

How Do I Become a Mediator?

Written by Diana Mercer, Attorney-Mediator, for the SCMA web site, copyright 2002 Diana Mercer

People from a wide variety of backgrounds can make good mediators. Presently in California, there are no licensing requirements, which makes the answer to the question “How do I become a mediator?” as individual as the mediators themselves.

The SCMA has some suggestions about how to get started. Before embarking on the journey to become a mediator, there are some questions you may wish to ask yourself in order to have a realistic approach in developing a career in mediation. Going from mediation training to a full-time mediation practice is a difficult road, like building any quality business. Before you get started, ask yourself:

- Why do I want to become a mediator?
- What do I hope to accomplish?
- What will I use my mediation skills to do?
- How will my background contribute to my future practice in mediation?
- Do I need a steady paycheck, or do I prefer to be self-employed?
- Do I want to mediate full-time, part-time, or as an adjunct service to my existing career or practice?
- Do I want to be paid for my services, or do I prefer to mediate as a volunteer?

Once you've answered these questions for yourself, you're going to need some training. Most people start out with a 40-hour basic mediation class, but before investing your time and money in a class, you may wish to read *The Mediation Process*, by Christopher Moore (2nd Edition, Jossey-Bass 2000). This book is a classic in the mediation field, and describes the process from beginning to end. While there are many great mediation titles available, no other book takes the process from start to end like *The Mediation Process*.

From there, you may wish to sign up for a 40-hour course. Most mediation panels, both volunteer and paid, require at least that much training in order to join. There are many quality courses offered in Southern California, some privately and some through government agencies. The Association for Conflict Resolution, ACR, lists certified training courses on its web site, <http://www.acresolution.org>, as does Mediate.com, <http://www.mediate.com>. ACR also holds an annual conference, as does SCMA. Although the ACR conference is a national conference, held in different states each year, SCMA's one-day conference, held each November, is always located in Malibu, California. Pepperdine University's Strauss Institute for Dispute Resolution offers a full degree program in Conflict Resolution. All of these places offer great ways to acquire, develop and hone your mediation skills. How much or how little training you wish to receive is up to you, but you'll want to start out with programs certified by the Association for Conflict Resolution, even though there's no formal certification process for mediators in California. Many mediators train and re-

train throughout their lifetimes, enjoying the new perspective that each conference or training course gives.

You'll also want to join professional organizations, like SCMA, to keep abreast of developments in the field as well as to network and form study groups. Join your professional organizations, and volunteer on the committees. You'll get the opportunity to propose legislation that affects the mediation field, you'll gain or help the group offer training in mediation or specialized skill areas that affect mediation, and increase your profile in the field. Even if you're new to the field, you have skills which you can offer to your professional organizations which will help you advance your mediation skills while helping the organization itself. You may find that the professional organization for your underlying field also has a mediation committee, such as the ADR Committee for the local Bar Association, Therapists' Association or Construction Contractors' Association. And, if your underlying field does not have an ADR Committee, here's your chance to get one started!

Once you've got your training, the next question most people ask is "how do I get started in mediating actual conflicts?" There's as many ways to get started mediating as there are paths to the profession itself. Many people choose to join volunteer panels and community mediation programs. Some examples of these are the programs offered by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Centinela Valley Juvenile Diversion Program, the United States Postal Service, and the Superior Court. There are also several

local paying panels of mediators, as well as nationally-known panels such as the American Arbitration Association. Most beginning mediators start out on a smaller local panel or volunteer panel, however. Many of these programs offer mentoring programs, or you can sign up for a mentor through the SCMA.

Mediation practices are by-and-large boutique firms or solo practices. The opportunities for being employed by one of these firms is small, but there are nevertheless opportunities. Networking through professional organizations is a great way to hear about these often unadvertised jobs.

Once you've been to a mediation training, you may also wish to begin offering mediation as part of your current career or practice. You can start to implement your mediation skills on a daily basis in your current work situation, from helping manage employee conflicts, or offering mediation as one of your services to existing clients. You may wish to take a mediation marketing course, such as the marketing course offered by Prof. Randy Lowry at Pepperdine's Strauss Institute, or Forrest Mosten's course through Mosten Mediation Training. There's also a book on the subject by Mr. Mosten, *Mediation Career Guide* (Jossey-Bass 2002).

There are also opportunities to work in mediation with a paycheck in private industry or government service, such as:

- Ombudsperson for a corporation
- Teaching & Training
- Teaching & Training in schools—peer mediation programs
- Human Resources



Conciliation Court (Superior Court)
Non-Profit Organizations and Community Mediation Programs administration
As a volunteer, e.g., FARS & VORS, US Postal Service
Government and EEOC, DFEH
Mediation coach or consultant

Volunteer Opportunities in Mediation

Centinela Valley Juvenile Diversion Program
Families Able to Resolve Situations (FARS—parents & teenagers)
Victim-Offender Mediation (VORS)
11633 Hawthorne Blvd., Suite 501
Hawthorne, CA 90250
(310) 675-8700

**they provide a very nice training program if you volunteer (\$50 is cost)

Los Angeles Superior Court (<http://www.lasuperiorcourt.org/adr/>)
111 N. Hill Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 974-5425

*** has panels for family and civil mediations. Also has internship program.

While it would be impossible to explore every avenue available toward becoming a mediator in this short article, we hope we've given you some food for thought in how you might approach becoming a mediator. For further information, please check our web site updates at www.scmmediation.org.