

## **Mediator Insights: When They Need to Roar**

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Sometimes we all just need to roar. By roar, I mean let out our anger. Anger is an emotional iceberg. What we see is the angry outburst, but underneath we find the hidden causes like fear, rejection, regret, grief, and more. In my experience as a mediator, parties often bring anger with them to the mediation. And sometimes, one of the most important steps in a mediation is to just let them roar.

To illustrate, let's consider Tom Percival's *Ravi's Roar*.

In this story, Ravi is the youngest and smallest in his family. Most of the time, he loves being the smallest. But not all of the time.

One day he and his family go to the park. They race from their house to the train. Being the smallest, Ravi is left behind. When they get to the park, they play hide and seek. His older siblings hide, but he cannot find them anywhere.

They move on to the playground. Ravi is too small to reach the monkey bars. Ravi is too small to jump over the logs. Ravi is too small to go down the big slide. Ravi gets mad. Hoping it will make Ravi feel better, his dad offers to buy everyone ice cream.

They run to the ice cream cart and line up. Ravi is last in line. When it is Ravi's turn, there's no ice cream left. Ravi is furious. In a fit of rage, Ravi turns into a tiger. He goes wild. He roars and growls. Others are scared of him. He takes their ice cream. He takes their seats. He takes over the playground, swings on the monkey bars, jumps over the logs, and slides down the big slide.

But no one wants to play with him. No one wants to be with him. Ravi is all alone. Once his anger is spent, he can't even remember why he got so angry.

In a very quiet voice, Ravi says to his family "I'm sorry." His family hugs him. His family accepts him. Ravi turns back into a boy and the kids go off and play.

How does this play out in a mediation? Let's examine what happened to Ravi.

- Ravi felt abandoned when he was left behind as they ran for the train.
- Ravi felt hopeless when he failed at hide and seek.
- Ravi felt incompetent when he couldn't do the monkey bars or jump the logs.
- Ravi felt excluded when he was too small for the big slide.
- Ravi felt wronged when there was no more ice cream.

Abandoned, hopeless, incompetent, excluded, and wronged. These are often the underlying hurts driving emotions in a mediation. So, what do we do when faced with someone who needs to roar? Let's follow Ravi's family's lead.

- Space: Anger is a valid human emotion. We all feel it and sometimes we all just need to get it out. A safe space to roar may be exactly what someone needs.
- Do Not Take It Personally: Anger is rarely about the receiver, but instead often masks underlying hurts, so try not to take it personally.
- The Calm: Once their anger is spent, there is often a quiet calm. This is an opportunity.

Parties often need a safe space to process their emotions in mediation before they are able to move forward and find a path to resolution. For some parties, that may come out as a need to roar. Give them space, do not take it personally, and then take the opportunity of the calm to find the path to resolution.

*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, Tom Percival's "Ravi's Roar" inspired this post.*

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