

# Update

January/February 2011

## Conflict Coaching: A Powerful ADR Tool

By Robin N. Amadei



**Introduction.** Conflict coaching is a set of skills and strategies used to support peoples' ability to engage in, manage, or productively resolve conflict. Conflict coaching can be used in various circumstances, including conflicts in the workplace, community disputes, family disagreements, or business conflicts. In such situations, the conflict coach serves as a confidential listener, helping the coachee to see the situation from all perspectives, consider options, and come up with a plan to deal with the conflict. In conflict coaching, the coachee, not the conflict coach, is responsible for the outcome. The conflict coach uses process skills to help the coachee develop more clarity about the situation, enabling the coachee to make good decisions to manage the conflict. Also, the conflict coach helps the coachee rehearse a conversation so that the coachee can more confidently enter into the conflict resolution discussion.

Let's examine how conflict coaching might work in the following workplace dispute: Bill and Jane often work on projects jointly. For the last couple of months, their working relationship has been fraught with conflict. Bill and Jane's supervisor, Charlie, told them that they need to work their differences out as the conflict was impacting the entire work team. Charlie told them that they could consult with HR, as he had heard that HR has conflict coaching and mediation resources. For several weeks, however, nothing happened and the conflict continued to simmer and worsen. Finally, Bill got frustrated and decided to visit Lisa, an HR generalist and conflict coach. Bill agreed to work with Lisa as his coach.

**Step 1: Build Rapport.** Lisa and Bill engaged in a bit of small talk, exchanged background information, and captured a sense of one another's communication style. Lisa noted that Bill was concise and to the point, and perhaps needed to be drawn out. Lisa ac-

knowledged Bill for asking for help to work through conflicts with Jane.

**Step 2: Overview of Coaching Process.** Lisa described her role as conflict coach and asked Bill's expectations regarding her role to make sure they shared an understanding. Lisa suggested that coaching would be especially effective if Bill enters into it with an open mind, a willingness to look at the issue from all perspectives, and an orientation to meet both his *and* Jane's needs. Also, Lisa reviewed confidentiality

parameters, reminded Bill that he can discontinue coaching at any time, and discussed logistics. She then obtained Bill's commitment to enter into the coaching process.

**Step 3: identify Client's Goals.** Lisa asked Bill to state his goals for conflict coaching generally and for this particular meeting. Bill stated that his general goal was to improve his working relationship with Jane. His specific goals for this coaching meeting included talking through the situation with Lisa and looking at process options that would meet his general goal. Lisa reminded Bill that he could change his goal, or add additional goals at any time during the coaching process.

**Step 4: Client's Sharing of Perspectives.** Bill was invited to share his perspective on the incidents that led to the conflict. At times, Bill reflected some emotional intensity and Lisa acknowledged his feelings. Lisa also asked Bill about his needs going forward. Lisa then asked Bill to explore Jane's perspective. She asked Bill to articulate what Jane's feelings might be, and postulate on Jane's needs going forward. As Lisa asked questions to help Bill deeply consider Jane's perspective, there was a perceptible shift in Bill's orientation. For the first time, Bill realized that there *could be* a different perspective, which was extremely enlightening and laid the foundation for productive conflict resolution.

**Step 5: Explore and Test Options.** After fully examining perspectives, Bill was ready to explore and test options. Options that Bill considered included: taking Jane to lunch to talk through the conflict, meeting in a business setting, having someone mediate, and sending Jane an e-mail. Lisa asked Bill to consider criteria to evaluate the options. His criteria included: simplicity, comfort, minimize chances of rejection, and enable a personal connection. Using these criteria, Lisa asked Bill to evaluate the pros and cons of each option. After doing so, Bill felt that meeting with Jane in a business setting was the best option.

**Interim Step: Define Next Steps (for next coaching session).** Since Lisa and Bill were at the end of the 1-1/2 hour time period allocated for this session, Lisa asked Bill to reflect on any insights that he gleaned from the discussion thus far. She suggested that he write these insights down so he would not forget them. She then asked Bill to do some 'homework' to prepare for the next meeting. She asked him to make a list of the things that he would want to say to Jane. Lisa indicated that Bill would have the chance to discuss his ideas with Lisa at the next coaching meeting and practice the conversation. Bill and Lisa scheduled the next meeting.

**Step 5: Explore and Test Options, Continued.** Lisa welcomed Bill back to coaching two days later. She checked in to see if there were any new insights or developments. Bill was satisfied that things were still on track. Bill had done a lot of thinking about what he wanted to say to Jane and how he wanted to say it. Bill reviewed his plan with Lisa. Lisa proposed that Bill practice his conversation, with her role playing as Jane. Lisa asked Bill how she should play the role and invited Bill to recalibrate at any time during the practice. Bill gave Lisa permission to interrupt to provide feedback on how his message was delivered and, if applicable, to suggest a different approach.

Bill and Lisa then started the role play. Bill conveyed his perspective, carefully framing his message and monitoring his tone of voice and body language. Lisa made every effort to play the role of Jane accurately. At points, Lisa stopped the role play for discussion and feedback. She asked Bill how the conversation felt to him so far and gave him feedback on how some of his statements 'landed' on her. She then gave Bill an opportunity to 'replay' some statements to increase the likelihood that Jane would respond positively. Lisa also asked Bill what roadblocks could arise in the discussion and how he might handle them. By the end of the practice discussion, which lasted about 45 minutes, Bill felt confident about having a conversation with Jane.

