

THE MEDIATOR

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“Making peace, one person at a time”

May-June, 2009

Part II: You've forgiven. Now what?

By John Bertschler, PhD

George Bernard Shaw wrote that we should always let our flattery be seen through, because what *really* flatters someone is that you think him worth flattering. If your partner brings you a single rose, your thought is never on the value of the flower but the fact that he is thinking of you and trying to please you.

So it is, unfortunately, also with the hurts we inflict on one another. The offenses, slight or catastrophic, hurt not only because of the magnitude of the deeds themselves, but because they show that people who are supposed to care about us often do not. Instead they think of themselves first, and may do things while knowing how painful they will be for their significant others. What *really* hurts is that they think it's all right to do such a thing.

We sometimes hear, “It's not the money; it's the principle of the thing.” The unspoken next thought usually goes, “\$100 won't make or break me, but I don't need people in my life who would violate our relationship for a lousy \$100.” In the same way we don't need people in our lives who hurt us, especially those who do so repeatedly or in full knowledge of the hurt being done.

My last article discussed the dynamics of forgiveness: what has to happen in moving from hurt and alienation to forgiveness and reconciliation. What comes next is perhaps even more crucial: if I do forgive the other person, does that mean we will (or even should) resume our relationship? How do I weigh the value of the relationship (when it is working well) against the possibility of further damage?

People know how good relationships have been at times and how horrifically painful they have been at other times. They may have heard abject apologies for earlier hurts as well as promises of “changing,” making amends, and never repeating the offense. Sadly, they may have seen the cycle more than once.

Some people want to assure a friend that this time change is for real, **or** that it's just another empty promise waiting to be broken. But most times we can't predict the future and can only make educated guesses about whether things will be different this time. Here are a few guidelines to remember when facing this crucial decision.

1) Get help. Although ultimately your decision and you have to live with the consequences, don't decide to reconcile or not without input of someone who cares about you unambiguously. If you're facing such a major question, whatever brought you to this place has probably disoriented you and rendered your judgment less sound.

2) Don't decide solely on external/material outcomes. I know. Easy for me to say. A cost may well be attached to leaving a relationship, e.g. loss of companionship or loss of income/life style. But ask yourself whether staying in that relationship involves selling your happiness (or even your safety) for the sake of material comforts.

3) It's not supposed to be this difficult. Sure, every relationship has its challenges and times that aren't so good. We hope they are outweighed by the good things that come to couples in healthy relationships. If the difficulties far outweigh the benefits, something is way wrong.

4) Probation office is not a fun place. When we forgive and reconcile, it is usually with expectations and boundaries. This is also common and natural. We say “I forgive you and we can resume the relationship, but if you do X again (or if you stop doing Y as you promised), then it's over. This is sometimes a necessary but uneasy arrangement. It makes one person feel as if he/she is on probation and the other as if he/she must be the probation officer. Neither of you set out to have such an arrangement when you got together, and it's uncomfortable. If either of you can't stand that reality, it may be preferable not to reconcile.

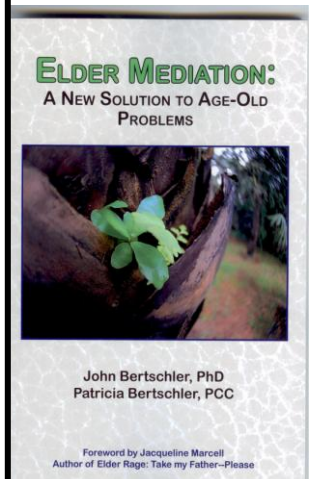
2009 CALENDAR

June 25-26 Basic Mediation. (12 hours). John Bertschler, PhD and Mark Newton, JD. 8:30 – 4 daily. \$250.

July 9, 10, 15, 16, 17 Divorce and Family Mediation Training. \$725. John Bertschler and Mark Newton, JD. 8:00 – 5 PM daily

October 2 Advanced Elder Mediation. 6 hrs 8:30 – 4:00. BENHA approval # 05-L-09. \$100.

Our second book, *Elder Mediation: A New Solution to Age-Old Problems*, has arrived. With contributions from 18 mediators around the world, our book offers insight into conducting a solid **intake, ethics, imbalance of power, styles of mediation and 55 marketing tips to build your practice.** To download an order form, please visit www.ncsmmediation.com.



Build a Business Marketing Tip...

Introduce yourself to law enforcement. Because they are often called to homes in which great conflict occurs, you may want to make yourself available to police and firefighter departments.