.

I wound up choosing law because it seemed to offer more opportunities to fight for social justice and a greater likelihood of making a decent living. I needed to make a financially sound choice because I had just remarried, and my second child (later followed by a third) was on his way. My wife, Beth Andrews, who (like me) grew up in an upper-middle-class home, was a potter, and we were both very committed to being financially independent of our parents. This was partly a matter of pride and partly an insecurity about money that Beth and I probably inherited from our parents, who grew up in the Great Depression.

Law lived up to its promise. After clerking for a year in 1984, I became a litigator at a downtown Boston law firm, Hill & Barlow, that paid me well and allowed me to do a lot of *pro bono* work. I represented an inmate on death row in Louisiana, and I handled ACLU cases involving free speech and privacy rights. But I became deeply disillusioned with the potential for litigation to make the world a better place. Courtroom battle was simply too blunt an instrument to remedy everyday injustices—too time-consuming, unnecessarily acrimonious, and too expensive for anyone but big corporations and wealthy individuals. One of my longest litigation cases, a nine-year court battle over the replacement of a six-acre roof at a gigantic grocery warehouse, pitted one huge company against another, and I could not help

but notice how far afield such cases were from the impulse that had led me to law school.

So I called my law school advisor, Professor Frank Sander, for advice. I wanted to know how I might shift my practice from litigation to mediation and other forms of non-court dispute resolution. Frank was and still is widely known as one of the foremost leaders of the alternative dispute resolution movement, and he generously shared with me his views about how lawyers could gradually transition their practices from litigation toward ADR. He encouraged me to get trained as a mediator and arbitrator and form an ADR practice group within my firm, and I enthusiastically followed his advice. I joined every ADR referral panel that would have me: the American Arbitration Association, various federal and state court panels, and a community mediation program. I was lucky. The court panels were hungry for mediators, and, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, court dockets were more jammed than usual. I had an ever-increasing caseload of commercial and family mediations and a handful of arbitrations. I attended every ADR conference I could find. And I got trained in the practice of Collaborative Law, which essentially is representation of clients with a contractual commitment to negotiate in a cooperative manner and for the lawyers to withdraw from the case if it needs to go to court.

ADR provided me with something I had been missing for many years: a calling. Serving as a mediator, arbitrator, and Collaborative Law attorney was satisfying on so many levels. The pragmatic, problem-solving part of me found fertile ground for inventive, efficient solutions to vexing conflicts. The spiritual part of me found the practice of bringing peace into the room nourishing. The emotional, relational part of me (a valued inheritance from my mother) found the deep connection with people in mediation

far more enriching than the intricacies of statutes, regulations, case law, and court rules.

Mediation and Social Justice

During my first few years as an ADR-focused lawyer, my main task was trying to become more proficient. I dove into the literature of negotiation and dispute resolution, seeking to understand the various theories that informed practice. I thought about the personal qualities that mediators can cultivate as an instrument for being peacemakers. I learned how to offer my clients a wide range of process options, following Frank Sander's famous recommendation of "fitting the forum to the fuss."

One of the connections for me between mediation and social justice was forged in the early 2000s. I had just returned to my old law firm from a six-month sabbatical hiking the Appalachian Trail end-to-end with my son (a wonderful adventure that provided much time for reflection), and I was considering the possibility of launching a new firm devoted to peacemaking. It took me a couple of years to find the courage to leave my role as a partner at Hill & Barlow, but I founded Boston Law Collaborative (BLC) in 2003 and never looked back. It was one the best decisions of my life.

Part of our mission at BLC is to influence the way the legal profession handles disputes by creating a practice model that empowers clients to resolve conflict more expeditiously and less expensively. By looking at our clients' problems in a more three-dimensional way—legal, financial, and emotional—we help them find solutions that are sometimes transformative, not only in emotionally complex family cases but also in dry business cases, where open communication and authentic connection often overcome seemingly intractable barriers to resolution.

However, even though practicing in a firm that was focused on peacemaking was fulfilling, something was missing—namely, getting more involved in addressing the persistent evils of discrimination that had drawn me to picket lines 40 years earlier. Then a door opened.

