

## **Mediator Insights: Leave Your Expectations at the Door**

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In the world of dispute resolution and mediation, everyone has expectations. Sometimes those expectations are basic or practical. For example, parties expect to know when and where to be for the mediation. Parties expect the mediator to address the process and ground rules for the mediation. They expect to have an opportunity to explain their side of the dispute in the mediation.

But some expectations are tactical and may be impractical. Often, parties start a mediation focused on their “win.” They may have come to mediation with the expectation that they could convince the other side to give them that win. Or they may have come to mediation with the expectation that they could use the process to bully or coerce a favorable settlement from the other side. Perhaps they came to the mediation with an expectation that they would not settle the dispute.

Whatever their expectations may have been, an important part of mediation is helping parties leave their expectations at the door. When they do so, they become receptive or open to new opportunities for resolution.

To illustrate, let’s consider Mo Willem’s *The Pigeon Will Ride the Roller Coaster!*

The pigeon is exuberant! The pigeon is about to go on their first roller coaster ride. The pigeon is practically and mentally prepared. The pigeon has a ticket. The pigeon knows there will be a long wait. While waiting in the very long line, the pigeon goes through mental gymnastics imagining the loop-the-loops, the fear, the dizziness, and the thrill of it all. The pigeon knows it could be scary. Or glorious. Or might make them nauseous.

Finally, it is the pigeon's turn. Excitedly, the pigeon climbs into the roller coaster cart. The cart begins to putt-putt around the track. Putt-putt. Putt-putt. Putt-putt. There are a few very small inclines and drops - bumps really along the track. No loop-the-loop. No scary parts. For a moment, the pigeon is disappointed. But then, the pigeon lets go of their expectations.

At the end of the track, the roller coaster attendant asks the pigeon if they'd like to ride again. And the pigeon responds exuberantly "You bet!"

Once the pigeon let go of their expectations, they enjoyed the ride.

There are many parallels between this story and mediation. Mediation can be a roller coaster. Mediation can involve long waits. Mediation can be thrilling or scary depending on your circumstances and what is at stake. But in the end, one thing that all mediations that end in a resolution have in common is that both parties, at some point in the process, left their expectations at the door.

*Author's Note: As a mediator, I am a "forever student" always seeking new ways to help people find a path to resolution in mediation. As a parent, I have spent a gazillion hours reading books to my children. Oftentimes, these books teach me new ways to approach conflict resolution. In this case, Mo Willems' "The Pigeon will Ride the Roller Coaster!" inspired this post.*

*Disclaimer: Nothing contained herein constitutes legal advice nor does anything contained herein create a professional relationship.*