

NM ADR NEWS

Encouraging communication through mutual respect

Fall 2008

ADR CURRENT EVENTS AND TRAINING UPDATE

About the OADPR

The 2007 Governmental Dispute Prevention & Resolution Act (GDPRA) created the OADPR to promote early dispute resolution and positive collaboration among state employees and agencies through the development and support of effective and efficient programs and policies. The Office operates as a Bureau of the Risk Management Division (RMD) of the General Services Department (GSD).

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NEW MEXICO
GENERAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

1. MONTHLY BROWN BAG LUNCH PRESENTATION SERIES

Lunch time presentations on ADR-related topics by subject matter experts; participants will receive practical information for immediate use. Upcoming presentations:

- **November:** Wednesday, November 12th, 2008, 12:00 – 1:00 PM
Presenter: Christopher Venegas, “The Mediation Process at the NM Human Rights Bureau;” (Location: NM Museum of Natural History & Science, 1st floor “multi-purpose” room near entrance, Albuquerque)
- **December:** Wednesday, December 3rd, 2008, 12:00 – 1:00 PM
Presenter: Deer Oaks EAP, “Team Building in the Workplace.” (Location: Joseph Montoya Bldg., 1st Floor Bid Room near entrance, Santa Fe)

2. MEDIATION TRAINING AT SF COMMUNITY COLLEGE

On September 29 – October, 3, 2008, the GSD/RMD ADR Bureau partnered with SFCC to present a 40-hour customized course to enhance state employees’ conflict resolution and mediation skills, and increase the overall productivity and effectiveness of state agencies and organizations. Participants earned 3 college credits for the course, as well as for ADR-related volunteer service. 21 state employees participated from the following 13 organizations, including: DOT, HSD, Adm. Office of the DA’s, CYFD, DCA, GSD, DPS, Agency on Aging & Long-Term Services, WCA, EMNRD, SF Municipal Court, SFCC, SF Public Schools.

Next training: April 2009

3. LABOR MANAGEMENT RELATIONS TRAINING

The Albuquerque Area Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, in partnership with state government, presented a 3-day training program on October 10, 15, & 16, 2008 in Albuquerque. This no-cost training, presented to managers from agencies with collective bargaining agreements in place, was designed to improve labor-management relationships by helping labor and management develop collaborative problem-solving approaches. Skills learned in this training will enable participants to jointly respond to change and makes future mediation efforts more effective. 37 state employees participated from the following 14 organizations, including: ALTSD, CYFD, DOH, DoIT, DOT, DVR, GSD, HSD, MLK Comm., NM Tech, PELRB, PRC, RLD, and WCA.

Next training: Advanced Labor Management Relations Facilitation, Spring 2009

Please contact our Office for more information on any of the above items.

Empathy at Work – Developing Skills to Understand Other People

"Tom is a great accountant, but his 'people' skills hold him back. I can't see how he'll ever be promoted unless he does something about it." Many of us know people who have reached a certain point in their careers because they have excellent technical skills - but they somehow don't get along with team members, because their people skills lag far behind their other job skills. This might be due to the insensitive manner in which they ask co-workers for things, the way they never seem to listen to what others say, or their intolerance for other working approaches. Do you have colleagues like Tom? Or are you, perhaps, like Tom? Workers with poor people skills can often find themselves in the middle of unnecessary conflict. This can be exhausting and stressful for all concerned, and it can destroy even the best laid work plans. Many people are confident that they can develop new technical skills and knowledge through training and experience. However, there's a common belief that "you are how you are" when it comes to people skills - or "soft" skills - and that there's little or nothing you can do to change these. Fortunately, this is far from true. And a great place to start improving soft skills is by developing the ability to empathize with others.

What Is Empathy?

Empathy is simply recognizing emotions in others, and being able to "put yourself in another person's shoes" - understanding the other person's perspective and reality. To be empathic, you have to think beyond yourself and your own concerns. Once you see beyond your own world, you'll realize that there's so much to discover and appreciate! People who are accused of being egotistical and selfish, or lacking perspective, have often missed the big picture: that they are just single individuals in a world with billions of other people (although, yes, this can be overwhelming if you think about it too long!) If you've been called any of these things, then remind yourself that the world is full of other people, and you can't escape their influence on your life. It's far better to accept this, and to decide to build relationships and understanding, rather than try to stand alone all of the time.

Using Empathy Effectively

Put aside your viewpoint, and try to see things from the other person's point of view. When you do this, you'll realize that other people most likely aren't being evil, unkind, stubborn, or unreasonable - they're probably just reacting to the situation with the knowledge they have. Validate the other person's perspective. Once you "see" why others believe what they believe, acknowledge it. Remember: acknowledgement does not always equal agreement. You can accept that people have different opinions from your own, and that they may have good reason to hold those opinions. Examine your attitude. Are you more concerned with getting your way, winning, or being right? Or, is your priority to find a

solution, build relationships, and accept others? Without an open mind and attitude, you probably won't have enough room for empathy. Listen to the entire message that the other person is trying to communicate. *Listen* with your ears: What is he or she saying, and what tone is being used? Listen with your eyes: What is the person doing with his or her body while speaking? Listen with your instincts: Do you sense that the person is holding something important back? *Listen* with your heart: What do you think the other person feels?

Ask what the other person would do.

When in doubt, ask the person to explain his or her position. This is probably the simplest, and most direct, way to understand the other person. However, it's probably the least used way to develop empathy. It's fine if you ask what the other person wants: you don't earn any "bonus points" for figuring it out on your own. For example, the boss who gives her young team members turkey vouchers for the holidays, when most of them don't even cook is using her idea of a practical gift - not theirs. Practice these skills when you interact with people. You'll likely appear much more caring and approachable - simply because you have increased your interest in what others think, feel, and experience. It's a great gift to be willing and able to see the world from a variety of perspectives - and it's a gift that you can use all of the time, in any situation. Here are some more tips for an empathic conversation: *Pay attention*, physically and mentally, to what's happening. *Listen carefully*, and note the key words and phrases that people use. *Respond encouragingly* to the central message. *Be flexible* - prepare to change direction as the other person's thoughts and feelings also change. Look for cues that you're on target

Key Points

Developing an empathic approach is perhaps the most significant effort you can make toward improving your people skills. When you understand others, they'll probably want to understand you - and this is how you can start to build cooperation, collaboration, and teamwork.

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“One of the best ways to persuade others is with your ears – by listening to them.”

Dean Rusk