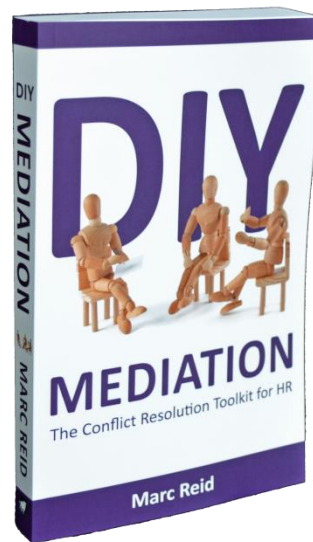


This is the first chapter of the book '*DIY Mediation. The Conflict Resolution Toolkit for HR*' by Marc Reid. The book can be purchased [here](#).



## Section 1 – Introduction

### What this book is about

Conflict is an inescapable element of every workplace. Most of the time it is minor – a disagreement over how to address a problem, a misunderstanding on what was wanted, some feedback that is poorly communicated. In nearly all these situations the people involved will sort it out themselves and that will be the end of it. Where HR comes into it is when it is not sorted. The people with the issue and their line manager have not been able to nip it in the bud and it lands on your desk as an employee relations issue to resolve.

So what do you do? Of course you can reach for your policies and procedures folder to pull out the company grievance policy. How many of those day-to-day relationship issues though can really be sorted with the formal process? You could try mediation. Do you really need though at this stage to bring someone else in to mediate? It's a relatively low-level issue at the moment. After all, if you were rewiring your house you'd call in an electrician, but to change a lightbulb or replace a plug you'd do it yourself, wouldn't you? But you would still need to know what you were doing. If you put the wrong wire in the wrong terminal you could end up with a serious situation.

This is how *DIY Mediation* came about. Having worked as a professional mediator and previously in HR, I know that there are many HR professionals out there who could be capable of dealing with low-level conflict. Yet they haven't been given the guidance or framework – a roadmap of what you need and how to do it, just as you have to know what tools you need and which wire goes where when rewiring a plug. That's what this book is about. It is *not* about training you to be a professional mediator. It is about giving you the necessary know-how and framework to use a mediation-style approach to nip low-level conflict in the bud.

I've taken the essence of what I have learned as a mediator and turned it into a pragmatic approach, combining a set of critical skills and a simple process that can be easily picked up and put into practice quickly. The emphasis in this book is very much on practical application. I've therefore given you lots of tools that can be useful in applying DIY Mediation. If you are looking for theoretical or academic complexity then you are likely to be disappointed. I've touched on some theory but only to the extent that it adds to your practical understanding and makes you more effective in using DIY Mediation. Should you want the more in-depth, full mediator's manual complete with theory there are other books out there for you. However, if you are someone who wants to grow their toolbox with practical options to support line managers and employees, then DIY Mediation is the right book for you.

### **Why I wrote this book**

I put together the AGREE model which forms the basis for the DIY Mediation approach some years ago and have been training HR and line managers in its use ever since. I had never intended to start training others but often in my mediation work I saw conflict escalate as opportunities were missed for it to be nipped in the bud. The competence and confidence were lacking to make the necessary timely intervention. That is when I put together the model and developed the training. The feedback has been excellent. Participants in the workshop really value the simple approach and feel it is something they can usefully apply in the workplace. The next step was to try to spread the message wider and a book was the obvious choice. I was always reluctant to say I was training people in 'mediation' because to do full mediation training takes a lot longer than the workshops I was running. When I needed a name for the book therefore I came up with DIY Mediation as that fits with the approach I am advocating. It takes the essence of mediation but makes it simple and pragmatic such that people can use it as part of their day-to-day job – literally a 'do it yourself' approach.

### **Who can use DIY Mediation?**

DIY Mediation is primarily intended for use by HR professionals. You might be an HR manager with responsibility for supporting the line or an HR consultant providing support to smaller companies. It is straightforward enough for line managers to use themselves but the focus in this book is on providing a conflict resolution toolkit for the HR professional. For DIY Mediation to work, you should follow the process and apply the skills. This won't necessarily result in a resolution to the conflict between the participants – in the end it is their responsibility to find a solution. But it gives you an approach that if used correctly gives the participants every possibility to resolve their issues. Most people can follow a process but the more challenging part is the skills. In Section 3 I cover the key skills you will need. The extent to which you can develop these skills will be the primary factor in determining your success.

The DIY Mediation approach is based on you acting as an impartial facilitator, helping the participants in the conflict find a way forward themselves. Having now trained hundreds of people in this approach and seen them try it out through role play, it is clear that some are simply not comfortable with this style. This is not surprising. We have been trained over many years as line and HR to 'sort things out'. So standing back and facilitating is a different approach that takes time to get used to. It takes practice – some people will pick it up fairly easily, others realise it is simply not for them and will look to other options. This could be asking someone who is confident in this

approach to help them or considering the other options available. In Section 2 part 1 we look at what other options are open to HR and the manager alongside DIY Mediation.

