

# ADR Skill of the Month

## Using a Neutral Meeting Facilitator

Ever been in a meeting and felt you were unheard, misunderstood or disrespected? Ever come away from a meeting without a clue what was accomplished?

• No one heard a word I said.  
• They didn't care.  
• They were downright rude to me.  
• Nothing got done.  
• Why do I even go to these meetings?

How many such statements have you heard or said yourself?

Imagine how much more efficient, positive and productive your meetings would be if they were run by a professional facilitator. Well, you don't have to imagine. This resource is actually available to you through the ADR program at the Southwest SELPA.

Currently we are in the process of training some great professionals to be neutral IEP facilitators. The goal is to have at least one professional trained from each of the Districts within the Southwest SELPA. For that matter, when everything is said and done within our SELPA there are no District boundaries. We are all here to support each other and our students.

Of course this resource may not be available or practical to enlist for every meeting. So if you don't use an "outside" meeting facilitator, here are some tips. Think through your meeting in advance, including who the players will be. Consider what the likely challenges will be, both in terms of the personalities and content of the meeting. This may enable you to have thoughtful solutions and compromises already in mind and can avoid some of those "surprise moments" that lead to ill-considered responses, emotional flare-ups, detours into irrelevant topics and other obstacles to productivity.

Most important is to have the best person available serving as the facilitator. For a given meeting that may be you or someone else on your staff. Make that assignment based on who can best take care of all the meeting participants, and who can clarify the meeting agenda and help move it forward. A good facilitator has the neutrality to assure that everyone has a voice and that all participants can walk away having been valued for their time and input.

**Marc Purchin, Director of ADR Services**

### Suggested Tips on Practicing This Skill

1. Attend "Making Meetings Work" on February 23<sup>rd</sup>. There is no cost to attend this training but registration is required at [www.swselpa.org](http://www.swselpa.org). See the attached flyer.
2. Know in advance who is running the meeting. After all, this person will help set the agenda, ground rules, and time frame for the meeting.
3. Debrief after meetings. Ask the following: Was this a successful meeting? Did everyone feel heard and validated? What could have I done differently? Is there any follow-up that was not discussed during the meeting that I should be doing?

**Southwest SELPA**

**Alternative Dispute  
Resolution Services  
(ADR)**

- **Mediation**
- **Training**
- **Coaching**
- **Facilitation**

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