

Ken, Doug and Other Inspirational Mediators

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I just returned from San Diego, where I spent most of last week at the annual convention of the Association for Dispute Resolution (ADR), a leading international group of arbitrators, mediators (commercial, family, community, etc), and peacemakers of all stripes. During the convention, I attended the Advanced Commercial Mediation Institute (ACMI), which was co-chaired by **Jerome Allan Landau** and **Lee Jay Berman**, two nationally renowned mediators who've inspired me for a long time, although I'll have to discuss them in a forthcoming article. I attended the ACMI to gain additional insights and techniques that I could apply to improving my own commercial practice, as well as spend some time with mediator friends from around the nation. For me, the ACMI was a great success on both counts.

My other major event was the luncheon hosted by Mediators Beyond Borders (MBB), of which I am a Founding Member. MBB engages in international peacemaking at the community level in, *inter alia*, South America, Africa and the Middle East. In those specific nations, MBB works with the group that is hosting them to empower local individuals to be mediators and/or peacemakers. They've even been successful working with Israelis and Palestinians! At the luncheon, I heard a review of the last year's activities, and, again, had the chance to meet, face-to-face, some of my distant mediator friends.

I love the ADR annual conferences!!

Getting back to the ACMI, in addition to the powerful presentations over the two days, we had a luncheon speaker on each day. I'd like to tell you about them.

The first day, the speaker was my old friend, **Doug Noll**. Doug discussed his Prison of Peace project. I urge all of you to go to the project's website, <http://prisonofpeace.org>, and, especially, go to the press-media page and view the Prison of Peace video that Doug showed during his talk. I can't imagine anyone not being moved by this.

Allow me to summarize the story of Prisons of Peace. A few years ago, Laurel Kaufer, another nationally renowned mediator I have the pleasure of knowing, received a letter from an inmate at Chowchilla, the toughest women's prison in California. The letter was a plea for a mediator to come to the prison to train women as mediators, with the hope of lessening the extreme level of violence. Laurel immediately contacted Doug. Laurel and Doug vetted the letter to be certain that the inquiry was legitimate. After that, they went to the prison to visit. The inmate was in prison for life without parole for murder. She explained to Doug and Laurel that she and a group of other women were hoping that a mediator would come to the prison and train the women as mediators so that they could attempt to introduce alternatives to violence. Doug and Laurel also learned that, although many letters were sent, the only other response was from a San Diego mediator who was willing to take on the project for \$50,000. And so Prison of Peace was born.

The prison authorities looked at Doug and Laurel with bemusement as they began their work. Before anything else, they taught the women how to mindfully listen, a skill that I teach often, sometimes even to attorneys (without their realizing it). Next, they taught the women how to organize and manage peace circles, an excellent tool for conducting discussion about the issues behind a conflict. Finally, they taught the women who wanted even more actual mediation. At the end of the day, Prison of Peace had **70 trained mediators** and **200 women trained in peace circles**.

Unfortunately, given the state budget crunch, funding for expansion of the project has not been available, and, although some private grants have been obtained, Prison of Peace is clearly not a high priority, as the amounts have not been sufficient to expand the program to other prisons. But the prison administrators have reported to Doug and Laurel that they've observed a **marked decrease** in the level of violence as well as peace circles **springing up everywhere**.

It's moments like these that have made Doug Noll one of my mediation role models and a personal inspiration. After his speech, I asked him to keep me in mind next time he receives a request like this. And I meant it!

The second day, the speaker was **Ken Cloke**, the co-founder of Mediators Beyond Borders. Ken spoke, in great detail, about the projects MBB is involved in. He especially emphasized that MBB works within the strictures of the hosting organization. Rather than "imposing" anything, MBB allows the local community to "own" the project and sees its role as a provider of assistance.

Ken's been doing things like this . . . well, forever. He may be the single most respected mediator as peacemaker in our profession. I have to admit that I've been lax in my commitment to MBB in the past, with excuses like health, family issues and other things. I had the opportunity to chat with Ken for a few moments before his talk. I told him that I was ready to take action. I added that while my funds (the participants pay their own way) may be limited, my conscience is infinite. And I meant it!!

A primary reason that I attend mediation conferences, such as the ACR or SCMA events is not really to network with other mediators, although many are dear friends. It's mostly to recharge my batteries, to get a booster shot of excitement and enthusiasm. And most of all, to be inspired by people like Doug Noll and Ken Cloke -- the mediators who inspire me.