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Understanding Precedes Resolution.

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Publication Information

Article: Becoming a Student of Humanity	HM-Article #009
Originally Published: 7/13/26	

Becoming a Student of Humanity

A mediator's education shouldn't end with certification. In many ways, that's where it begins.

One of the most valuable things we can do as mediators is intentionally broaden our understanding of the people we may one day serve.

The United States is often described as a melting pot, but I've begun thinking of it differently.

We're more like a potluck.

Each person brings something unique to the table. Our goal isn't to erase those differences or blend them into one uniform culture. It's to learn how to appreciate, understand, and navigate them with curiosity and respect.

That growth doesn't happen only in mediation training.

It happens by attending community events, volunteering, visiting neighborhoods we've never explored, reading books written from different perspectives, participating in different faith communities, and building genuine friendships with people whose experiences differ from our own.

Every conversation becomes another opportunity to learn.

As mediators, we should also remember that no individual represents an entire culture, religion, ethnicity, or community. Every person offers one perspective shaped by their own



experiences. The more perspectives we encounter, the more complete our understanding becomes.

Sometimes that understanding is practical.

In one culture, sustained eye contact may communicate confidence and attentiveness.

In another, it may be perceived as disrespect.

Some families communicate conflict directly.

Others value indirect communication to preserve harmony.

These differences aren't barriers to mediation—they're reminders that effective communication begins with curiosity rather than assumption.

For me, personal development and professional development are inseparable.

The more we become students of humanity, the better equipped we are to help others understand one another.

Understanding doesn't happen all at once.

It grows one conversation at a time.

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In Practice

Professional development extends beyond formal training and continuing education. Seek opportunities to engage with people, communities, and perspectives that differ from your own. Volunteer, attend cultural events, read broadly, and cultivate relationships that expand your understanding of the human experience. As your awareness grows, so does your ability to approach each mediation with curiosity, cultural humility, and respect for the unique experiences every participant brings to the conversation.

Reflection Questions

- What experiences have most broadened my understanding of people whose backgrounds differ from my own?
- How can I replace assumptions with genuine curiosity in my conversations and relationships?
- In what ways can I continue growing as a student of humanity outside of formal education or professional training?
- How might a deeper appreciation for different perspectives improve my ability to communicate, listen, and resolve conflict?

Key Takeaway

A mediator's education is a lifelong pursuit shaped as much by lived experience as by professional training. By intentionally learning from diverse people, cultures, communities, and perspectives, mediators develop the curiosity and cultural humility necessary to serve others with greater understanding. Every meaningful conversation becomes another opportunity to expand our perspective, reminding us that understanding is not a destination but a practice that grows throughout a lifetime.

Understanding Precedes Resolution.

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