**Step 6: Define Next Steps.** After the role play, Bill reaffirmed that he wanted to proceed with the con-

versation with Jane. Lisa then invited Bill to map out a plan. Guided by Lisa's questions, Bill specified logistics and timing for initiating a conversation with Jane. He agreed to send Jane an e-mail when he returned to his office asking her if she would meet with him to discuss their working relationship. Assuming Jane agreed, he would schedule the conference room. If Jane did not agree, Bill would visit with Lisa again to determine possible next steps to manage that setback. Lisa asked Bill if he would send her an e-mail or drop by after his discussion with Jane to let her know how things went. Bill agreed. Lisa reiterated her availability to support Bill in working to resolve the conflict. Bill left, empowered to go forward with his plan.

**Conclusion.** As illustrated above, conflict coaching can be a powerful ADR tool to help manage conflict. The conflict coach helps the coachee think through multiple aspects of a conflict and consider options to improve the situation. The conflict coach uses active listening, asks questions, provides feedback, and offers insights. Conflict coaching can help at any stage of a conflict, both formally and informally -- especially when there is an ongoing working relationship or need to communicate.

*Robin Amadei, JD, is the owner of a training, mediation, facilitation, workplace assessment and conflict coaching organization, Common Ground Mediation Center, LLC in Boulder, CO. Her mission is to help people become excellent communicators and problem solvers so that they are empowered to resolve conflict, enhance skills, meet goals for success, and move ahead in their lives. Robin's mediation practice is focused primarily in the employment (government and private sector), real estate, and business areas, as well as in family disputes. A significant portion of her practice is devoted to facilitating public policy and organizational meetings in a variety of areas. Since 1994, Robin has been an adjunct professor at the University of Denver, teaching programs that address conflict management including mediation and negotiation classes. Robin is a published author in the field of mediation and team-building in organizations and is considered to be a leader in the mediation community.*

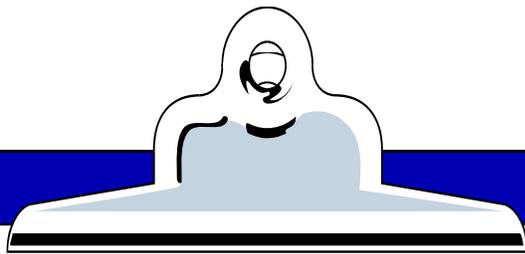
**Join us for a one day workshop on  
Conflict Coaching**

with Robin Amadei

Thurs., Mar. 17th, 9 AM-5 PM in Rm 1E-108

Cost: \$95.00

Email [gjones@bellevuewa.gov](mailto:gjones@bellevuewa.gov) or call 425-452-4091 to request a registration form or for more information.



## Parent—Teen Update

By  
Gwen Jones

In January there will be another opportunity to practice your mediation skills with a mediation practice session. This session is scheduled for Wednesday, January 19th from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM in room 1E-118. All parent-teen volunteers are invited to attend. Some of you will be able to mediate and some of you will be role players. For volunteers who took the training last year, this is a prerequisite to mediating actual cases. Anyone who wants to begin mediating in the near future is encouraged to attend.



Another prerequisite to mediating is observation of actual mediations. When you receive emails from me about opportunities to observe, be sure to respond as soon as you can, because the spots go quickly. We've had a number of new cases recently, and more opportunities to observe will be coming soon.

Don't forget to mark your calendars for the 2011 Volunteer Recognition Party. All volunteers are invited to come and be recognized for their hard work! The party will be held on Tues., Feb. 15th at 5:30 PM at the Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center in Bellevue. Watch your email for the Evite invitation!

## **BNMP Training Opportunities For Mediators and Conciliators**

### ***Parent-Teen In-Service Training:***

#### **Mediation Practice Session**

with Gwen Jones

Wed. Jan. 19th, from 2-4 PM in Rm 1E-118

### ***Training:***

#### **Conflict Coaching Workshop**

with Robin Amadei

Cost: \$95.00

Thurs., Mar. 17th, 9 AM–5 PM in Rm 1E-108

### ***Volunteer Recognition Party 2011***

Tues. Feb. 15th, at 5:30 PM

at Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center for recognition, food and fun...



## **Volunteer Award Recipients**

Congratulations to Colleen James and Jenny Winkler, volunteers of the 2010 year. They received the PRESIDENT'S VOLUNTEER SERVICE BRONZE AWARD on Nov. 18<sup>th</sup> in a private ceremony with the Mayor of Bellevue, Don Davidson, at the North Bellevue Community Center.

### **Program Staff:**

Program Co-Manager:	Cheryl Cohen	-	452-5222
Program Co-Manager:	Andrew Kidde	-	452-5288
Program Assistant	Gwen Jones	-	452-2897

City of Bellevue website: <http://www.bellevuewa.gov>  
(Look for the Mediation Program under "Neighborhood Information")

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*Volunteer Profile:*

**Peter Sugarman**



My introduction to Bellevue mediation was in 2001 working with my wife and son in the Parent Teen Program. We appreciated the safe environment and positive approach the mediators took in dealing with our issues. As a retired software engineer, I wanted to give back to the community in some way. Volunteering as a conciliator has been a great avenue for helping local neighbors resolve conflicts or at least talk with each other and avoid further escalation. The rich diversity of Bellevue's neighborhoods is fertile ground for a lot of interesting conflict issues. I appreciate the opportunity for helping people find non-adversarial approaches to resolving their differences.

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**BELLEVUE  
NEIGHBORHOOD MEDIATION PROGRAM**

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