I had been teaching the mediation course at Harvard Law School—the same course that Frank Sander started in 1981 and taught until he retired in 2006. In November 2015, an anti-racism student group at HLS began putting black tape over the law school's shield because the shield's coat of arms was adopted from that of a slave-owning family, the Isaac Royall clan, that had donated the money for the first law professorship at Harvard. Then, in a move that shocked students, faculty, and staff at HLS, someone (or perhaps a group) removed the black tape from the shields all over campus and used it to deface the photographic portraits of all the African American professors at HLS. The tape was placed over their faces, which felt frightening—like a not-so-veiled threat. All this was taking place in the wake of increased police killings of Blacks such as Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in August 2014, and Freddie Gray in Baltimore in April 2015.

Students, particularly students of color, reacted to this assault by occupying the main classroom building at HLS for the next six months. My teaching assistant at that time, Rabiya Akande, a doctoral student from Nigeria, pointed out that we devoted a week of the mediation course each year to diversity issues and struggled to fit important material about race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other matters into that one week, and she suggested that we expand the subject into its own separate course. I asked her to help me plan and teach the course, and she agreed. As a straight, White, cisgender male who is able-bodied and from an upper-middle-class background, I took this proposal for a new course, to be called Diversity and Dis-

pute Resolution, to Dean Martha Minow with some trepidation. But the law school quickly approved the course.

Teaching this course, which I have been doing each January since 2017, has been one of the best learning experiences of my life. One reason it has been so valuable is that my students and I focus not just on understanding differences such as race, culture, class, gender, and sexual orientation, but also on the ways those differences affect the distribution of wealth and power in our society.

This focus on social justice informs the structure of the class itself. For example, my teaching assistant and I make sure that the voices of students with marginalized identities are heard at least as fully as everyone else. One technique for doing this is to ask the students to have preliminary discussions in small groups, with one student designated as the reporter to summarize the small group's views when the class reconvenes in a plenary session, and ask each small group to make sure that the reporter is someone who has had fewer reporting duties in previous classes than the others. This not only widens participation (by drawing out the introverts and moderating the participation of extroverts) but also creates a safer setting for students who are nervous about sharing their experiences and perspectives by allowing them to "test the waters" in a small-group setting.

Another tool that we use to create a safe space is an exercise on the first day of class called the "Social Identity Circle," in which the whole class stands in a large circle, facing each other. People take turns stepping into the middle of the circle and announcing some facet of their identity that is not obvious and inviting others to join them in the circle if they share that identity (for example, "please join me in the circle if you are an only child," or "please join me in the circle if you love to dance"). The purpose of this exercise is to get beyond the "single story" that we often

have about each other initially based on our visible differences such as race, gender, age, and others. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED talk entitled "The Danger of a Single Story,"¹ which is assigned for the first day of the course, vividly illustrates this concept with her personal narratives.

The students who enroll in the Diversity and Dispute Resolution course come from a wide variety of backgrounds and bring many "intersectional" identities into the room, a term that refers to the various identities that any one person can have. I tell the students at the outset that, given all the privileges I have enjoyed (a friend once described me as having "won the intersectional lottery"), I come to the course as one of the learners. We put a lot of thought and effort into creating a supportive environment for all of us, myself included, to share our narratives and our experience of difference. And then we apply our insights about ourselves and others to the context of conflict, looking for strategies that enable us as dispute resolvers to work successfully with people who are different from us.

For me, one of the social justice dimensions of teaching this course stems from the idea that teaching and learning about diversity does not have to be the sole responsibility of people who already carry the extra burden of disparate treatment resulting from their identity, such as women, people of color, members of the LGBTQ community, and others. To be sure, an extra dose of humility and curiosity is needed when the professor has experienced few, if any, of the disadvantages that form the substance of the course.

