

Preface

In thinking about and practicing conflict resolution, it's useful to have some historical framework:

- The history of conflict resolution as applied behavioral science began in the 1940s with social psychologist Kurt Lewin and his students at Yale University.
- The history of the behavioral science of conflict resolution as applied to workplaces began in the 1960s with NTL Institute.
- The history of mediation as a non-coercive, interest-based, facilitated process to settle disputes—an alternative to litigation—began in the 1970s. (The legal field prefers to call mediation “ADR”—alternative dispute resolution.)
- The history of mediation as a self-help skill in workplaces began in 1980 with an article outlining managerial mediation in an obscure journal by the present author.
- The history of strategic management of organizational conflict begins with the book you are holding in your hands at this moment.

I recall a conversation with a faculty colleague at the University of Hartford around 1981. Pam was sharing with me her progress in developing a multi-dimensional model of organizational behavior. I was sharing with Pam my emerging view of mediation for non-professionals in the workplace. She remarked, “You know, Dan, the difference between you and me is that I strain for complexity and you strain for simplicity.”

Pam did not realize 20 years ago, as she made that astute observation, that she was predicting the course of my career to

the present moment. Nor did I. With planning no more conscious than water coursing its way downhill, I have stumbled along a career path of simplifying mediation so that everyone—not just professionals—can enjoy its remarkable benefits. Milestones along that path are denoted by chapters in this book—managerial mediation, self-mediation, and preventive mediation are progressively simpler self-help mediation tools that everyone can use following only brief study.

Coming of age in the 1960s, I was influenced by the “peace and love” values of the time—I’m a veteran of both Vietnam and Woodstock. Over the ensuing decades, I have transformed those values from Quixotic ideals to practical tools. I declare this with confidence because the fact that these mediation tools indeed work is beyond question. My hundreds of corporate clients and thousands of trainees and students continue to demonstrate their utility.

This book is the first published treatment of self-help mediation tools for the workplace. It is also the first published examination of conflict management as a corporate strategic issue. Later chapters glibly refer to these emergent concepts as a “paradigm shift”—tongue only lightly planted in cheek. Now that much of the Earth’s population has electronic access to ideas arising half a world away, it is only a matter of time before the demonstrable fact that self-help mediation offers a better way of managing everyday human differences catches on. The personal, organizational, and societal benefits of doing so are overwhelming—and they are obvious.

Companies that recognize that internal conflict can be managed strategically will succeed in the global marketplace. Those that ignore it and incur its unnecessary costs will be at a competitive disadvantage. Companies that failed to recognize quality as a strategic issue 20 years ago either changed or died. I predict that companies that fail to address conflict as a strategic issue will meet a similar fate.

A word to my mediator colleagues: those already familiar with my work over the past two decades know that I’ve been

pushing the envelope toward mediation-for-everyman (or the gender-inclusive equivalent of that term). My efforts to make mediation accessible to everyone in their everyday lives have been misconstrued by some colleagues as an unwelcome erosion of professionalism in our field. Please read the close of Chapter 1 with particular care. To state my case bluntly: I support the creation and enforcement of standards to protect consumers of professional mediation services. I also support the broadcast sharing of our little secret with the other six billion people on this planet—less to create a consumer market for professional mediators than to empower every individual to apply in their workplaces and their homes what we know how to do. Let's not repeat the misguided error of dentists of decades past who feared that public education about dental hygiene would put dentists out of business. Let's show people how to use self-help mediation, when to call a professional mediator, and how to tell the difference.

I have had fun writing this book, and I hope you have fun reading it. I hope you will actually laugh out loud on occasion—I did while writing. Who says conflict can't be fun!?

I suggest you read it once from start to finish, as later chapters build on blocks laid in earlier ones. Then, return to those chapters that focus on the specific mediation tools that you need to resolve a current conflict.

Special Features

The idea behind the books in the Briefcase Series is to give you practical information written in a friendly person-to-person style. The chapters are short, deal with tactical issues, and include lots of examples. They also feature numerous boxes designed to give you different types of specific information. Here's a description of the boxes you'll find in this book.



These boxes do just what they say: give you tips and tactics for being smart in the way in which manage and resolve conflicts.



These boxes provide warnings for where things could go wrong when you're trying to resolve a conflict.



Here you'll find how-to hints to make conflict management go a little easier.



Every subject has its special jargon and terms, conflict management especially. These boxes provide definitions of these concepts.



Want to see some ideas for how others have done it? Look for these boxes.



Here you'll find specific procedures you can follow when resolving different kinds of conflicts.



How can you make sure you won't make a mistake when dealing with conflict? But if you see a box like this, it will give you practical advice on how to minimize the possibility.