

A Preparation for Mediation (PFM) story

In a previous article I have shared FairWay's PFM process. Now to share a story (Names have been altered).

It had been six years since Jane's separation with Michael. This was her second FDR mediation. She had also experienced one Round Table Meeting and two Family Court hearings. Every two years he tries again, she advised. Jane was sure that the mediation wasn't going to work. They would soon be back in Court. You could very well be right, I validated. After a pause, I went on to explain that I have been involved in many mediations that should never have worked and somehow they came together. That there is nothing you can do that guarantees a mediation will work but there are things you can do that can give you the greatest shot, and there are things you can do that give you no shot. Mediation is all about doing things differently. If you want something different to come out of the mediation you have to do something different in the mediation.

Jane listened and then advised she didn't know what she could do differently. I feel I have tried it all, she said. Over the next ninety minutes Jane and I explored many paths on our way to developing a plan. A plan of how she was going to participate in the mediation in order to give her that greatest shot.

- I informed Jane about family systems theory and relationship patterns. How patterns are created and maintained by people in relationship. How it is these patterns that create the problems. Jane began to understand why she and Michael continued to play out the same old story.
- We uncovered some of the dysfunctional patterns of behaviour and communication that existed within the relationship between Jane and Michael. We explored Jane's role in these patterns and cycles.
- Jane recognised the 'attack-defend' and 'pursue- withdraw' cycles as two core patterns. Jane learned that she has just as much power over the pattern as Michael does. Any one person can disrupt an old pattern by changing their behaviour and maintaining this change.
- We developed new ways for Jane to participate in the old conversations. New ways of sharing her stories, new ways of responding to Michael and new ways of listening. All designed to disrupt the old predictable, habitual patterns. I supported Jane to practice these tools, both in session with me and with others.
- Jane and I explored her thought patterns and how these supported the old behavioural patterns. In order to successfully change her behaviour she also had to make shifts in her thinking. I coached Jane with new tools to help regulate her 'self-talk' and therefore create a healthier internal balance. This internal balance then allows her to be more balanced externally.
- I showed Jane how to use thought and emotional regulation tools to deactivate her buttons and triggers, therefore giving her the tools to hold on to her power.

- Jane learned how her new self-awareness of behaviour, thoughts and body sensations during the mediation could enable her to choose her behaviour 'manually' rather than react automatically (again following old patterns).

At the completion Jane expressed her gratitude. Whilst the result of the mediation was not fully in her control, she now had a plan of how she was going to participate and a new definition of 'success' based on this. A focus for the mediation that was within her control. She was optimistic that for the first time she could sit in the same room as Michael and hold on to her power. She knew this time it was going to be different, because she was going to be different.

Four weeks after the mediation Jane emailed me:

"I am so grateful for the tools you gave me before I went into mediation with my ex-partner. I came out of there 100% empowered for not buckling under the pressure and definitely not giving into the 'attack/defend dance' that he wanted to keep playing throughout the session. The notes I recorded from our discussion helped me to keep composed throughout the session and when I felt like I was going into 'automatic mode', I'd look down and see what we had talked about and instantly switched back into 'manual mode' which paid off big time.

At the end of mediation, we both signed a trial care arrangement which commenced last week. I've kept my notes from our prep session and will definitely refer back to them before heading into my next session. I definitely should refer to them on a more regular basis as it can easily be transferred to my correspondence with my ex going forward. Thank you again for your help."

PFM provided Jane with the self-awareness, motivation and tools to change the way she engaged in her dispute, thus changing the dispute itself. She is now empowered to move forward and play her part in creating a better future.