

# On the Benefits of Mediation Training, and On Getting Things Wrong. An Interview with Eva Chye

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Last week I was reading an essay by the American novelist Jonathan Franzen, and was struck by the following thought: "The essay's roots are in literature, and literature at its best [...] invites you to ask whether you might be somewhat wrong, maybe even entirely wrong, and to imagine why someone else might hate you." Franzen is writing about the essay writer forcing himself to face up to some "honest self-reckoning." [fn]Jonathan Franzen, "The Essay in Dark Times," in *The End of the End of the Earth*, London 2018, pp. 1-22 (p. 14 and p. 6). [fn] I do not wish to compare this blog-writing with Franzen's essay writing, except in this one sense: in this blog I will admit that I was wrong, and it was through writing that I gained that insight.

Before I do, I would like to invite you to reread the sentence I just quoted. Could it not also be a description of mediation, or at least some mediations?

I have always been sceptical about one-week forty-hour mediation courses leading to accreditation and people being able to say they are qualified mediators. This is because I, like most people most of the time, tend to see the world through the prism of my own experience, and I give that experience so much value that it colours my judgements. I was proud to have to do two hundred hours of mediation training, then several mediations, and coaching on those mediations before I could become accredited by the German Mediation Association (Bundesverband Mediation). I was and am convinced that this is a sign of quality.

I have also trained on five-day intensive programmes, and found them wanting. See above: because of the prism of my own experience. I missed the self-reflection, the peer feedback, the intensive practice, the toolbox of methods, the reading, the growth, and a lot more besides, that I knew from my own training. And I saw participants still very unsure of themselves and their methods at the end of the week.

Then this week I interviewed Eva Chye, who some years ago took part in a one-week programme that I trained on in Berlin, and who has kept in touch with me from her home in Perth, Australia, ever since. Eva works at PricewaterhouseCoopers. She does not work as a mediator, but she uses mediation skills. I wanted to know from her what sustainable effects mediation training had had.

## What do you do?

*I am the Principal Adviser for International Trade in Services. I have two functions: (1) Helping Australian universities and government with their international education and research strategies; and (2) Helping Australian scale-up companies grow their business-to-business portfolio.*

## Can you say a few words about the mediation training you did?

*I did a Certificate of Advanced Study and Training in Mediation at Humboldt University as part of a postgraduate law degree with The University of Western Australia. What started as an academic interest ended up shaping my career.*

## Why did you decide to do mediation training?

*I've always been fascinated by how people communicate and why we communicate badly most of the time.*

## Were your expectations met?

*Yes, and more. I had expected the training to be interesting but it was more than that. I've come to realise there is always more to what is being said, and that it is worth peeling back the layers to uncover the problems or treasures. I've also learnt that sometimes someone may not even know what the real issues are, but good mediation will help them to refocus their thoughts and restore their faith.*

## What did you really learn?

*The significance of active listening, self-reflection, and respect. And constantly reminding myself to communicate this way in my day-to-day life, not just during mediation sessions.*

## Have you been able to use your mediation skills since your training?

*Absolutely. The first time I realised mediation skills had such an impact on everyday life was at work when an unhappy assistant directed angry accusations at me. It came out of left-field and instead of being shocked and upset at what she said, I remember thinking, "there must be something behind it" and allowed her to blow off steam, even though it was confronting. There were only the two of us at the meeting but I walked through what a mediator would have done to flesh out the issues, had a joint discussion so my views could also be heard, and came to an agreement with her. She ended the meeting by saying I'm the best manager she ever had, and I still remember thinking how what started badly could have ended worse if I didn't have the foresight of mediation to work through the situation.*

## Has anything else changed?

*My self-confidence and how I am much more conscious of how I communicate every day, in all situations. Going back to the example earlier, the self-confidence came from knowing when I was accused that even though I was wrongly accused, there was no need to be defensive. I knew I could still make myself heard in other ways and there was a better way to resolve problems.*

## What surprised you along the way?

*That the surprises continue to unfold. It has been two years since I did the training and whenever I reflect back on any communication, I'm surprised by how there is always "much more" to uncover. This may be from understanding what a client really wants, to listening to the needs of my elderly parents, and what the kids are really saying.*

## What next?

*I don't know, but I'm OK with this. Life is full of surprises. I may not be a mediator but mediation has taught me to patient, open, and reflective. If I can do this consistently, I know I can do anything.*

I thank Eva for these answers, and also for showing me that I was wrong.

PS: When I sent Eva this blog for review before publication she wrote back: *I know what you mean but you were but not wrong at all. I wouldn't feel ready to be a mediator and charge clients for my services after a one-week program. You were absolutely right (both by experience and given your background) to say that much more training is required. I do wish everyone would do mediation training, if not for the accreditation, at least for how it helps with communication (understanding). Maybe then there wouldn't be so many issues to mediate?*