

A story is like water  
that you heat for your bath.  
It takes messages between the fire  
and your skin, It lets them meet,  
and it cleans you!  
Very few can sit down  
in the middle of the fire itself  
like a salamander or Abraham.  
We need intermediaries.  
Jalāl ad-din Rumi (1207 - 1273)



Image: [Salamander from The Story of Alchemy and the Beginnings of Chemistry](#)

Image source: M. M. Pattison Muir [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

## The Intermediary

One of the most welcomed developments over the 30 years has been the development of mediation. The law focuses on what is wrong and offers a remedy. Mediation focuses on what is possible and builds a solution. Both have a place but one is infinitely more positive than the other.

Most people think that mediation is a legal process but it is a human process designed to resolve conflict which has become a dispute. Conflict is part of our nature and it is the fuel for creativity and innovation. Both are essential to our well being.

The feelings we have about “the experience” or dispute come from our

interpretation and a very particular way of perceiving the experience. Our own. If we can acknowledge that everyone believes that their actions are reasonable, we are half way there. If we can go one step further and take the risk of saying “tell me why you feel that way?” Then we might learn something that will change our point of view. We might not like the answer; we don’t have to agree with the answer but we should listen to the story and be willing to understand.

It’s human nature to state our position over and over again. We want our side of the story to be heard in order to feel our experience validated. Very often, that is all we need. Until that story is heard it will go around and around



getting stronger and angrier with each revolution. Until something changes there can be no resolution.

Change brings conflict and change is what resolves it.

Change is inevitable and most of the time it will come about unannounced, unexpectedly. Other times, we can sense its approach, smoke- signalling the end of a commitment, the arrival of an overdue finale. We ignore the signs in the hope that we are mistaken.

Eventually our disappointment overshadows memories of all the good feelings we had when we engaged and committed to a contract or relationship. They are forgotten and replaced by new, less comfortable feelings of anger, fear and mistrust. If they remain unacknowledged, eventually they become an unremitting cycle of complexity and confusion. It's simple, there is no conflict without emotion and emotions are messy.

One way to stop the pain and confusion is to hand the decision to a judge. An imposed decision is one way out but it can leave people feeling neither winner nor loser.

In mediation, however, negotiation includes both parties telling their stories. Each has the opportunity to be heard, to express their valid and personal view. By narrating their experience, creativity flows and the

anger, fear and mistrust are slowly replaced with acceptance and willingness to find agreement. People need help to complete the process and they need to know that the mediator has no agenda of her own. It is my job to steer the parties towards agreement. The outcome is that both parties can maintain their dignity.

I am an intermediary. The conduit for understanding that brings acceptance and creates reasoning which people can buy into. Mediation is a conversation and an opportunity to be entirely human, productive and efficient through our innate creativity. Creativity is the best of human nature and conflict has an important place for increasing our understanding and acknowledgment.

Amanda Bucklow

\*\*\*\*\*

There may be times over the holidays when you are sitting in the middle of the 'fire'. You may find some of the tips and activities over the next few days helpful in creating opportunities to listen to someone's story about their experiences in 2018, their hopes and fears for the coming year.