

Managing Diversity

A monthly source of information, ideas, and tips for people managing a Diverse Workforce

Vol. 7, No. 7

April 1998

A Book Review

By Dr. George Simons

Conflict Resolution across Cultures: From Talking it out to Third Party Mediation by Selma Myers and Barbara Filner provides us with a solid and workable overview of person-to-person conflict resolution and mediation. The book is replete with solid examples of how differences in values, beliefs and behaviors not only complicate conflicts, but also, in many cases, are the very sources of misunderstanding that generate the conflict in the first place.

Conflict Resolution across Cultures is about the everyday stuff that keeps neighbors at odds, school yards tense, and workplaces edgy. Myers and Filner have offer solid advice on two dimensions of conflict: how we "talk it out" when we have to resolve a disagreement face-to-face with someone different from ourselves (aren't we all?) and how to use a mediator effectively for resolving differences between two parties. The authors high light the requisite skills and appropriate actions for steering conflicts to acceptable solutions.

Often the result of their methodology is not simply a problem solved, but a deepened understanding and respect for the people involved, because of, rather than in spite of their cultural difference.

All in all, the assessment tools and techniques that the authors offer us are relatively simple to grasp. Unfortunately, in the heat of the moment they are often difficult to apply and sustain as both ego and cultural rectitude too easily lead us to demand a pound of flesh from our opponent. Early on the authors note that where issues are resolved in such a way that there are winners and losers, the stage is set for the next round of conflict. This is most of all what the world needs to avoid, whether that world consists of families, a city block, two people working side by side, or nation against nation. We need all the help we can get, and are grateful for small but precious nudges in the right direction that Selma Myers and Barbara Filner offer us in this practical volume.

Copies of the book are available from Amherst Educational Publishing, 1-800-865-5549.

You can reach George Simons from the USA at (888) 215-3117. In Europe he is at: Tel: +31-344-68-24-54. E-mail worldwide: gsimons@euronet.nl. Website: www.intl-partners.com