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THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CONFLICT AND DISPUTES AND WHY IT MATTERS?

During October 2014 I thought I'd test the waters and enquired on our Facebook page "What is the difference between conflict and disputes?".

According to the Facebook stats this question reached 27 people and only one person "liked" the post but did not reply.

From this I deduced a few things:

1. Most people think the terms "conflict" and "disputes" refers to one and the same thing.
2. Some people do not know.
3. Some people are not interested and ignored the question.

I asked the question in anticipation of the Court annexed mediation pilot project and the fact that I would like to highlight the benefits of mediation not only in the context of Court annexed mediation, but also as a private process that can be utilized by parties to resolve a dispute.

There are different interpretations but one method of distinction, which is particularly useful, is the method used by *John Burton*. He makes a distinction between the two terms based on **time** and **issues in contention**. He regards **disputes** as short-term disagreements that can be relatively easy to resolve and **conflicts** as long-term, deep rooted problems that involve seemingly non-negotiable issues that are resistant to resolution.

It becomes apparent that both types of disagreement can occur independently of one another, however they may also be interconnected. It can almost be compared to a lot of small battles within a bigger war. Therefore **conflict** between two or more parties may involve one or more **disputes**. The **disputes** form "short battles", while **conflict** erupts into "war".

Disputes therefore refer to **interests that are negotiable**. Therefore it is possible to find a solution that at least partially meets the interests and needs of both parties.

For example: co-workers may have a disagreement about who has to attend to a certain task at work. By negotiating, each may have to do something they did not want to do, but in exchange they will get enough of what they want to enable them to settle the dispute.

In the end by resolving one or more of these disputes over a period of time, the parties may even end up in a position where "the war" comes to an end.

This can be described as the process of **conflict resolution**.

In my next post I am going to explain the process of mediation and how you, the client, can benefit from it.

Warm Regards,

Lizelle

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