

MEDIATIVE COACHING

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The 1978 Camp David retreat is an extraordinary example of the successful integration of coaching, mediation, and careful management of physical circumstances. From the severity of the challenges, the success of the event, and the sadness of later failures at resolution, principles of successful Mediative Coaching were revealed.

The stakes were high; repeated wars between Israel and Arab states, acts of terrorism, denials of Israel's right to exist, and Arab civil liberties were persistent problems not resolved through "business as usual" diplomacy and avoidance. Parties continued to go their own way, settle for shallow relationships, and blur complexities with rhetoric. Physical isolation and commitment to mediation were the keys. Repeated shifts in internal operations kept things moving, as well as a variety of approaches within and outside traditional frameworks of advice, management and diplomacy. U.S. President Jimmy Carter was the mediator. Menachim Begin and Anwar Sadat, the leaders of Israel and Egypt were the protagonists.

Fifteen Principles of Mediative Coaching

Principle 1: SHARED REALITY, UNCHARACTERISTIC STRATEGY, AND PERIODIC RESTRUCTURE.

Beginning with Sedat's visit to Jerusalem and ending with a dramatic televised embrace, the Camp David Conference established some fundamental conditions for successful mediation in complex circumstances. A 'Shared Reality' was made the basis for planning and action. The parties came to appreciate that their reality was not the only one -- things really were different according to where you sat. 'Uncharacteristic Strategies' for meeting, communicating, and bridging differences were made legitimate. 'Periodic Restructure' of ideas, groups, time, and physical setting kept energy levels high and focused both on the work to be done and the common humanity of the participants. These conditions helped get the job done at the conference.

Principle 2: TRUSTED AND NEUTRAL MEDIATOR TO ORCHESTRATE DIRECT AND INDIRECT COMMUNICATION.

In a pluralistic world, conflict is inevitable. A leader's talent is required in mediating disputes as much as in deciding who is right and who is wrong. This calls for sensitivity, a sense of timing, integrity, patience, and acceptability as controller of the work environment.

"Review of the Summit's opening days convinced the US that Begin and Sadat were disagreeing so sharply on basic issues that it would be wise to quit holding joint sessions. Instead Carter began conducting what is known in diplomacy as 'proximity talks'. Sadat and Begin were in lodges less than one hundred yards apart and Carter was able to move easily from a bilateral conversation with one to a chat with the other. Meanwhile, trilateral meetings continued between ministerial level officials."

Principle 3. NORMAL HIERARCHICAL PROTOCOLS BETWEEN HIERARCHICAL LEVELS AND BETWEEN FUNCTIONS ARE SUSPENDED.

Usually policy makers make policy and workers do the work. Often each devalues the other's perspective, consensus is not achieved, and execution misses the intent of policy. When policy makers and workers collaborate at both levels of work and policy, the effect is a lessening of adversarial dynamics implicit in a 'propose-disclose' system, and forward movements based on a shared reality. At the least there is greater understanding and at the best there is learning and successful action.

"Ignoring protocol, Carter deals not with leaders, but with their aides to work out technical details. He worked with US as well as Israeli aides -- keeping them in session for 10+ hours, sending out for tea and sandwiches."

Principle 4. MEDIATOR CONTROLS TIME LIMITS TO INTRODUCE A SENSE OF URGENCY

Control of time and space is essential to effective mediation. This makes sense, since the parties' normal practices with regard to the use of time and space led them to their current difficulties. The logic applies to the resolution of any long standing organizational conflict -- whether or not the lines are as clearly drawn as they were at Camp David.

"When the talks bogged down, Carter finally wondered whether Sadat and Begin might be holding a few concessions in reserve, to play if necessary in the final crucial stage of the talks. The President thus came to a vital decision. He would propose that the Summit end Sunday whether or not agreement had been reached."

Principle 5. PHYSICAL ISOLATION.

Physical Isolation allows more flexibility and less posturing, and people concentrate on issues at hand. It was harder to sustain one's avoidance of the obvious and new allegiances could be formed within the isolated group.

"Never in the history of modern or international negotiations have leaders been so isolated for so long in so single-minded an attempt to resolve the antagonisms that divided them."

Principle 6. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD IS SUSPENDED.

Suspense put pressure on performance. Thinking could happen before rather than after politics. Boundaries of the conflict, although artificial, were made clear for the moment--and being clear, were more accessible to negotiation or problem solving.

