

ADRIO's Specialty Interest Section Meetings (SIS)

Specialty Interest Section (SIS) Meetings are held at ADRIO's offices and via webinar one or two evenings a week from 5:45 – 7:30pm and are free to members and feature topics and speakers of great interest to ADR practitioners. Sections include: Construction, Environmental, Estate Mediation, Facilitation, Family ADR, Family Arbitration, Franchise, Insurance, IP and IT, Public Conflict, Restorative Justice and Workplace.

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Bridging the Gap: Conflict Management Coaching for ADR Practitioners

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The ADR Institute of Ontario ("ADRIO") presented a live program and webinar by Ms. Cinnie Noble on the topic of *Conflict Management Coaching for ADR Practitioners*, on Tuesday, June 19, 2012 at the ADRIO office in Toronto.

Since the mid-90s, conflict management coaching (also known as conflict coaching) has grown exponentially as an ADR technique. There are different types of coaching such as executive/leadership coaching, life coaching, and business coaching and within these types of coaching there are many specialties. Conflict management coaching is one of those and though it may be the sole purpose clients seek help, conflict-related matters commonly arise for coaches providing other forms of coaching too.

Coaching, in general, is about helping people optimize their potential in whatever areas of life they want to improve. It is a future-, task-, results-, and goal-oriented process. The coach's role in all forms of coaching is multi-dimensional and essentially, aims to support clients in their efforts to bridge the gap between where they are and where they want to be. Part of achieving that objective is to help clients gain increased self-awareness and different perspectives on themselves and their situations. This enables them to ultimately develop and implement a plan of action for moving forward in ways that align with their goals. Cinnie's conflict management coaching model (the **CINERGY®** model – described below) is based on this basic coaching framework and incorporates conflict management, coaching, and neuroscience principles.

Unlike sports coaching, professional coaching does not entail advising people what to do to improve their actions and reach their goals. As with mediation, self-determination is one of the cornerstones of the coaching field. Although there are a number of other similarities between some aspects of conflict management coaching and mediation, there are also a number of significant differences. One is that it is an individualized process. Rather than acting as a 'neutral', a coach is a champion of the individual and strives to help them achieve their goals. That is, the client's objective is the focus, and coaches partner with them to co-create an effective working relationship that facilitates goal attainment.

Conflict management coaches assist clients - in both personal and professional contexts - to effectively and independently manage and engage in specific disputes, to prevent unnecessary conflict and to strengthen their conflict competence. The types of goals an individual may bring to a coach are not necessarily about resolving issues though they

may be. Objectives often include the desire to gain strategies for changing non-productive behaviours, or to learn better methods for managing themselves in conflict situations. This process is growing in workplaces as an additional option for employees and management to address conflict, whether or not there is a formal or informal conflict management system or program. (For example, many Federal Government ADR practitioners in Canada provide conflict management coaching as part of Informal Conflict Management Systems.) Sometimes conflict management coaching is used when one party doesn't show up for a mediation or prefers not to participate. Other times it is used as its own distinct mechanism for the sorts of reasons discussed here. In addition to one-on-one work solely geared to help client's conflict management goals about self-managing a situation or behaviour, some applications of this technique include:

- Pre-mediation coaching—to help individuals anticipate and prepare for any challenges, and effectively participate in the process.
- Post-mediation coaching—to help individuals with the aftermath of any unresolved responses, and to manage ongoing interactions. (One common example here is when people see themselves getting into the same kinds of situations over and over again and realize they need to improve their general conflict competence.)
- Preparing people for effective participation in collaborative law meetings or other ADR processes.
- Helping managers, supervisors, and other leaders improve aspects of their conflict conduct.
- Helping managers and others conducting performance appraisals and other challenging conversations and meetings.
- Helping people enhance their negotiation skills.
- Coaching lawyers, ADR practitioners and others who aim to develop a self-reflective practice and improve their own conflict competence.
- Post-conflict management training to help participants apply their learning.

There are core competencies that certified coaches are required to meet (some of which mediators also learn in their training). Among other things, trained coaches learn how to frame and use powerful questions that increase self-awareness and to use other tools that help people in their efforts to make progress and reach their goals. Training is required in conflict management coaching just as we expect mediators to be properly trained. When mediators are trained as coaches, it is not recommended that they coach an individual and then mediate between him or her and the other party. As may be expected, the practitioner's ability to remain impartial would be compromised under such circumstances. Cinnie's view is that ideally each party has a coach, and then a third individual would be the mediator. However, she acknowledges this is expensive and she trains many mediators who learn how to incorporate coaching principles in their practices to prepare both parties and facilitate their engagement.

The **CINERGY®** Model of conflict management coaching is a seven stage process and the basic intentions of each are as follows:

Clarify the goal - to determine what the client wants to accomplish in coaching

Inquire about the Situation - to find out what lead the client to want or be referred to coaching

Name the Elements - to deconstruct the conflict and help the client analyze what happened for him or her and the other person (Cinnie uses a construct she created called the Not So Merry Go-Round of Conflict)

Explore the Situation - to consider what optional plans of action may suit the situation and conflict dynamic

Reconstruct the Situation - to make the plan a reality by visioning, practicing, etc. - depending on the outcome desired

Ground the challenges - to consider what barriers preclude goal achievement

Yes, the Commitment - to commit to when, where, etc.

It may take 4 to 8 one-hour sessions for clients to go through the whole model and be prepared to proceed with their plan. Conflict management coaching takes longer when clients are working on shifting unproductive conflict habits.

Coaching is an intensive process requiring clients' commitment, effort, and motivation to increase self-awareness and make changes in their usual way of handling conflict. Since it is common for people to wait until conflict escalates before they do something about it, introducing proactive processes can be challenging. In general however, Cinnie's experience has been that many people prefer to manage their conflicts independently without third party assistance, and thus choose coaching over mediation when they have the option. Conflict management coaching may be done in groups; however, Cinnie has found that progress is often higher when one on one work is included for individuals wanting and needing to make changes in their own idiosyncratic approaches to conflict that are unproductive. Also, some people are uncomfortable describing/admitting their challenges in front of peers.

In summary, conflict management coaching is fast emerging in the ADR field as mediators and other practitioners are adding this technique to their toolbox. It is a process that may be used in private and public sector workplaces - and also, in personal contexts including relationship disputes and familial matters, estate situations, and collaborative law. Increasingly, mediators and others are seeing the value of learning and providing more options to clients for addressing conflict including individualized work such as coaching and it is expected that its many applications will continue to develop.