

Haltung - On the Meaning of a Word and Its Relevance for Mediation

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When you study languages, or gain fluency in more than one, at some point you realise that each language has its own terms that are not translatable. It is about the way language thinks for us, and in different languages or cultures this varies.

Take the English word “sophisticated.” I am bilingual in English and German, and I often work as a translator or interpreter, but I have never found an easy one-to-one translation of this word into German, no matter what the context. If you look in a dictionary you will find a long list of synonyms for this, and would need to take your pick to suit the context. Often it is easier to translate this one word with two or three words in German.

The other way round there is a great German word: “schillernd”, which can mean “gleaming,” “iridescent”, “shimmering” and much more, but is not usually used to describe optical or physical impressions and is instead a word denoting the use of language itself, as in an “iridescent” word or concept. But of course, “iridescent” won't do the trick.

In mediation training in Germany the word *Haltung* is a key term. And it is another of those words that contains much more than any translation can do justice do.

Haltung is the way you hold yourself. Physically. The way you stand, sit, walk. Your

body language.

Haltung is your approach to something. Your methods, the way you do things.

Haltung is your frame of mind or attitude.

Haltung is the way you look at yourself, at relationships, at other people.

Haltung is your focus.

Haltung is part of your view of life in general.

Haltung is the view you have of your own role in your profession.

Haltung contains values, the things that matter to you.

All of which matters so much in mediation. What is my approach to mediation, to clients in mediation? Do I call them clients – is that part of my *Haltung*, or do I have another word for the people I work with? Why am I here with these people? What am I saying about myself? Am I curious? Am I empathetic? Am I there to give advice? Am I here to close a deal? Are there limits to what I can offer? What are my strengths and what are my weaknesses in mediation? What do I do when I make mistakes? In communication? In relationships? In mediation?

This is so much more about *Haltung* than attitude (a word which sometimes can even have a negative after-taste in English). It is a practical philosophy, or a philosophy of practice. But philosophy is too intellectual a word for it. *Haltung* contains vision, wisdom, self-reflection, self-criticism, and concern for others. I reckon that being inquisitive about your own *Haltung* is essential to all forms of coaching and consultancy, and mediation in particular.

So here are just a few of the dictionary synonyms you will find: bearing, stance, attitude, poise, conduct, posture, position, behaviour, demeanour, carriage, morale, stand.

Mediation training will define and work on the basic mediator traits: neutrality (or multi-partiality), responsibility for process rather than content, empathy, and probably a few more. But these remain very much text-book driven or just learned unless each mediator turns them into his or her own personal claims through reflective experience. Working on *Haltung* takes these ideas much further and is a

never-finished process of learning about your own personal mediator . . . personal mediator what? *Haltung* of course.

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