



## Getting In Sync

### What Improvisational Theater has to Teach Co-mediators

By Ann McBroom

What do improvisational theater and co-mediation have in common? Both involve two or more people, both are guided by a structure and a set of principles, both occur “in the moment,” and both engage around previously unknown subject matter. Improvisational masters appear to shift seamlessly, blending with and moving between each other with such ease that the production might appear scripted. But it isn’t – and that’s the beauty!

Anyone who has been part of a co-mediation team, or has observed a co-mediator team, knows the potential pitfalls and challenges these teams face. It can sometimes look as though each mediator is mediating independently, or batting the lead between them like a shuttlecock in a badminton game. One mediator may dominate, and the other may remain silent. Or perhaps one mediator may head down a path that neither the co-mediator or the parties can follow. Even so, the benefits of co-mediation are great: two minds, two sets of eyes and ears, the balance of gender, race and age. Seamless co-mediation is possible, and when it happens the results are as amazing as an improvisational jazz concert, when everything goes just right.

As an improviser, you set out to create something with no preconception of how you might do it. Let’s look at the principles how we can apply those principles in our co-mediation teams.

**Acceptance.** Improvisational art is based on the idea that no matter what your partner hands you, you will receive it. When your fellow comic starts out with “You are a big green frog...” you might say “rrrbt”, and the show would go on. But if you say, “No, I am not!” or you be-

come speechless, the show stops. Acceptance means that no matter what comes your way, your response is always “yes...and.” “Yes, and...” adds to and multiplies the potential. A “no, but...” response, no matter how subtle, subtracts and divides. Acceptance does not mean giving in, but rather, surrendering to the idea that there are possibilities waiting to emerge.

**Mutuality.** Mutuality requires a symbiotic joining together. While each person maintains their own center, their own core, through give and take they develop a “third thing.” Imagine two people, each standing straight, breathing deeply, feeling their own center and gravity. Imagine a ball is placed between them, their bodies holding the ball several feet from the floor. Imagine one person begins to move, and in order to keep the ball pressed between their bodies and off the floor, the other person must also move. Each moves and the other follows in a dance of mutuality. The ball stays between them. The ball becomes their new core. This ability to “follow the follower” occurs through continual give and take, offer and acceptance.

**Creativity.** Creativity exists in every one of us. Remember when you were in kindergarten and your teacher asked, “Do I have any artists in the room?” How many five year-olds raised their hands? I bet you did! I know my shining moments as an artist occurred at age five. Now, let me ask you this...WHAT HAPPENED? The creativity still lies within you. Viola Spolin, the founder of improvisational theatre, describes creativity as “a greater capacity for experiencing your environment. Get out of your head, don’t let your pre-planned strategies interfere with your ability to accept the gifts your environment of-



fers.

**Risk-taking.** How often do you avoid stepping up, stepping out, taking a risk, because you are afraid of what you don't know, or because of the unknown outcome? If you are to practice mutuality, you must be willing to step out, accept, follow the follower. What if you are left on the stage, alone, holding the bag? Conflict is always risky, but can lead to amazingly creative outcomes. When two mediators take risks with each other, you can invite your parties into the creative process.

**Trust.** How would your relationship with your co-mediator change if you were able to trust that they would not leave you alone on the stage? What if you knew that they would follow you where ever you went? What if you knew that when you followed your co-mediator, they were taking you exactly to the place where you, and the parties, were meant to go? Trust is the glue that holds improvisation together. How would the mediation be different if you trusted your own instincts and the instincts of your co-mediator?

**Awareness.** Awareness is an illusive quality. Self-awareness requires continual checking in with our own responses. In improvisation, and in co-mediation, awareness involves all that is in our environment and it's affect on us as well as others. It requires breath, the quieting our internal "chatter," listening deeply, and the surrender to genuine curiosity.

How can you become a better co-mediator? Practice the principles of improvisation, and practice, practice, practice. It requires both intention and discipline. AND... you will love the results!

And check with Cheryl Cohen for the brilliant ideas generated at the in-service on co-mediation.

### **Conflict Resolution Day is Oct. 16**

Please join us on **Thursday October 16th** for Conflict Resolution Day, proclaimed by Governor Gregoire. Come and hear about conflict resolution by the City of Bellevue Neighborhood Mediators. Bring your questions and conflicts. The mediators will be available for consultation.

This is co-sponsored with the King County Library System and discussions will be held at:

**Lake Hills Library from 12:30-1:30 pm**  
15228 Lake Hills Blvd. 425-747-3350

**Newport Library from 1-2 pm**  
14250 SE Newport Way 425-747-2390

**For more info call 425-452-4091 or e-mail**  
[mediation\\_info@bellevuewa.gov](mailto:mediation_info@bellevuewa.gov)

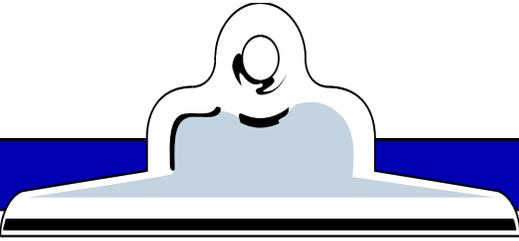
### **Conflict Personalities in Mediation** with Pam Wyss, King County EAP Coordinator

There are two things that make each mediation unique: the nature of the conflict and the people involved. There is a third element, however, that can make any mediation uniquely difficult: peoples' *personalities*, especially when those are "conflict personalities". These are parties we find to be obstinate, inflexible, demanding, self-centered and unreasonable. They frequently blame the other party, accept no responsibility themselves, expect resolutions to be on their terms, and often appear to sabotage a successful outcome. Sound familiar? **Please join us Wed. Oct. 15th, from 6-8 PM in Room 1E-121.** This workshop will explain the "conflict personality;" teach you to identify when one of your parties may have one; and offer specific suggestions for how to deal with this challenge. Brief role-plays and case examples will be provided.

