

# Kluwer Mediation Blog

## Holding On or Letting Go?

John Sturrock (Core Solutions Group) · Tuesday, December 28th, 2021

At this time of year, it is good to reflect, to look back, and also to look forward. This is not always easy as we sense the clutter and complexity of life crowding in on us.

I have had the uneasy experience in the past few weeks of clearing out the Core office, our administrative base for the past several years. With remote working now the norm, not only for delivery but for administration, having a physical office space is, for us, an unnecessary luxury – or more honestly, a glorified and expensive storeroom.

And therein lies the problem. For that storeroom contains gems. Letters from people and clients long forgotten, records of past events, mediations and other fascinating exploits, proposals for unfulfilled projects, ideas which would have changed the world (we thought), articles and adverts (all meticulously logged in hard copy form). From those times when we printed everything out and received letters and enclosures by post, there is so much to read, to reminisce about, to follow up. I've taken to sending photographs (electronically) of long-lost documents to people featured in them – “remember this...”, “whatever happened to...”, “a blast from the past...”. Some of the recipients respond, others probably shake their heads and click delete.

I found a folder of papers from a project in Africa – that would make a great article or book chapter, I think to myself. I had forgotten how often I had travelled to that great continent on mediation-related work. Records of the wonderful opportunities to support athletes, coaches, funders and administrators in the lead up to the London Olympics and Paralympics in 2012. All the energy put into political dialogue, especially around the independence referendum in Scotland in 2014.

Then, there are all those early strategy papers with detailed action plans. We started so many projects in the early 2000s to promote mediation in different sectors: planning, health, construction, IP, the boardroom, SMEs, the list goes on. And pilot studies, proposed and never taken forward or taken to a certain stage and still undercooked all these years later. Clauses in contracts, ideas for expansion of mediation into deal-making and public/private project management, the list gets even longer. Plus of course, all those interventions and facilitations which made a difference to somebody, somewhere.

Forty bags went off for shredding a week or so ago. A career's worth of endeavour. There are still a few folders to go through – and several boxes of retained papers to sort further, languishing now in my basement at home. That will be a job in itself. When and how to do so? And at what cost to the present with its promise, to looking ahead, to creativity and innovation in 2022?

What is the price for holding on and what value might there be in letting go? More generally, for each of us, what are we clinging on to because we fear the loss in letting go? What would be the impact of releasing ourselves from those things – expectations, unfulfilled ambitions, entitlements, obligations, even our jobs – which confine or restrict us from doing or being what we need to do and want to be going forward? Regularly, as mediators, we ask others these questions. Do we need to ask them of ourselves?

A friend with whom I was discussing all this has lent me a business book by Gino Wickman, entitled Traction. Chapter 2 is about “Letting Go of the Vine”. The writer tells us that “before you can grow, you’ll need to take a leap of faith.” Amongst other tips, he includes simplification, open-mindedness and being vulnerable. Perhaps my challenge, and maybe yours too, is to simplify all that clutter and complexity in life, to be open-minded about the possibilities in the future and to strip away the camouflage and protective armour by being vulnerable in the face of what lies ahead.

There are always options. Usually too many to handle well. As in mediation, we need therefore to identify criteria which we can apply to help us make choices. These are the benchmarks which address our real needs and interests, not simply protecting what has gone before. For me, in simple terms, what criteria will I apply as I endeavour to whittle down still further the contents of those boxes? What are my reasons for holding on to any of it? Nostalgia? Sentiment? Or a real prospect of using the material in a future project, perhaps to the benefit of others who have not been through the same experiences?

More generally, as I consider 2022, what are the benchmarks for assessing how to use my time? There are things I have wanted to do for many years. These are regularly deprioritised as apparently more urgent work comes along, often in the form of the next important mediation. But there is always a price to be paid. I sense that I need to find the courage to let go of quite a lot of stuff, literal and metaphorical, in order to do the things that really matter to me. What about you?

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