

How To Mutually Gain Experience in Mediation? Mentoring Young Mediators: a Win-Win Situation: An Interview with French renowned mediator, Claude Amar

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Daphné d'Hennezel (Daphné d'Hennezel Mediation)

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We all know how difficult it is for newly-trained mediators to gain practical exposure in this field, where competency is so heavily based on one's breadth and depth of experience. The next few generations of mediators need experienced mediators to help them break the "chicken vs. egg" cycle so they can gain initial experience, hone their skills under the guidance of a master mediator, gain in confidence and skills and gradually build their career as a mediator.

Under the umbrella of IMI, a Young Mediators Initiative (YMI) has been created – an online platform to encourage and support new mediators anxious to gain vital experience as a mediator. The goal of YMI is to facilitate interaction between experienced mediators, young mediators and service-providing organizations to create a global platform for networking and for sharing opportunities for experience exchange.

I participated in the ICC International Mediation Competition as a student in 2010, where I instantly fell in love with the mediation profession. I knew mediation was my professional calling, but I didn't know how or where to begin building my career.

While at the ICC International Mediation Competition, I met renowned French mediator, Claude Amar. I wanted to know more about mediation, to experience it in real life and I therefore asked him if I could observe one of his mediation sessions. Claude generously agreed. I had no mediation training at that time, no experience in mediation, only the conviction that mediation was the path I wanted to take. Without knowing it Claude started to "mentor" me. He gave me precious advice and tips. Thanks to his welcoming attitude I finally started a mediation training course and I was hired as Deputy Manager at the ICC International Centre for ADR, where I was involved in the organization of the ICC Mediation Competition.

I am now part of the Young Mediators Initiative team where a mentorship programme has been created. Claude is one of the pioneers behind the programme. This is why I interviewed him about his mentoring experience.

Are you in favour or mentoring young mediators?

"Yes of course. I always said yes to anyone who wanted to observe one of my mediation sessions. I always agree to have mediation trainees observe at least one of my mediation sessions. I cannot guarantee that they will be able to attend another session but I try my best to give a chance to anyone interested."

Who would you invite to attend a second mediation session?

"This will depend on their feedback: their understanding of the situation, their feelings, and perceptions and how they perceived the case. I always open my door to persons who want to learn by observation but this does not mean that I will mentor all of them."

What is your definition of mentoring?

"My definition would be to invite my mentee to first attend my mediation sessions as an observer, then participate with him/her in a real feedback session and follow the mediation until the end. After two or three observations, to interact with them as co-mediator. Still followed by intense feedback sessions – back and forth feedback sessions."

When did you start mentoring?

"I started mentoring 15 years ago. I was always keen on helping young mediators. But for the first time I feel that I can do it up to a professional level. I have a new mentee and I feel that I can accompany her in becoming an acting mediator."

Did you establish a process when you mentor? Such as briefing/debriefing/focussing on specific points (attitude, outcomes etc.)

"Not yet. This part is under development. The programme is yet to be developed with my new mentee, but I have a scheme in mind."

Can you give me five key words/positive feedbacks about mentoring?

"Complicity, Exchange, Feedback, Feelings, Transmission, Pride."

Can you give me the negative aspects of mentoring?

"I cannot think of any."

What encouraged you to act as a mentor?

"Nothing, I found it naturally."

According to you, what kind of mentorship programme could be useful/efficient for both Young and Experienced mediators?

"The new technologies, such as a "Tinder" application. An online application where mentees match with mentors but for mediation of course! This first online step is the future of mentoring. I found the Young Mediators Initiative programme very useful as well as the International Academy of Mediators.

We started from scratch. Rather than limit it, we should open it. At first it has to be opened; Let the new explorers explore. And in the second time it will be time to sit down with some of the matters and some of the mentees and start developing processes."

How many mentees do you have? How many are you willing to have?

"I have one "real" mentee for the moment. I am thus willing to start training another one once the first will be at a more advanced stage."

How do you chose your mentees? (Criteria: age? Experience, training, nationality, mediation training?)

"They choose me. The most important criteria is developing a positive and open relationship with the mentee. It is a matter of intuition."

Which tips would you give to Young Mediators in choosing their mentors?

"To give priority to chemistry not to reputation, chemistry before celebrity."

Which tips would you give to potential mentors who might be reluctant?

"I would advise them not to hesitate! The burden is minimal and the return is huge. The investment is limited and the rewards are tremendous!"

As mediators, we always advocate "growing the pie" for a win-win solution. Mentees will make the pie bigger, because the more Young Mediators who are mentored, the more experienced mediators there will be on the market. Mediation is indeed a contagious disease."

What have you learned from your mentees?

"I learn from their different perspectives and learn from their interpretation of what I did or didn't do in certain key moments of the mediation. Also they offer a different approach of what could have been done or said at various times during the sessions. And finally, since we both have a different life experience, we don't see nor hear the same things at the same time. As a mentor, you gain experience from them, and you are becoming richer.

The mentee/mentor relationship is a mutual learning opportunity."

Daphné d'Hennezel
Mediator
Young Mediators Initiative Team Member.