"Nobody was ever sure whether what one high US aide called 'Carter's gigantic effort' was succeeding, or if there was serious trouble. Except for White House Secretary Jody Powell's terse briefing on non-substantive matters, there was nothing to go on. Nothing for a frustrated

world-wide press corps of some 350 to report. Unusual was the meeting's nearly total isolation from the probes of the world's press. It may well have been the rule of strict secrecy that enabled the conference to go on as long as it did and thus made possible the dramatic turnabout period. Not having to face a barrage of questions from newsmen, the participants had no need to posture or issue self-serving, and, sometimes, inflammatory statements."

Principle 7. INTEREST-BASED, MEDIATOR CONTROLLED PROPOSALS WRITTEN OVER AND OVER.

They used a single text negotiation strategy suggested by Professor Roger Fisher of Harvard Law School. This method lets people make repeated, unbinding additions to a single document, and permits people with different interests and power to state their positions, remain flexible, and gradually accumulate agreements. The mediator controls the process and presents it for a 'yes-no' only when convinced it cannot go further.

"Aide Harold Saunders, after night-long labors, produces a first draft of American proposals. Americans spent eleven days working through three more drafts. There were ultimately twenty three."

Principle 8. SPIRITUALITY OF KEY ACTORS IS A REQUIRED FOREGROUND.

The Camp David conference allowed the parties to use the conceptual, emotional, and procedural resources at their disposal. The spirituality of the main players, their ability to agree on higher values even as they disputed issues, provided a further bridge. The crisis of modern times is often referred to as a crisis of spirit. This spirituality, usually unexpressed in government and business offices, was present at Camp David and seemed to ease surface tensions.

"What was perhaps most unusual of all was the very cast of characters. For Carter, a born-again Baptist, the strength of his faith may have inspired him to convene the session even while knowing its possible collapse would dim further hopes for peace. As Carter perhaps optimistically said, 'the potential benefit--a major step toward resolving the Arab/Israeli conflict was greater than the risk.'"

Principle 9: PLANNED INFORMALITY TO INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY AND SPONTANEOUS BEHAVIOR AND SOFTENING OF INTERPERSONAL BOUNDARIES.

The novelty of it drew attention and it was easier to behave outside of one's role. In one sense it released energy for people to "be" with each other in addition to "doing" with each other. This in itself unified the group to its purpose.

"They were working under highly unusual conditions. In contrast to the serious items on the table was the bucolic setting of Camp David with an enchanting hint of autumn in the air. The mood of informality was evident from the participants' attire. Instead of the pinstripe suite of traditional diplomacy, Carter wore faded denims, an old cardigan and comfortable sneakers. Sadat at in his elegantly tailored Safari suits and sport coats resembled a continental taking the waters at a spa. Even Begin, whose sartorial formality is one of his trademarks, occasionally shed his coat and tie. Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dyan and Defense Minister Ezra Weizmann sported wind breakers bearing the Camp David seal and US security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski wore a submariner's jacket at several sessions."

Principle 10. CONTINUOUS JUXTAPOSITION OF PEACE WITH ITS OPPOSITE.

The theme was Peace without Victory. Forward movement was paradoxical. It helped to experience-- the certain virtue of peace and the reality of bloodshed at the same time.

"On the Summit's first weekend the participants took a respite from diplomacy when Carter, at military buff Begin's request, organized a three and a half hour excursion to the Gettysburg Civil War battlefield, some seventeen miles north of Camp David. The group viewed monuments and century old cannons. Carter attempted to lighten the mood by joking that the gun had a range of three miles vs. three hundred to four hundred yards for the cluster bombs that the U.S. sold to Israel after the 1973 war. Sadat and Begin somehow managed to laugh."

Principle 11. MANY MEETINGS AMONG AND BETWEEN LEVELS OF AUTHORITY AT THE SAME TIME.

Complicated problems called for networked communication. In the past there had been so many unpredictable and unintended consequences of discussions that conventional groupings at Camp David would have resulted in more misunderstanding. People were, therefore, permitted to assemble as need suggested.

"On Wednesday Powell was more guarded than ever at his briefing. He talked of 'final stages'. He said that so many meetings were taking place simultaneously that 'I can't imagine any more intensive period of discussions.'"

Principle 12. TENSION RELEASE MECHANISMS ARE EASILY AVAILABLE.

