

## Mediator's Corner



[John Cooke](#)

# Personality Traits of an Effective Mediator

by [John Cooke](#)

On more than one occasion I have been asked the question “What personality traits should an effective mediator possess?” Three key personality traits that I believe are important are: (1) good interpersonal skills; (2) good listening skills and (3) the ability to come up with creative solutions. The parties often value good interpersonal skills. Their first impressions of the mediator may influence their confidence in the mediator. Good interpersonal skills include such traits as likability and a trustworthy demeanor. My ability to adapt to a particular party is also important. For example, a mediator must be able at times to interact effectively with an aggressive party who may initially appear inflexible, or a party who simply wants to obtain “what is fair.”

Good listening skills are also important. I listen to the parties and process the facts that may be underlying their position. It may also be useful to identify any potentially relevant psychological factors observed at this point. Once I have identified the underlying positions, I am better equipped to conduct the mediation.

The third trait is being able to facilitate creative solutions. In my experience, the three traits are interrelated. I use my interpersonal skills to develop the trust of the parties. Once I gain their trust, I seek information from the parties that will assist me in determining monetary amounts or items that can be used as bargaining chips to facilitate a settlement. The important point to remember is that mediators do not “settle” disputes. We facilitate a settlement among the parties. I, like, most mediators have a set of tools that I have developed through experience. These three traits form a good foundation for being an effective mediator.

\* John Cooke joined The Mediation Society in 2010. John graduated from the University of Maryland School of Law, practices law in San Francisco and mediates business, real estate, construction and employment cases.