

Unsure about mediation?

I don't think I've ever known someone offered mediation to reply 'oh yes please I'd really love to do that'. This is not surprising. Most people's preferred way to spend a day is not to sit in a room and have a conversation with someone they have fallen out with. It's perfectly normal to be reticent, to give mediation serious thought before agreeing and to reflect whether it will be worth the effort. To help you decide if mediation is right for you here are some of the reasons people have said why they are unsure and my response to this.



Marc Reid, Mediation4

I'm not the one to blame

Of course it feels unfair that you are being asked to mediate when you believe the situation was caused by the other person. In mediation the focus is on how the relationship can be better going forward for both of you. So we don't need to worry about where blame lies. The other person may not even be aware of how you view them and why you see them to be at fault. Mediation gives you the opportunity to express your concerns so the two of you can find a better way forward.

I don't think it will work

It's not surprising you are sceptical about possible success – most people are. You've probably been enduring the pain of a difficult relationship for ages and nothing you've tried has worked. You don't have to believe mediation will work – all we ask is that you give the process a try and give it your best shot. Actually what I've found when people do mediate there is a positive outcome almost every time. It's unlikely you'll end up best of buddies but you should be able to find a way the two of you can work together on a professional basis.

I don't want to talk to them

You've been telling HR for ages that it's impossible to talk to the other person and now they ask you to sit down and talk to them! It sounds like an odd way to sort things out but that's where the mediator will help. The mediator will take you through the structured process and will support you both equally in having the conversation. I'm not saying it will be easy – it won't. But what I've seen is that whilst it is really tough to begin with, normally as we move through the process things become much easier.

I'd rather raise a grievance

This option is always open to you, it's not a choice of one or the other. Just be aware of what is involved in the grievance – there will be a full investigation and an appointed manager will look at the evidence and make a decision about whether the grievance will be upheld. It may go your way, it may not. Either way the process is likely to worsen the situation between you and the other person and you may still have no option but to work with them. One way a mediation differs is that it is forward looking. Yes we will talk about what has happened, but not to decide right or wrong as would happen in a grievance, but to understand what has not worked so the two of you can agree how to do things differently in future. Mediation is also quicker, confidential and informal, so for issues about a difficult relationship, it is normally worth trying.

I think it will be OK, I'll just avoid them / won't say anything

That's possible but you haven't managed to do this to date. Why do you expect it to be different in the future? Also how feasible is this in your roles? Of course if there is no need for any interaction between you then avoidance is a possibility. But wouldn't it feel better to resolve the issue rather than just avoid it? In most cases avoiding is only postponing the issue and can even lead to escalation. I always say the earlier you mediate the better as finding a way forward is much harder when the conflict has become entrenched.

It's gone too far / it's too late

This picks up on my last point. It is definitely harder to find a way forward when the conflict has escalated but not impossible. All it takes is a willingness on both sides to want to make it work. Mediation has been successful even after painful, divisive grievance processes. In the end you just need to ask yourself what you have got to lose? Look at your options. Mediation will be one day of your time – is it worth that to have a chance of finding a resolution?

I'd do it but I don't think they will

Fine, that's all we ask. If you are willing to give it a go then the mediator will check with the other person to see if they are also willing. If so then it will happen, if not it won't happen as we can only mediate if both people are ready to give it a try.

The manager / HR tried to mediate. It didn't work.

It's great that someone has tried to help. In many cases this is all that is needed to help people find a way forward but sometimes it doesn't work and that's when you need some extra help. Some relationships are more complex, or the conflict has escalated, or you really need someone completely independent. That's when it is helpful to bring in someone who has some additional expertise and experience to help you.

It's not that bad that we need to mediate

You may not see it as too serious at the moment but it could worsen and as I said above, the earlier you act the better. Also, presumably someone has suggested mediation, so clearly they think the issue is significant enough for mediation to be considered. But think too why does the situation have to be serious to have a conversation? That's all mediation is, having a conversation with the help of someone to facilitate.

Hopefully this has helped you clarify your uncertainty. If you are still not sure, find out more about mediation. There is loads of information on the internet and ask your HR team or speak to the proposed mediator, they will normally be willing to talk through any concerns you might have. Or give me a call – I'm always happy to have a confidential chat.