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3-2012

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Citation

ALEXANDER, Nadja. Where do all the mediators go?. (2012).

Available at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/sol_research/3342

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Where Do All the Mediators Go?

Nadja Alexander (Editor) (Singapore International Dispute Resolution Academy)/March 27, 2012

In my capacity as a trainer and educator of mediators, I am frequently asked about entry into the mediation profession: “Once I pass my accreditation assessment, I want to become a full-time mediator...”

The mediation training market continues to boom, confirming a continuing strong interest in mediation as a career path. However the supply of mediators continues to outweigh the demand for them. So where do all the mediators go? While some mediators forge a full-time career as private mediators, many freelance mediators keep themselves in business through a combination of private work, mediation panel work for specific mediation schemes, training and consulting. Others continue to work in their traditional professional role, for example as a lawyer or psychologist or educator, while mediating part-time. Lists and panels of accredited mediators usually include many who have not conducted a single mediation since they passed their mediator assessment.

The result is an extraordinary situation where, despite poor employment prospects as full-time mediators, enthusiasm for the profession of mediation continues to rise with would-be mediators paying large amounts of money to training organisations and accreditation bodies.

At the same time, a review of professional and social networking websites indicates that mediators are beginning to sell their skills in diverse ways. For example, many mediators in the professional online network, LinkedIn, have added related roles to their mediation profile such as conflict management professional, conflict and communication coach, mentor, negotiation adviser, ADR strategist, conflict specialist, dispute resolver and so on.

So it seems that mediators are reinventing and broadening their role to encompass a range of interventions beyond that of a ‘traditional’ mediator working with two or more parties to help them resolve their dispute.

Similarly, employers are recognising the need to engage staff with mediation and conflict resolution skills. Employment advertisements and job descriptions increasingly acknowledge the importance of managing conflict in the workplace through a range of informal approaches including preventative strategies, mentoring, coaching and interest-based interventions. There is a greater willingness on the part of institutions and workplaces to acknowledge conflict and engage with difference proactively.

So what do I tell inspired graduates of mediation training and education? I encourage them unreservedly to follow their passion and to broaden their horizons in relation to their mediator role. Newly-minted mediators, especially young graduates, can move into one of any number of conflict-related roles in a range of industry and organisational contexts as the first step in their career path as conflict resolution professionals.

There is an abundance of opportunity in working with conflict. We seasoned conflict resolution professionals should help those new to our field discover it.