In addition to teaching this course, I have recently teamed up with trainers—women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQ community—to bring workshops on diversity and implicit bias into the Boston community and beyond. (As I write this, COVID-19 has actually expanded the geographical reach of this work because of the increased use of video-conferencing.) I have discov-

ered that the basic tools of mediation, such as active listening, eliciting people's narratives and underlying interests, and promoting understanding by distinguishing between intent and impact, can help people manage difficult conversations about difference.

I have always believed that we teach what we want to learn, and this maxim is certainly applicable to me in this area. One of the big lessons for me has been a deeper understanding that invidious distinctions based on difference—and the concept of difference itself—are a social construct. While certain kinds of difference may have a physical component—such as skin color or gender assigned at birth—the meaning we ascribe to those differences is socially constructed and therefore can be deconstructed. For example, students report being acutely aware of the hierarchies of power that exist within their own ethnic communities that look monolithic to outsiders (such as one Cambodian American student who reported on how she is often treated as “lower class” by Asian Americans whose ancestors come from Japan or Korea).

A second lesson is about privilege and intersectionality. The term “intersectionality” is generally used to describe the synergistic way that multiple disfavored identities (such as being both Black and a woman) substantially magnify the disadvantages faced by the people who have those identities. But the same phenomenon is true in reverse: being White, and a cisgender male, and upper-middle-class, and heterosexual substantially magnifies the privilege that any one of these characteristics provides.

A third lesson is that one of the most effective ways to counteract bias is to access the opposite feeling. There is a newly invented word to describe that feeling (i.e., positively inclined toward people who are different from us): “allophilia,” coined by Professor Todd L. Pittinsky, in his excellent book *Us + Them: Tapping the Positive Power*

of Difference (Pittinsky, 2012). Pittinsky was looking for a word that means the opposite of “discrimination,” and such terms as “tolerance,” “acceptance,” even “fair treatment” didn’t fit the bill. And so my goal, as a teacher—and also as a dispute resolver—is to help all of us access and deploy the allophilia that exists to one degree or another in all of us. In the classroom, one of our techniques has been to create opportunities for students to access and respectfully express their curiosity about each other’s differences.

I believe there is enormous potential in fostering allophilia to help us all overcome the barriers of misunderstanding and mistrust in our society—barriers that stand in the way of achieving greater social justice. In addition, I believe that by training mediators and other dispute resolvers to work more skillfully with differences, we might expand the reach of mediation into communities, particularly communities of color and less affluent communities, where it is not widely used. In my view, one of the reasons that the ranks of mediators in the United States are predominately White and upper-middle-class is not lack of motivation to make our field more diverse but rather a lack of skill and clarity about how to build alliances across the gulfs of race, class, and other differences.

A few final words about teaching the Diversity and Dispute Resolution course: I don’t think I would have found the courage to do it without the help of a small, longstanding support group of diverse mediators. We call ourselves the Three Guys, and I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the other two, Daniel Bowling and Homer La Rue, for educating me about my blind spots and expanding my experience of bridging differences with loving connection. We confer monthly, sometimes in person and sometimes by phone or video, to learn more about each other, ourselves, and our work. I have also learned a great deal from my adult children, whose political astuteness, passionate commitment

to social justice, and willingness to show me where I am stuck in “old school” thinking has been a blessing. My wife, Leslie Warner, has also played a vital role in my education about diversity issues. I have been the beneficiary of her voracious reading about cultures other than our own and her keen attention to the news and social media sources of insight about injustices in our society.

Learning About What Makes People Tick

Although I chose law over psychotherapy as a profession, my interest in psychology, which stems in part from having family members who have struggled with mental health issues and from my own (ongoing) work with a psychotherapist, has been magnified by the practice of law. One of my first clients, who was going through a divorce, called me one day, upset about his bill. “Why are we litigating this divorce?” he asked. “We should just settle it.” I told him I would be happy to hit the brakes on pretrial discovery and draft a settlement proposal. After I sent it to him, he called back: “Why are we being so reasonable?” he asked. “I want to fight this in court.” The next week, he wanted to push for a settlement. I was baffled: why was he veering from guardrail to guardrail?

