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## FACILITATING THE JOURNEY TO CONCILIATION

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The possibility of conciliation exists in every situation. Every human thought or action is significant and has very real effects on the situation. The people involved can make wise, responsible choices and they can work together to develop solutions for common problems.

### **What Keeps us Apart?**

"I Am an Island" - As social diversity and globalization impinge more deeply, individuals and groups struggle to assert their own selfhood and identity. To this end, they develop their own sets of principles, values, approaches and solutions which can easily become rigid. We define ourselves in a certain way and everything else is "something else."

"Them and Us" - We have developed the tension between opposites into a high artform. We see ourselves as right, and others simply wrong, or at best, inadequate. We are not trained in the mental agility that is able to see two, three or four sides of an argument at the same time.



"Let's Get Together and Fight" - Society abounds in methods that divide, but is weak in methods that unite. No wonder we experience an increasing inability to come to consensus. Trying to resolve a dispute with another dispute, even disguised as mediation, is not likely to create lasting solutions. Disharmony prevails and we scratch our heads in wonder.

"I Heard What I Said" - We report on many conversations by telling people what we said. Truly hearing a different perspective is not easy when the roar of our own thoughts drowns everything else out. Individuals and groups retreat to the bunker of their own perspective and spend the whole time pushing that and not listening to anything else. Ships pass in the night.

"Who's Got the Power?" - Our relationships and social systems are based, all too often, on power relationships. Resolving difficulties and making decisions has become a matter of gaining or manipulating enough power to have one's own way. People have not been educated to use power in a way that honours and pulls together the creativity of others into approaches that benefit all concerned.

"We Need to Find a Solution and I've Got it" - We tend to approach a lot of our conversations with our positions blazing. We arrive with answers rather than questions. It seems exceedingly difficult to dialogue deeply enough to take the conversation beyond the positions that individual parties bring to the table. If the door is closed; the door is closed.

### **Steps Toward Getting Together**

Form a Common Purpose - Effective conciliation methods are aimed at what is common to a group rather than what divides it, leading to a joint problem-solving approach with the involved parties. This approach defines the situation, identifies the interests and frames questions in such a way as to develop a genuine sense of joint ownership.

**Develop a Genuine Dialogue** - Making real and substantial progress depends on it. The method enables the group to develop an authentic dialogue and create a consensus on the solutions. This approach assumes that unity and consensus are possible from the beginning, while its tools work to realize them.

**Focus on Substance** - The focus of joint problem solving is primarily on the substantial questions under consideration. Processes which enable the group to examine and address their critical issues provide the basis for consensus. Divisions and hostility can be healed effectively by focusing on the primary topics of concern.

**Maintain Healthy Relationships** - To promote conciliation, all the factors involved must come into alignment. Poor communication, bad feelings and dysfunctional relationships can cause any process to go off the rails. Using basic methods of participation ensures positive communication and develops an environment conducive to success.

**Respect Multiple Perspectives** - There are a multiplicity of perspectives involved in any one topic. Any perspectives or ideas that are not included in a conciliation process can undermine the results. When people's ideas are received and respected, the possibility for effective solutions increases.

**Promote Clear Thinking** - Conciliation processes need to keep people grounded in reality, that is, in the substance of the real issues. The method helps identify and maintain the parameters of the task and the process; clarify ideas and relate them to the focus question; and separate objective data from reflections, associations, interpretations and decisions.

**Focus on Forming Consensus** - Consensus, the core of lasting solutions, enables people to move forward together. A consensus articulates the common will of the group. It enables all the



participants to win. Conciliation happens when people think things through to the point where the group is able to make appropriate decisions, plans and commitments.

Presence of Objectivity - The facilitator establishes and maintains the presence of objectivity. While the facilitator enables the process, there is no attempt to influence the substance or the results. The facilitator focuses on guiding a process which will enable people to create the best possible results.

### **Facilitating the Journey Toward Conciliation**

This model evolved as a description of the journey that goes on when any dispute or conflict is resolved resulting in a healing of relationships. The word "conciliation" has roots in the Latin for "unity", and is chosen to describe a process where different perspectives come together to create a larger whole.

#### 1. Initiating the Dialogue

The focus of this step is getting together and agreeing to dialogue. Sometimes this is simple, and sometimes it is necessary to spend a great deal of time and energy building enough trust to proceed.

#### 2. Clarifying the Situation

In this step the background data and information from all perspectives are articulated and shared. This step focuses on facts, quotes, and events. Clarity is an important value.

#### 3. Expressing the Experience

At this stage, internal reactions and feelings are articulated. This may be painful, but is critical in order that the internal impact of the situation can be understood. Acknowledging and respecting each others' experience is sometimes the key to the whole process.

#### 4. Determining the Effects

Now the dialogue probes under the surface to the substantial problems, needs, or underlying issues. It is here that deep mutual understanding of the problem and its impact is created.

#### 5. Generating the Options

When the underlying problems are understood, then alternatives to solve them can be generated. Creativity is the dominant mode here.

#### 6. Creating Resolution

In this stage, the participants weigh up, choose, or pull together the options to agree on mutually satisfactory solutions.

#### 7. Planning for Implementation

Commitment to the solution is generated as concrete action steps to implement the solutions are planned.

Our experience is that when a conflict moves to conciliation, whether it is a minor 2-person dispute, or a long-term multi-party conflict, all of these stages in the journey occur. Knowing this journey helps the facilitator to design a process that guides the journey effectively.

ICA Associates Inc.  
Facilitating Participation  
Conducting Positive Dialogue  
Building Consensus  
Joint Problem Solving  
Developing Creative Strategy