

## **Trap of a wrong question**

### **Work with emotions in mediation through non-verbality and body- language**

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The presentation concentrates on the possibilities of work with nonverbality in mediation and alternative conflict resolution. The idea is supported by following findings: relevant part of the consent of communication flows through other than verbal canal; some nonverbal statements can communicate the consents that are not conscious; in the case of disharmony of the inner attitude or feeling and externally verbally communicated information a communication misunderstanding can take place which may initiate or maintain the conflict.

Work with nonverbality and with movement behavior is inevitable in mediation as a source of information about the parties, self and the process, mainly in following aspects of his/her work: identification of the double statement, neutrality and non-partiality setting, authenticity of the voluntariness of the participation, understanding the interests and work with emotions. Nonverbal face of some well-known communication techniques is here to be further explored: active listening, mirroring, emphatic understanding, paraphrasing, validation, equality balance/ space contract.

The elementary research in nonverbality in communication has been formulated in three basic schools of studies of nonverbality (La Barre, 2004):

Mehrabian's school of internally given meaning postulated that there are inherited and universal nonverbal expressions in each human being that had been developed for social adaptation purposes. This attitude is looking at emotion and symbol through movement behavior. Cultural school stated that nonverbality is a communication channel we learn and there is no biological universality here – looking at the context of nonverbal and movement behavior. School of practical analyses - Laban movement analyses - stated that body and mind are integral and this stream started to look firstly at the movement itself.

Laban movement analysis is one of the practical instruments for the work with nonverbality of the participants of mediation and the nonverbality of the mediator him/herself.

Different statements occur in the debate about use of verbal and nonverbal channels in communication:

- Mind and language are better developed, better controllable, manageable channel than the nonverbal movement channel
- Mind and language are socially more valuable channel
- Mind and language are separated from the body and non-verbal behavior
- Mind and language are superior to physical movement and body experience, behavior and expression.
- Much of the content of the communication flows through a channel other than verbal (40-70 percent)
- Some non-verbal expressions may communicate the contents which are not conscious

- In the cases of disharmony of the internal attitude or feeling and the outerly communicated verbal information, misunderstandings may occur, which can stimulate and sustain the conflict

Instead of hierarchical understanding, a new attitude based on partnership of body (movement behavior) and mind (verbal expression) is being proposed.

In psychotherapy, consensus has been already reached on following ideas dealing with nonverbal communication channel:

- The body and the mind are in constant reciprocal activity
- The movement reflects the personality and the personality reflects the movement
- The body is the seat of emotions
- The first human language is non-verbal language
- The body and its movements are an integral, equal part of an individual's personality.
- The body and its movement is a unique source of information and a key communication channel - not just a source for the additional information on the emotional colouring the words.

In the area of mediation, effective work with emotions appearing in the process is one of the key skills. Taking into account that expressing emotions is connected with nonverbal communication, it is possible to identify following statements in the recent professional dispute, where recently prevailing attitudes and body-connected attitudes can be compared:

Recently prevailing attitudes :

- Work with emotions is not the aim of mediation
- Expression of emotions can help with clarification of motives, values, needs in mediation, but only to the extent it is supporting the agreement creation process
- It is possible to separate emotional and rational processes in communication of two people

Body - connected attitude:

- We all almost constantly express our authentic emotions nonverbally
- The difference is in the intensity of this expressions, not in its existence/non-existence
- Ignoring nonverbal or verbal signals of emotions that are in contrast with verbally expressed statements are one of the possible reasons of the failure of mediation process

How to use nonverbality in a good work with emotions in the mediation process?

The proposal here is to work from the premises that emotions are located in the body and are expressed through the body and that the first language of each human is the nonverbal language.

Practically, nonverbality in mediation process can be effectively used in three key areas: understanding clients, understanding self and understanding the process.

Work with nonverbally expressed emotions has special value in the first to third phase phase of mediation - before shifting the conflict attitude to the work on solutions.

As mediators, if we ask ourselves, whether our mind (verbality) or our body (nonverbality) is more important in the conflict resolution process, we are falling into the trap of a wrong question. Partnership – not hierarchy – of our bodies and our minds is the way how to do good job in mediation. And this is valid especially, but not exclusively, in family mediation.

„ To work with a family is like to play cards with a group of people who know the rules - and you are the only one who doesn't know the rules. Firstly, you have to learn about the rules of this system – and the family cannot or doesn't want to tell you about them in words only“ (Diane Dulici, family therapist)

Sources:

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Zuzana Vasičáková Očenášová is a mediator and dance movement therapist, based in Bratislava. She holds degrees Mgr. in law and MSc. in communication. She is a registered mediator in Slovakia since 2005. She supervised the mediation program in the Centre of legal aid for low-income people.. Participated at the Probation and mediation services development project within the Ministry of Justice in 2012. Absolved a three-years training in dance-movement therapy, as a dance movement therapist works with different populations. Co-founded and cooperates with Laban Atelier Bratislava. Student of long-term processwork

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