

How Do I Become a Mediator?

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

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 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, Wiley/Jossey-Bass 2002). This book



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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 finish 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. A 40 hour course is a great place to start 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 (ACR), as well as your local mediator organization, like the Southern California Mediation Association (SCMA). Even though there's no formal certification process for mediators in California, solid training is essential.

Many mediators train and re-train throughout their lifetimes, enjoying the new perspective that each conference or training course gives. There are many quality courses offered in California, some privately and some through government agencies. The Association for Conflict Resolution lists certified training courses on its web site, <http://www.acrnet.org>. Training classes are also listed on Mediate.com and the Southern California Mediation Association's web site, <http://www.scmmediation.org>. ACR holds an annual conference, as does the SCMA. Although the ACR conference is a national conference, held in different states each year, you can find more local conferences like the California Bar Association's ADR South Committee's one-day conference, held each year at Pepperdine University in Malibu. These are just a few of the places you might look for a taste of what a career in mediation might look like.

You'll also want to join professional organizations, like the Dispute Resolution Section of the American Bar Association, the ADR Section of the California Bar Association, and your local bar associations as well as ACR and the California Dispute Resolution Council, to keep abreast of developments in the field as well as to network and form study groups. Join a few professional organizations, and volunteer on the committees. You'll get the opportunity to propose legislation that affects the mediation field, you'll help the group offer training in mediation or specialized skill areas that affect mediation, and you'll increase your profile in the field. Even if you're new to mediation, you have skills which you can offer to these professional organizations which will help you advance your mediation skills while helping the organization itself. For example, as a new member of SCMA, I volunteered to co-chair the Los Angeles Roundtable. As I helped to organize each meeting, I met the area's top mediators and had an intimate opportunity to hear them speak. I didn't know much about mediation when I started, but by the end of the year I'd learned the best tips from the top practitioners in Los Angeles.

You may find that the professional organization for your underlying field also has a mediation committee, such as the Alternative Dispute Resolution 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 change 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 are 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 for-profit panels of mediators, as well as nationally known panels like JAMS and 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 your local bar association or mediator association.

Except for the large panels and in-house corporate or government positions, mediation practices are, by and large, boutique firms or solo practices. The opportunities for being employed by one of these firms are few and far between, but there are nevertheless opportunities. The SCMA web site has a listing of job offers, but networking through professional organizations is a great way to hear about these [often unadvertised] jobs. Starting and building your own practice is also a choice many mediators ultimately make. Adding mediation to your existing career is where many mediators start their transition into a mediation career.

Once you've been to a mediation training, 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 courses offered by Golden Media, Mosten Mediation Training, or the Straus Institute of Dispute Resolution at Pepperdine. There are also several books on the subject, such as *Mediation Career Guide* (Wiley/Jossey Bass 2002) by Forrest S. Mosten and *Becoming a Mediator: Your Guide to Career Opportunities* (Nolo Press 2004) by Peter Lovenheim.

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

- Ombudsperson for a corporation;
- Teaching and training;
- Teaching and training in schools and peer mediation programs;



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- Human resources departments;
- Conciliation Court (Family Court Services, Superior Court);
- Non-profit organizations and community mediation programs administration;
- As a volunteer, e.g., Centinela Valley Juvenile Diversion Program, US Postal Service;
- Government agencies like the EEOC;
- Mediation coach or consultant.

While it would be impossible to explore every avenue available toward becoming a mediator in this short article, but it provides some food for thought as to how you might approach becoming a mediator.