### **When should you use DIY Mediation?**

The general rule of thumb is that the earlier a problem can be addressed the more chance you have of resolving it. The vast majority of conflicts that arise will be resolved by the individuals themselves. However, if they can't resolve it, more often than not the first port of call will be the line manager – or the observant line manager may notice that something is amiss before any of the individuals alert them to it. Once the issue has been flagged the manager will need to decide their response. Section 2 part 1 introduces you to the Roadmap for Appropriate Intervention, which gives options on dealing with conflict at different stages. This is a useful guide but ultimately it is normally down to you and / or the manager to decide when the individuals are not going to resolve it themselves. At that point an intervention is needed. The attraction of using an informal approach such as DIY Mediation is that it can be set up very quickly and doesn't involve anyone else, thereby preventing the kind of escalation that a formal process would entail.

As a guide, therefore, here are five questions to help you decide if it is time to use DIY Mediation. If the answer to most of these is 'yes' then it is probably appropriate:

- Have the individuals tried to resolve it themselves but are not able to do so?
- Is the issue causing the conflict non-binary i.e. there is not a simple yes / no or right / wrong?
- If not addressed could the issue escalate and cause further damage?
- There is no simple solution that could be implemented which would fully resolve the issue?
- Do you feel sufficiently competent and confident to start the process?

Most conflicts end up being serious as they have not been addressed early enough. This is often because the person responsible for addressing it has either not recognised the issue or has recognised it and *avoided* dealing with it. An avoiding strategy may be appropriate if you have decided this is the most appropriate option. However, simply ignoring the problem and hoping it will go away is inevitably going to lead to conflict escalation and more problems down the line. To summarise, intervene earlier rather than later so you can nip conflict in the bud and avoid additional problems for yourself, the organisation and more pain for the people involved.

### **How to use this book**

There are three main sections to this book which I've titled The Issue, The Skills and The Process. Throughout I give examples to demonstrate practical application and many of these refer to a case study which runs through the book. If, once you've read the book, you want a rapid reminder of the key points there is a quick reference section at the end which gives you the key messages in double-quick time.

In The Issue section I give you an understanding of conflict. I know what it is like working in a busy HR environment; you'll have little time to spare, so I've split the section into two – what you *should* know and what is *useful* to know. If you are really desperate to get on with the nuts and bolts of DIY Mediation you can always skip part 2 and instead jump ahead to The Skills. Part 1 looks at what

conflict is, what indicates there could be conflict and options for tackling it. Part 2 explores conflict in more depth, looks at why it is important we deal with it and considers how people respond to conflict differently.

The Skills section takes you through what I consider the four key skills you need when using DIY Mediation. These are Questioning, Active Listening, Assertive Communication and Impartiality. I'll show you what the important elements are of these skills and provide several helpful tools to make applying the skills that much easier.

The section on The Process introduces you to the AGREE model and takes you through the five phases in detail. Each phase includes guidance on what to look out for and tips on how to tackle the likely situations you will experience. I take you through the meeting structure within which you apply the model and will show you how the model can be applied when you are not helping others resolve an issue but you are part of the conflict or potential conflict yourself – what we think of as 'difficult conversations'. I'll look at generic types of difficult behaviour and finish up with my top five strategies for being a truly competent DIY Mediation practitioner.

Once you've got to grips with the skills and process for DIY Mediation, you can test yourself with our online assessment. Get the questions right and you'll receive your DIY Mediation certificate. Details on how to access the assessment are in Appendix Six.

### **The case study**

Throughout this book I'll refer to a simple case study which illustrates a typical workplace conflict. It is actually based on a real-life situation which in the end needed full mediation to help the participants resolve the conflict and move forward. I've adapted the actual situation (and obviously changed the details to assure anonymity) to show how DIY Mediation could have been used to nip the conflict in the bud. A transcript of key sections of the DIY Mediation undertaken by the HR manager, Mark, is contained in Appendix One. The scenario concerns Barb and Sue, two Sales Support Officers in a medium-sized company who have fallen out and are finding it impossible to work together. Their line manager, Chris, tried to address the situation by telling them to 'sort it out' but the situation had only worsened. Chris approached Mark, his HR contact, for help. As Mark had recently read DIY Mediation he was well equipped to support the situation!

I hope you find this book useful. In my daily work I frequently see the amazing benefits of using a mediation-style approach for those involved in conflict. If DIY Mediation helps you to benefit others in a similar way then I've done my job.