
Kluwer Mediation Blog

“A Mediator’s Prayer”

Joel Lee (National University of Singapore, Faculty of Law) · Monday, July 14th, 2014

I would like to use this month’s entry introduce readers to something referred to as “A Mediator’s Prayer”. It goes something like this.

A Mediator’s Prayer

Disputants, make me the instrument of your negotiation,
Where there is conflict, let me mediate;
Where there is difference, mediate;
Where there is contradiction, mediate;
Where there is discord, mediate;
Where there is litigation, mediate;

As a mediator, I assist to reframe rather than to repeat,
To communicate rather than to adjudicate,
To facilitate rather than to evaluate,
To summarize rather than to advise,
To generate options rather than to provide solutions,
To reality-test rather than to protest.

It is in letting go that we move on;
It is in wearing the shoes of your foe that we empathize;
It is in accommodating our adversary that we satisfy our own claims;
It is in striving for a settlement that we find peace.

I came across this Mediator’s Prayer in Hong Kong during the 3rd Asian Mediation Association Conference. All conference participants received a mug with this Mediator’s Prayer on it.

I had the privilege of first meeting and then calling a friend, the author of this Mediator’s Prayer. I had the occasion to meet with Mr. Ting-Kwok IU in Singapore just last week. A lawyer and mediator, TK (as he likes to be referred to), is a humble man, not one to speak of his achievements.

Conversation inevitably turned to the Mediator’s Prayer. TK recounted to me how he got into an argument with this son. The argument revolved around TK’s “illogical” thinking in that he wanted to omit his name as author yet insisted that there be an acknowledgement that the Mediator’s Prayer was “Inspired by the Peace Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi”.

His son felt that TK should ensure that TK's name is associated with the Mediator's Prayer so that those who encounter the Mediator's Prayer can give proper attribution and credit to TK.

On an initial hearing, this made perfect sense to me. After all, as author and creator of the Mediator's Prayer, TK has a right to be associated with it. I was therefore curious as to why TK held an opposite view.

Suspending the urge to tell him I agreed with his son, I exercised some of my mediation training and skills to inquire why TK took the opposite view. TK's answer was interesting. He said that he wanted the Mediator's Prayer to stand for more than something a single person created. He wanted the Mediator's Prayer to be propagated in the international mediation community and if it turned out to serve as a point of inspiration and bonding, even better.

While TK had no objection to being identified as the author of the Mediator's Prayer, his concern was that by deliberately ensuring his name was associated with the Mediator's Prayer, this might work against his greater mission.

I was struck by his answer because, from a cultural viewpoint, TK clearly put the interests of the collective above that of his own individual interests. Or as fans of the Star Trek series would recognize, "The needs of the many, outweigh the needs of the one, or the few".

It is a timely reminder that something, which to me, was a "no-brainer", had layers of meaning and nuance to it and that it was important in both everyday communication and mediation to constantly be aware of the assumptions I hold and to question them. If we, as mediators, do not remember this, how can we remind parties to do so? A small point but I hope, an important one.

And since TK does not object to being identified with the Mediator's Prayer, dear readers, I present to you, A Mediator's Prayer. I hope it resonates with you and if it does, please help TK achieve his goal of propagating it.

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