

# Changing the World? An Inspiring Encounter at the ICC International Commercial Mediation Competition

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I was again privileged to be at the ICC International Commercial Mediation Competition in early February, which this time included a new event – an intergenerational round table, workshops for student and professional participants together. It began with an hour of dialogue around one table, where participants were asked to generate and discuss questions for each other. At my table, these questions included matters like “how do you deal with your feelings when your mediations fail,” which led to a discussion on what is meant by the “failure” of mediation, or whether a better question might not be “what is within me that makes me see a particular mediation as failed,” or “what do I do with my feelings when I feel that my interventions are not appropriate and I have failed.”

Then there was a moment that I found magical. My friend and colleague Rosemary Howell (who also writes for this blog) told us that now she was getting older she was thinking about her legacy, and she turned this around as a question for the table, the average age at which was well under forty. The question was: “How do you, as young mediators, wish to change the world?” It was the answers that were magical.

**Tomasz Murzyn**, a volunteer at the competition, is presently working as a teacher in China. He spoke about his vision for training mediation and listening skills in schools around the world, to very young children. Tomasz has already organised workshops in Polish schools, and he is thinking about creating a training system that will allow schools to step by step organise workshops on their own and teach children to become teen peer mediators.

**Paulina Majtkowska**, a trainee attorney-at-law, who co-coached the team representing Jagellonian University from Cracow at the competition, spoke about wanting to use mediation principles to transform political dialogue in her home country of Poland. She remarked that when parties share different values at the mediation table, those values are not subject to negotiation. In such case, the crucial element is to acknowledge one's own values as well as recognize that the other party's may be different. Such an approach may bring people closer to reconciliation and at the same time, maintain our rights to represent different political opinions.

**Veronika Arbekova**, a full-time mediator working in St. Petersburg, Russia, and an observer at the competition, said that the changes she wishes to make are incremental. When she mediates, her clients experience a different way of dealing with disagreement and she hopes that this may then be passed on to others, like a ripple expanding. It is not settlement that matters most, she said, but this form of paradigm shift. Mediation can lead to mutual understanding and compassion between people, avoiding the courts or other “severe” methods. Veronika sees her mission in alleviating stress and bringing comfort through dialogue.

**Katya Curran**, from New Zealand, also a volunteer at the competition, is interested in mediation for its potential to impact the world in innumerable spheres. She is not a lawyer, and for her mediation is about much more than commerce or law. She is interested in the power of mediation to ease relationships and deal with disputes creatively on any scale – from the interpersonal to the political. One way she believes that this can happen is by transcending ideas of mere tolerance and compromise. Specifically, Katya mentioned her interest in restorative justice, and how mediation can be healing and innovative in this area, in part by rethinking the victim-perpetrator binary.

**Bartosz Mazurek**, a law student and competition participant from the Jagellonian University team, said he hopes to use mediation as an opportunity to train better communication with adults, as poor communication can cause lots of disputes. He also turned the question round, and asked Rosemary how she had changed the world. He said he did this because he wished to learn something about the expectations she has of the younger generation. Bartosz holds a degree in journalism, which he said explained his interest and answer to Rosemary by way of a question.

This was a powerful question, which Rosemary answered by saying that in her work coaching young mediators, not least for the ICC Commercial Mediation Competition, she hoped she had made some change in the world. She expressed her admiration for former students who were using their training to influence conflict resolution practices in their workplaces.

I was very touched by this discussion. In a commercial mediation setting, attended primarily by lawyers and young lawyers (and people who would say they are ex-lawyers), it was inspiring to hear how this group of young people, brought together in random fashion by the competition, all saw mediation and their role in it as a purposeful contribution to society as a whole and not primarily as a professional skill in a future career in the legal profession. It was that mediation magic I was hearing again.

I thought about myself. How can I change the world? What is my legacy? Referring to the world of mediation, there has certainly been some influence on people I have worked with in mediation and facilitation, and in workplace conflict advisory services. I suspect that my legacy will be primarily with the young students I have met, taught and trained in many parts of the world. What will it be? I hope that I have been able to contribute to their own self-empowerment, in small ways. Many of them will forget me and when we met, as I forget them. But we will have been enriched by the contact we had. They have given me so much in return, in beautiful moments of presence and connection. Like the one I experienced in Paris on 13 February this year. Thank you.



Veronika, Bartosz, Paulina, Katya and Tomasz at the ICC