Everyday Peacemaking:
Quelling the Conflicts that Disrupt Our Lives

This document contains the opening and closing paragraphs of the speech.

*Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing there is a field.*
*I will meet you there.*

Those words are from Rumi, a poet and philosopher who lived 800 years ago in a part of Persia that is now in Afghanistan.

I intend, in our few minutes together today, to unpack the profound wisdom and practical guidance that is imbedded in Rumi’s statement. Let me repeat it:

*Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing there is a field.*
*I will meet you there.*

Rumi’s deep insight into the essence of human conflict, and how we might manage it, is as relevant today as it was 800 years ago, and will surely remain relevant for another 800 years. Indeed, his truth applied when humans first developed language some 100,000 years in the past, and that truth will still pertain to the daily lives of our own descendants 100,000 years into the future. Human nature changes slowly.

So, my message here today pertains not only to today, nor even just to our current generation, but to the entire span of human existence on this planet. Conflict, and our struggle to manage it, is as inherent to our humanity as wet is to water. We must deal with it. To ignore it is to fail – to fail ourselves and to fail our fellow-travelers along this perilous road of life.

**Final paragraphs follow**

To state what should be obvious: If I will need you tomorrow – if I need your trustworthiness as my friend, your loyalty as my employee, your respect as my boss, your love as my spouse – the most self-destructive thing I can do is to win today’s fight with you. In the long game, I will not win if I cause you to lose. Using preventive mediation places the power tools of the expert mediator into the hands of every person to build a non-adversarial win-win normative climate in which our most important relationships can thrive. It is like giving water to a thirsty plant. A well-watered plant produces flowers that add beauty to our home.

You will notice that managerial mediation, self-mediation, and preventive mediation – indeed all forms of mediation that attempt to repair broken relationships, or to nourish good ones – contain in their methods certain core principles that are so deeply imbedded in human nature, so logical, so obvious as to seem unnecessary to even mention – except that they are so often violated in the normal course of human affairs.
The first core principle is “Without communication, there can be no solution.” Its corollary is equally obvious: “Refusal to communicate ensures continuation of the conflict.” So, the mediator’s most fundamental task is to convene a conversation between the parties. As in all negotiations, the most important seat is the seat at the table.

The second core principle is “We can’t change the past; we can only change the future.” So, as eager as we may be to establish that our opponent is to blame for our predicament, doing so does not solve our joint problem. Indeed, insistence on assigning blame to the other, or declaring one’s own innocence, only puts an obstacle in the path to progress toward finding a workable solution. We must accept the other’s, and our own, past conduct – the good, the bad, and the ugly – as historical fact, as permanent records stored in our memory banks. We can’t un-ring a bell. We can’t un-say a past remark. We can’t un-do a past deed. We can only agree to prevent their recurrence.

The third core principle is durable solutions require “voice and choice” – whether a marriage of two, a work-team of ten, or a nation of millions, if we are to act in concert, in cooperation, and in peace, we must ensure that every person who will be affected by a decision must be given voice – that is, an opportunity to speak and be heard, whether face-to-face or in the voting booth. And, each person must feel that his or her voice has meaningful impact on the eventual outcome, on the decision being made, on the plan being written. It is human nature to say, “If I thought of it, then it must be a good idea.” “If I helped create it, then it must be a good thing.” By ensuring voice-and-choice for each party in the decision-making and problem-solving process, we foster a sense of ownership of that solution, and commitment to its implementation. If we fail to do so, we produce, at best, grudging compliance with the winner’s demands. At worst, we sow the seeds of defiant rebellion and sabotage. This principle of voice-and-choice applies to happy marriages and to peaceful societies, and to all forms of human relationships in-between, across the full spectrum. This is democracy, from the smallest to the largest scale of human affairs.

Effective peacemaking – call it “mediation” if you prefer – in all ongoing interdependent relationships employs all three core principles. Effective mediators know this truth in their bones. So do effective everyday peacemakers.

In our few minutes together today, we have traversed a broad landscape. We began our journey by examining instincts buried deep in our nature that arose millions of years ago in our far pre-human ancestors. We then briefly mentioned the development of law as a rights-based alternative to violence, beginning several thousand years ago when civilization as we know it today began to emerge from pre-history. Finally, we have arrived at this place and this time, where we discover that we can use our minds – that is, our magnificent cerebral cortex – that most human of body parts – to harness our primitive impulses and to construct tools – that is, behavioral technology – that enable us to elevate ourselves above ancient instinctual reflexes so that we may live and work together in peace, harmony, and productivity.
We mediators believe our way is preferable to rights-based adjudication of civil disputes, especially in family courts where the well-being of vulnerable children is often at stake. Some mediators, especially those of us who seek to make the magic of our profession accessible to all people for everyday peacemaking, even agree that the essence of mediation can be distilled to its core simplicity and applied in our everyday lives. Peacemakers share a sense of satisfaction in contributing to the betterment of society, to building a wall of peace, one brick at a time, one conversation at a time, as a defense against the assault that conflict relentlessly wages against our daily pursuit of happiness.

My purpose here today has not been to lecture about mediation as practiced by lawyers and psychologists. Rather, I simply hope that I have made a sensible case that tools for everyday peacemaking, derived from professional mediation and placed in the hands of all of us, can improve human relationships, especially those ongoing, interdependent relationships that reside at the core of our own, very personal, reasons for living.

I’ll leave you with one final reminder from Rumi:

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\text{Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing there is a field.}
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\text{I will meet you there.}
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Thank you.