

Giving Shelter

Sometimes mediation participants – mostly the disputants – are disappointed if a dispute doesn't settle by the end of the designated day. Frustration can spill over, with fingers pointing. After all, you've got to blame somebody. When cases don't settle, it is often the result of unrealized or unmanaged expectations. Part of the neutral's job is to promote the idea that "Rome wasn't built in a day" and the time spent together was well spent in terms of such things as narrowing issues and adjusting expectations. At moments like this an encouraging message is often in order: perhaps with a little more work, resolution can be accomplished.

The neutral's job description in these instances includes giving appropriate shelter to the representatives, who can become the brunt of frustration. Many tools are available in the mediator's kit to deflect negative emotions and redirect parties to the constructive goals of resolution.

Events like this should remind us that settling differences is a dynamic process in which the neutral's expertise in adding balance and symmetry – smoothing the rough edges – is essential.

As always I invite your comment and look forward to hearing from you.