

REPHRASING AND REFRAMING

Rephrasing and **Reframing** are two important active listening techniques that promote constructive dialogue between parties attempting to negotiate a resolution to a dispute, or any other issue, for that matter. It is an indispensable tool in the mediator's toolbox. It can be especially useful when mediating disputes involving multiple parties or groups.

Rephrasing (or paraphrasing) lets a person know that he or she has been heard and, more importantly, correctly understood by the listener. It is used to prevent misunderstandings. Rephrasing is not simply a restatement. It does at least the following three things:

- For the speaker, rephrasing reinforces your expectation that others are actually listening to what you have to say, while providing you the opportunity to clarify your intent.
- For the listener, rephrasing validates what you have heard by checking your understanding, either reinforcing it or modifying it based on the speaker's agreement or disagreement and clarification.
- Rephrasing defuses "loaded" terms or connotations by demonstrating an understanding and validation of the (often negative) emotions behind the statement, yet casting the statement in a much more positive, less emotional fashion.

Examples:

Validating emotions:

"Sounds like you felt attacked."
"This seems to have made you angry."
"Seems like you felt ignored or unappreciated."

Conveying that you understand what is being said:

"You were upset when ..."
"You believe that..."
"You seem to be saying..."

Revealing a concern, worry or desire:

"If I understand you correctly, you want..."
"You seem to be concerned that..."
"What seems most important to you is..."

Reframing is a bit more complex. **It is the arrangement of a collection of ideas, feelings, facts, and/or concerns into a single common theme, often moving the parties in a more**

constructive direction. Reframing ties separate and scattered statements together and often gives the parties a common, perhaps previously unrecognized, focus or theme.

In the example below, a type of reframing is illustrated which identifies the issue as a mutual one and states it in such a fashion that it can be a springboard or transition into creative ideas, options, and solutions. The frame of reference shifts away from blame for past failures toward a testing of commitment for future joint initiatives.

"Based upon various concerns that have been raised so far, you seem to be talking about discovering new ways for labor and management to work together."

*Remember to **validate!** *Never assume* that your rephrasing or reframing is accurate until it is confirmed by the speaker. Sometimes, other group members will be able to perform the tasks of rephrasing or reframing because of familiarity with the work situation and the speakers.