

Reflections on Certification

When my colleague Rob Ketcham first asked me to speak about my certification experience, I smiled with wry amusement. Rob knows I suffer from test anxiety, and for that reason, I resisted the assessment process. I don't test particularly well, and I had already endured PSATs, SATs, GREs, Miller Analogies, LSATs, and Bar Exams in two different jurisdictions! After passing the Maryland Bar exam, I promised myself "No more tests!"

"Why should I take another assessment which really won't give me anything I don't already have?" I asked myself.

To my great surprise, I found that the obvious answer was the true one for me: personal and professional growth.

In thinking about how this growth happens during the process, four particular attributes—and benefits--of the assessment process came to mind.

First is the foundation of the process: the one page self-statement. Short is hard. It requires you to pare down to the bare bones. I found the experience enormously helpful in articulating what I believe the process of mediation is about and why. And the sense in which the statement is now a part of myself is invaluable in becoming purposeful during practice. What's more, for someone with test anxiety, the exercise shifted the focus from external assessment to internal discovery.

Second is the experience of the role play, itself. Mediation is a very forgiving process, and this truth is personified in the role players. They are wonderful, forgiving, supportive and encouraging. The point, after all, is to learn. And, in their roles, I have found, they are authentic. The conversation really does belong to them, and, in their roles, they are looking for some gain for their effort. They were all generous and constructive in sharing the impact of my moves as mediator in helping them to realize their purpose.

Third, were the assessors who engaged me as wise mentors in deep reflection about what just played out in this process we call mediation and what the answer to that question might mean for practice. They shared with me a wealth of feedback, most of which helped me to find my own way forward to do better whatever it was I thought I was trying to.

Even where, once or twice, I may have disagreed with perspectives shared by the assessors, the conversation helped to make clear a richness of possibility in our differences. It's not about one right way. Like branches shooting in different directions from a common trunk rooted in fertile soil, I was deeply appreciative that we all shared a fundamental, deep respect for the individuals who were trusting us to help them make their own decisions.

Finally, the fourth benefit of the process was personal. I valued the opportunity through the certification process to discover changes that might make me better as a mediator. I came to appreciate, though, that, in many cases, these discoveries mirrored changes that might make me more effective in other roles with family and friends.

Credibility, respect of my peers, validation: all are worthwhile benefits of the process. For me, the deepest benefit was an awareness that there is an integration between who I am or try to be both as a mediator and as a person: attentive, empathic, curious, responsive, and caring.