
Kluwer Mediation Blog

The Mediation Orchestra

Andrea Maia (Mediar360 – Dispute Resolution) · Saturday, January 25th, 2014

Recently, one of the greatest maestros of our time passed away: Italian conductor Claudio Abbado. He led some of the most prestigious classical music institutions in the twentieth century. He served as music director of the La Scala opera house in Milan, principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, and principal conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic orchestra.

Among several recordings that Abbado left us, we could highlight his amazing performances in the opera *The Barber of Seville*, Mahler's *Symphony No 3*. and Ravel's *Piano Concerto*.

Abbado usually conducted without looking at the score to show off his familiarity with the piece. He was also known for his undisguised perfectionism and skill in managing people who were used to high levels of performance and excellence. Therefore, he had to deal with – and sometimes tame – egos which were often “bigger than life.”

Another interesting aspect of Abbado's career was the fact that, at a certain point, he left the direction of large orchestras and devoted himself to his work with young musicians and new orchestras that he helped create during his career. He was the founder and music director of the European Union Youth Orchestra and the Gustav Mahler Jugend Orchester.

Abbado's death had a strong impact on classical music aficionados. After reading several stories, watching some of his beautiful concerts, and comparing different stages of his long career, I started wondering about the similarities between the roles of a mediator and a conductor.

Undoubtedly, with a lot of hard work and training, one can learn the theory and master several techniques regarding Mediation. For example, would be practitioners can learn all the stages of Mediation procedures, as well as most tools applied by mediators, such as conflict mapping methods, summarizing using neutral language, and identifying impasses, among other techniques.

However, Abbado also showed us that, in order to reach a distinguished career stage, one also needs to develop and master some managerial characteristics that go beyond the traditional literature and require a sometimes difficult self-assessment / self-reflection exercise (for some people it comes naturally) in order to not only understand their importance, but also incorporate them on the daily routines and assignments. Among others, some of the important lessons that Abbado left us Mediators are:

– **Search for excellence** – A rigorous self-assessment exercise is extremely important after each task, as it will enable us to constantly try to improve our *modus operandi* and performance;

– **Good Leadership Skills** – to understand what motivates people, to lead by example, and to develop the ability to help members of your team to perform at their highest creative levels are essential characteristics that are present on outstanding professionals, no matter their performance field;

– **Create a harmonic atmosphere around** – this will allow a fair balance of participation and a better interaction among the parties.

– **Sensibility** – Know the right time to give voice to each participant, balance of different tones, and be aware and sensibly realize the appropriate time for a solo (as to caucus sessions).

– **Persistence**– There will always be difficulties and obstacles to deal with, but a good leader (Mediator, Conductor etc...) should have the ability to recover readily from adversity and deadlocks using his experience and creativity;

– **Experience** – An experienced conductor has already faced many obstacles and challenges and will be confident enough to never give up and reach the intended results;

– **Creativity** – Not being afraid to apply new solutions to apparently similar problems or “impossible” situations is what distinguishes outstanding professionals from the pack. Take risks;

–**Unique style** – Your style is your distinguished trademark.

–**Ability to adapt** – An experienced conductor/mediator should be able to adapt to different settings. Each symphony/conflict is unique and a good professional should be always ready to face the new needs and requirements of unpredictable situations;

– **Generosity** – Sharing your experience with aspiring professionals is essential to guarantee an improvement in the process as a whole, and contribute to the long term quality and dissemination of the practice.

Finally, I have no doubt that Abbado’s legacy has a lot to teach us. The way he managed and inspired people, the way he created harmony among huge egos, and the way he balanced different sounds, tones and volumes to produce unforgettable experiences will always be admired and should inspire not only mediators, but also professionals from every walk of life.

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