

The Joys of Giving

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At this time of year, everybody, myself included writes paeans to the gratitude we're supposed to feel during this holiday season, and opines that gratitude should not be a seasonal thing. All true, of course.

But I want to remind all of us in the business of resolving conflict to be joyous in all that we give -- and not just during the holidays.

For me, mediation acts as a conduit for my spiritual self. I harness a higher power that I do not regularly have, but that I am able to use for the benefit of others. It's a power that works best when turned outward, rather than for my own, personal benefit. Many times, in the course of opening an initial mediation session, I point out that I'm basically one of the tools available to the parties that they can use to help resolve their disagreements, if that's what they choose to do. And when I say that, I mean it from the bottom of my heart. What goes on within the mediation rooms may include very evaluative input from me, but if I'm on my game, that input is provided for the benefit of the party to whom it is given, rather than for my own personal gratification. I try to be sure that I don't dispense evaluative information with an ulterior purpose, such as self-aggrandizement, manipulation of the outcome, and the like. I can't swear that I always succeed in drawing this line, but I can guarantee that it's always on my front burner and is something that I take very seriously before any of the words leave my mouth.

No matter what my mood has been, something amazing happens when I enter the mediation room. Some days, I've found myself in a tired, grumpy, stressed or otherwise negative mood while driving to a mediation. I remember so many times when I thought to myself, "why did I schedule this for today? Why on a day when I'm just not emotionally up to dealing with someone else's problems? Why couldn't I have just called in sick and spent the day in bed licking my own wounds?" To be honest, that thought has crossed my mind a whole lot of times. But never have I taken that action. It never occurred to me to abandon a client, whether pay or *pro bono*, who was relying on me for help. And then, without exception, once I've shaken hands and gone through any formalities, the details of the case come to the fore of my thinking and I start studying each person, and . . . voila . . . the mystique is back! Whatever you want to call it, mystique, focus, mindfulness, I find myself in a tight little world where nothing is happening but the mediation. My personal issues have vanished. The outside world may as well be another planet. Every sinew of my being is completely focused on the single process of mediating the matter before me. **What I've done is immersed myself into a total act of giving with no expectation of anything at all in return.**

Lest the cynics among you point out that I'm being paid for my services, I have two responses. First, I find no distinction in the feelings I have in *pro bono* versus pay mediations. Second, financial matters are among the externalities that reside on another planet while I'm in my mediation "zone."

So, my friends and colleagues, while I certainly join in the overall sense of gratitude for all the wonderful people and things in my life that I've been privileged to enjoy, I am far more grateful for the unconditional love that I receive from several very special people in my life. And in the same way, I am most grateful for my own ability to return that unconditional love to these special people as well. And, to me, mediation is an extension of that. **I am grateful for the opportunity to give of myself unconditionally to people who are asking for help.**

To me, that's not a job. It's a calling.