Bikes, walks, movies, religious experiences -- Tension release mechanisms were readily available.

Stress can be avoided or used as the basis for coaching transformation and mediating disputes. Without play there is an aggressive convergence on work, duty, and responsibility. People lose their liveliness, and interest in learning diminishes. The conference successfully combined opportunities for work and play -- for tensing against and relaxing from demands of work and personal contact.

"The problem apparently was Sadat's mounting frustration and Begin's adamant refusal to accept the principle of Arab sovereignty over the West Bank. It took a talk with Dayan and a long walk with Carter before Sadat cooled off and the crisis passed."

Principle 13. PHYSICAL QUARTERS ENABLE PERSONAL CONTACT.

Rustic, accessible quarters kept people vulnerable to one another personally. Without vulnerability, there is little compassion and people are left only with threat as a means of getting attention.

"The task apparently was to draft some sort of statement, but Carter continued meeting with Begin and Sadat. One evening, he dropped by Begin's lodge. The following morning he strolled with Sadat for more than an hour along Camp David's wooded trails."

Principle 14. DRAMATICALLY REDUCED CONTACT WITH HIGHER OFFICIALS AND HIERARCHIES NOT PRESENT.

Conflict resolution sometimes calls for controlled communication. Reduced contact with their governments permitted secret diplomacy as well as open mediation. The system learning studied itself as it does it's work. Cutting off this contact advanced the proceedings.

"After advocating open diplomacy in his election campaign and first months in office, Carter proved himself a master of the old art of secret negotiations. He even managed to get silence from the often leak-prone Israelis. Premier Begin, for example, calmly told his colleagues in Jerusalem by telephone that he could not say much about the talks because Carter had asked him not to. When Defense Minister Weizmann was asked by a newsman how the Israelis were doing, he cryptically responded, 'we are doing.'"

Principle 15. CLARIFY THE END PRODUCT

While exploration and learning were fundamental to the process, the end product, "peace with justice" for all sides was clear from the beginning. Without goals there could have been learning without results. An organization that learns also needs to perform.

"At a showing of the movie 'Patton', Weizman makes a graphic point: "If this thing falls apart this is what we're going to have -- another war."

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Camp David was different. Part of the success was luck -- partly because the time was right, partly because of the political pressures on Sadat, Begin and Carter. But much credit is due to the way the conference was run. Whether Carter invented his method as he went along or orchestrated it is irrelevant. Despite the struggle and risk, it worked.

Much of what he did is described above and there is reason to believe that these conditions can be recreated by a powerful, third party mediator in any group with important work to do and conflicts to resolve. While leaders of states and institutions try to mediate differences, they rarely succeed because of the difficulty maintaining a neutral stance. A third party is the key -- either a neutral or someone involved, trusted, and able to get parties to take full responsibility for the substance and process of their discussions.

At Camp David the mediator enabled parties to narrow the gap between the expectations of one group and inflexibility of the other. He closed issues and started movement on others. He explored and narrowed differences. He furnished each side with a realistic look at their demands and the possibility of meeting them. He gave both parties some idea of how their positions looked to a third person, and when either side did not feel free to have private meetings, the mediator provided a safe conduit through which private positions could be taken. The mediator served as a catalyst and translated positions and proposal into understandable terms, some attainable in whole or in part, and some not. He made suggestions and exerted pressure. This exercise we believe points the way for governments and corporations to find a new way to do business and make decisions.

Camp David is a glimpse of the possible in human organization. Conditions orchestrated by Carter allowed the unusual to happen -- initiation from top down and bottom up simultaneously made for fast, open communication from different points of view. Natural surroundings and the stimulating pace fostered imaginative as well as logical thought. The Mission was conveyed in ways both clear and inspirational -- informality and personalization made for a 'human', not aggressive, atmosphere. The up/one down relationships were managed. They recognized that only equals will cooperate -- there was a search for alternative forms of management. Reorganization of people, time, and schedules was legitimate. The approach was experimental, not strictly preplanned. All the meetings, all the

information, all the scheduling gave people as much information as possible. Beliefs about what should be were continuously challenged by what was.

Gregory Bateson said that, "We create the world we perceive -- not because there is no reality outside our head -- the Vietnam War was wrong." The Iraq war was wrong, we are destroying our eco-system, and therefore ourselves.