*Pam Wyss is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Certified Employee Assistance Professional. She received her Masters Degree in Social Work from Washington University, St. Louis in 1986 and since then has worked almost exclusively as an EAP where conflict resolution is an everyday part of the job. An experienced and interesting presenter, Pam is an EAP coordinator for King County and a trained, volunteer mediator with its Alternative Dispute Resolution program.*



For September, the book club read *Predictably Irrational*, by Dan Ariely. Ariely is a behavioral economist who runs experiments to see if people make "rational" choices -- i.e. choices in their own best interest (classical economic theory is based on the idea they do). Ariely finds not only do people often not behave rationally, but also their irrational choices fall into predictable patterns. Some common patterns are: people put a higher value on things they own than on things that they don't own but would be willing to buy; people are irrationally swayed by the offer of something free; and, once a number has been mentioned, even a random number, it will strongly influence what parties will pay in a transaction. Many of his findings have significant implications for mediation. For example, people are not good at predicting how they will behave when their emotions or passions are aroused. Also, people use two sets of norms to decide how to behave: social norms (neighbors helping each other out by taking in the mail, etc.) and market norms (an exchange of money for a service). By introducing money into a situation where social norms are operating, the spirit of neighborly cooperation can quickly be lost. So, in a multi-issue case, save the money issue for the end. Our next meeting will be Wednesday, November 5th, at 6 p.m. at City Hall. The book will be *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently and Why*, by Richard E. Nisbett.



## Parent—Teen Update

By  
Cathy Goldman

It was so great to meet with the new mediators in September to talk about the intake process. Now that school has started, we are getting some referrals! I hope to have many observation opportunities for all of you. I will post them on email so please watch for them.



Big thanks to Stephanie Bell and Ann McBroom for presenting on co-mediation and improv. We had so much fun and we learned a lot too. On October 2<sup>nd</sup>, I have invited all the new mediators and their families to learn more about their family member's role as a volunteer for our program. Then on October 15<sup>th</sup>, Glenn Hasslinger from Bellevue School District will talk to us about "The Becca Bill; What we Need to Know." He does a great presentation so please attend if you have not heard him speak.

Our new brochures are out and they are wonderful. Thanks to Michelle Stanelun for her concepts and creativity.

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

### *Neighborhood In-Service:*

#### **Conflict Personalities in Mediation**

Pam Wyss, King County EAP Coordinator  
Wed. Oct. 15th, from 6-8 PM in Room 1E-121  
6:00 refreshments, 6:30-8:00 program

### *Parent-Teen In-Services:*

#### **Family Night: An Orientation to Mediation**

Thurs. Oct. 2nd, from 7-9 PM Room 1E-120

#### **Becca Bill and Beyond**

Glenn Hasslinger, Bellevue School District  
Tues. Oct. 15th, from 6-8 PM Room 1E-118

### *Joint Neighborhood Parent-Teen In-Service:*

#### **Win As Much As You Can Game Night**

Wed. Nov. 12th, from 6-8 PM Room 1E-121  
Come play! Who knew that learning about negotiation could be such fun...

### *Book Group:*

Wednesday, Nov. 5th at 6:00 PM at City Hall.  
We will be reading *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently and Why*, by Richard Nisbett.

### *Con/Med Consultation Group:*

Join us to discuss your current conciliations/mediations or questions. Great networking and learning opportunity. Open to all volunteers.  
Wed. Dec. 3rd at 5:30 PM in Room 1E-119.

### **Program Staff:**

Program Co-Manager:	Cheryl Cohen	-	452-5222
Program Co-Manager:	Andrew Kidde	-	452-5288
Program Assistant	Gwen Jones	-	452-2897
Parent-Teen Coordinator:	Cathy Goldman	-	452-4091

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

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*Volunteer Profile:*

**Lian Caspi**



I am a senior at Newport High School and have been living in Bellevue with my family. I joined the Bellevue Parent/Teen Mediation program in 2007 because the idea of co-mediating with adults to improve relationships between parents and teens interested me. After going through the training, periods of observation and mediating cases myself, I have gained skills that are valuable in daily interactions. This has led to a continued interest in training and I now participate in other programs such as Teen Link, a teen crisis line. Singing and music are two of my main passions and I am very involved in musicals, singing competitions, voice lessons and several choirs in the area. Apart from these extra-curricular activities I am a member of Newport High School's tennis team, Honor's Society and theatre program. Bellevue Mediation has taught me so much and I am extremely grateful to everyone involved with the program. I'm excited about furthering my knowledge in mediation and will take these experiences with me wherever I go.



City of Bellevue Department of Planning and Community Development  
P.O. Box 90012 Bellevue, WA 98009-9012