In my work as a mediator, I frequently encountered people experiencing deep ambivalence about settlement, and I wondered how I could help them reach an agreement that would not later be tainted by regret. I also encountered parties—and lawyers—who exhibited characteristics that psychotherapists would classify as pathological, such as narcissism, based on the diagnostic categories listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association* (DSM).

As I thought about my docket of mediation cases, and how “difficult” many of the people in those cases were, I did some research and found that according to the National

Institute of Mental Health, 26.2 percent of the adult population of the United States has a diagnosable mental illness in any given calendar year. Why then, I wondered, am I seeing more than my share? If people with mental illness find themselves in conflicts more often than others (and one should not overlook the extent to which conflict exacerbates pre-existing vulnerability to mental illness), what do mediators need to know to help people feel empowered and safe in mediation?

I was married at the time to a therapist, Beth Andrews, who gave me an entry-level education about a new model of therapy called the Internal Family Systems (IFS) model. IFS was developed by a psychologist, Richard Schwartz, who noticed that his patients not only had different “parts” (e.g., a playful part and an industrious part) but that these various parts had family-like, and sometimes polarized, relationships with each other (Schwartz, 2001).

The IFS model was appealing for several reasons. First of all, it is intuitive: people often talk about having different parts (“a part of me wants to exercise, and another part wants more Netflix”). Second, it is non-pathologizing: there’s nothing wrong with having multiple parts—we all do. It’s also empowering: unlike the medical model, which relies on the power of the clinician to heal the patient, IFS teaches that patients already have the tools for their own healing, by bringing their parts into greater harmony and accessing curiosity about and compassion for all their parts.

When I began looking at my clients’ various dysfunctions through the IFS lens, I began to see how IFS techniques could be useful not just for clinicians but also for mediators and lawyers. For example, the IFS model helps me understand my clients’ ambivalence about settlement and their conflicting feelings about the people with whom they have disputes. With clients such as the man who vac-

illated between wanting to settle his divorce and wanting to fight, I now say something like the following: “It sounds like there’s a part of you that wants to resolve this case and another part that wants to win.” Such an intervention is not appropriate in every instance, but my experience has been that clients appreciate being seen fully, with all their complexity.

When I see parties in a mediation escalating their attacks and counterattacks, I now say something like: “I’m noticing that you each have a very forceful gladiator part that seems to be taking the lead in this discussion, which is feeling more and more like a battle. I wonder if you could each ask your respective gladiators to take a couple of steps back (they don’t have to go away—they may want to keep an eye on what’s happening here in case they’re needed). You each also have some problem-solving parts. Perhaps you could each make some space for those parts at the table.” In my experience, clients immediately understand the metaphor.

The IFS model posits that we not only have “parts” with their own complex internal relationships but we also have a core of energy called “Self,” which is calm, curious, and compassionate. (In some religious traditions, this core is called “soul” or “spirit.”) The goal of the IFS model is for people to be Self-led. Self energy is like the conductor in the orchestra. It does not play an instrument (the “parts” do that); instead, it coordinates the parts with the goal of playing harmoniously. For IFS clinicians, one of the most important techniques is helping clients “un-blend” from overactive parts (such as their inner “gladiators”) so they can access their Self energy, which in turn can heal the wounded parts that the gladiators are trying to protect, by “witnessing” the pain of those wounded parts and giving them the experience of unconditional love and internal acceptance.

Using the IFS model has opened the door for me to have a deeper connection with my mediation and Collaborative Law clients, even the most difficult, because rather than “othering” them with a category (such as “narcissist”), I could recognize that they have “parts,” just as I do. It was, and still is, a steep learning curve, but a highly useful one—a bit like learning to bat right-handed if you’re a lefty. It requires using muscles that you already have but never used in that way before.

As I began to learn more about this model, Beth introduced me to Dick Schwartz, who graciously agreed to co-lead several workshops with me for mediators and lawyers. I have also added a discussion of IFS in all three of the courses that I teach at HLS, and my students have found the model to be tremendously useful in their understanding of how to resolve internal and external conflict.

I know there are many models of human psychology that mediators have found helpful, and I can make no larger claim for IFS than the fact that I have found it extraordinarily useful— not only in understanding, honoring, and helping clients manage their own complexity but in understanding, honoring, and managing my own. For example, in the past I have noticed a rising anger inside me when one of the parties in a mediation is being particularly stubborn or gratuitously adversarial. “Don’t Mess Up My Mediation!” I hear an inner voice saying (I call this my DMMM part, for short), and I know that my irritation probably seeps out in various subtle ways that probably don’t endear me to the “difficult” party. Now I can recognize my irritability as simply a part of me, one that we all have, and not a character flaw that would, if known to others, disqualify me from being a mediator. Also, the IFS model has helped me recognize that, when I find myself subtly—or not so subtly—“pushing” the parties in mediation toward a settlement, this impulse is just a part of me

and that I also need to honor the part that wants those people to experience self-determination. And so, when I am feeling more Self-led, I try to help the parties access their own inner mediator (their Self energy) to guide them to a wise decision about resolution.

IFS has also helped me harmonize my professional work with a broader agenda of social justice. First, IFS is all about empowering people, which is a core component of a progressive social justice agenda. We can all be more effective in pursuing just goals when our parts are in alignment, and such alignment can help us overcome feelings of shame that may have been inflicted on us by bigoted assumptions and unjust treatment. Second, for those of us who experience guilt about the unearned privileges that we have enjoyed (e.g., simply by virtue of being White or male), the IFS model provides a means for healing the shame that those “parts” carry around with Self-led compassion and repurposing them to play a more constructive role in our internal system, such as being vigilant about the injustice in our society and more skillful in our attempts to redress it. Third, IFS provides valuable tools for understanding implicit bias—those unconscious attitudes and reactions based on race, gender, and other differences that have been instilled in us by messages we received as youngsters and cannot seem to shake, despite our conscious intention to be entirely unbiased. The IFS model helps us see that we all have bigoted “parts” that carry around these outdated and unwelcome images and stereotypes, and we also have idealistic parts that motivate us to pursue social justice.

Our Footprints in the Sand

As I enter my mid-70s, thoughts of mortality are increasingly unavoidable. For so many of us in the field of dispute resolution, myself included, our choice of vocation has been fortuitous. In part, this is because we can do this work,

which is deeply rewarding, even at an advanced age. Our age and experience might even help us do our work better. We might not have as much wisdom as our clients ascribe to us (or hope we have), but if we've been paying attention all these years, we probably have more wisdom now than we did as youngsters. In addition, with each passing year, my insecurities about whether I am skilled enough or empathic enough to do this work fade into the rear-view mirror, not because I no longer care about those questions but because I have reached a place of greater acceptance of limitations that we all have.

Reflecting on our mortality also leads me to think more about what footprints I am leaving behind. What lessons have I imparted for my students? In what ways have I led my clients to have more capacity for resolving their conflicts in the future? In what ways have I opened the door for more people—of every kind—to pick up the dispute resolution baton that each of us will at some point be passing on?

Writing this essay has given me a welcome opportunity to consider these questions. For me, one of the answers lies in the famous statement by Mahatma Gandhi that “we must be the change that we want to see in the world.” Being a peacemaker in the world outside us requires us to be a peacemaker in our internal world. And, the quest for greater self-understanding and self-acceptance, a quest I have tried to express in this essay, achieves its lasting impact when we can use those tools in our work as dispute resolvers to make the world a better place.

I conclude with an important lesson from my rabbi, Darby Leigh. At our High Holiday services a few years ago, he said: “The Talmud teaches us the importance of *tikkun olam* and that while it is not our responsibility to complete the work of healing the world, neither may we desist from it.” Rabbi Darby went on: “And when you feel daunted by the enormity of the world's suffering, remember that there

may be certain corners of the world (at home, at work, in our communities) where you are uniquely situated to do good.” I try to bring that way of looking at life in these challenging times into each of my mediations, into my home, and out into the world each day.

Notes

¹Adichie, C. N. “The Danger of a Single Story.” Filmed 2009. TED video, 18:31. https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare.

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