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CIVIL RIGHTS MEDIATOR TURNED CHILDREN'S AUTHOR INSPIRES A LEGACY OF EQUITY AND PEACE (/BLOG/2022/6/18/CIVIL-RIGHTS-MEDIATOR-TURNED-CHILDRENS-AUTHOR-INSPIRES-A-LEGACY-OF-EQUITY-AND-PEACE)

JUNE 18, 2022 (/BLOG/2022/6/18/CIVIL-RIGHTS-MEDIATOR-TURNED-CHILDRENS-AUTHOR-INSPIRES-A-LEGACY-OF-EQUITY-AND-PEACE) JAYNE WAITHITU (/BLOG?AUTHOR=62ADF74BDE9789548E14AACD)

CIVIL RIGHTS MEDIATOR
TURNED
CHILDREN'S AUTHOR
INSPIRES A LEGACY OF
EQUITY AND PEACE





Perhaps what I appreciate most about the field of mediation is that it is universally dynamic and impactful. Mediators across the globe are making significant inroads in established public [institutions and government](#)

(https://www.mediate.com/articles/where_will_mediation_be_in_10_years.cfm) offices. One example is [author](https://amzn.to/3xADV0L) (<https://amzn.to/3xADV0L>), [mediator](https://imamediation.com/about) (<https://imamediation.com/about>) and [civil rights leader](https://www.evnaacp.org/leadership/) (<https://www.evnaacp.org/leadership/>), [William "Bill" Smitherman](https://imamediation.com/about) (<https://imamediation.com/about>), based in Arizona, USA. I recently interviewed Bill, who is an [IMA associate](https://imamediation.com/about) (<https://imamediation.com/about>) and participant in our [Master Mediator program](https://imamediation.com/courses) (<https://imamediation.com/courses>). I discovered a rare gem in the mediator community. His career has been devoted tirelessly to expanding equity in government, as well as the private business sector, through conciliation and mediation, culminating in a series of [children's books](https://amzn.to/3xADV0L) (<https://amzn.to/3xADV0L>) he has recently authored. The world could use more mediators like Bill Smitherman to pave the way for future generations of peacebuilders.

CHAMPIONING EQUITY AND PEACE



([/articles](#))

President of Absolute Mediation and Arbitration Services (AMAS), Smitherman has over 25 years of experience in the field of alternative dispute resolution in public and private sector cases.

He has practiced [mediation](https://imamediation.com/solutions) (<https://imamediation.com/solutions>), conciliation, systemic complaint investigation and resolution to large and small employers, federal and state government, and community-based organizations.

Bill is also a retired Senior Executive Service (SES) official of the [U.S. Department of Labor](https://www.dol.gov/) (<https://www.dol.gov/>), Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs.

Smitherman's firm, AMAS specializes in blending equal opportunity training with problem solving processes. His business focuses primarily on employment, human and civil rights issues, and strategic planning outcomes for small businesses and not-for-profit businesses and organizations. Bill is a mentor to several upper-level business managers. He also works with several police department heads regarding police and community relations. Additionally, he is a

member of the Arizona Department of Public Safety (<https://www.azdps.gov/>)'s Advisory Board. His clients include business and government executives, department heads, managers, supervisors and human resources professionals in higher education and employment.

What's most remarkable is Bill's contribution to all levels of government in the United States. He is skilled in matters of federal contract compliance and complaint investigation in business, government and education sectors. He holds senior mediation certifications from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

(<https://www.eeoc.gov/>) (EEOC), U.S.

Federal Executive Board, and Mediation

Training Institute International. He has conducted employment, civil and human rights investigations involving legal compliance and enforcement matters.

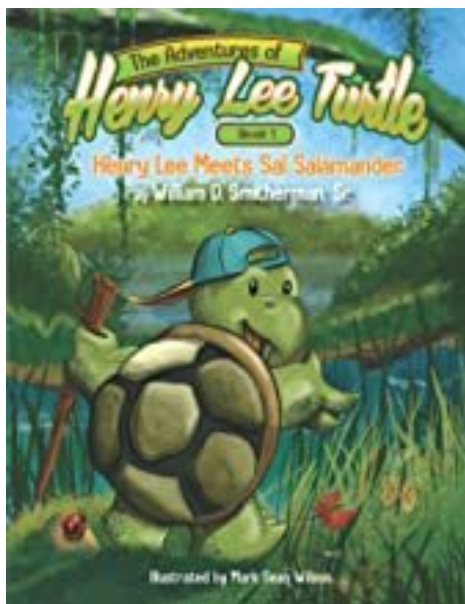


(/articles)

Bill has successfully conducted conciliation hearings before administrative law judges. He has trained over 1100 federal and state compliance officers and managers on how to conduct effective federal employment complaint and compliance investigations. Bill has been a presenter and primary consultant to several national and state conferences on employment, in higher education, civil and human rights and resource management.

From my vantage point, Bill has been a champion of peace and equity, using mediation as his platform. By perfecting his skills as a mediator, modeling effective conflict resolution and promoting the field, he has positioned himself as both a civil rights and mediation leader.

BUILDING A LEGACY AS AN AUTHOR



(<https://amzn.to/39yfl8O>)

Perhaps even more inspiring than his exceptional career in civil rights and mediation is the legacy he is forging through a series of children's books about Henry Lee Turtle (<https://amzn.to/39BuiXN>).

This adorable turtle sets out on many adventures, meeting unfamiliar characters, such as Sal Salamander, along the way. Henry Lee (<https://amzn.to/39BuiXN>) demonstrates to children how to engage wisely, respectfully and fearlessly with others who are different from us.

Smitherman's first book

(<https://amzn.to/39BuiXN>) is now

available for purchase at [this link](#)

(<https://amzn.to/39BuiXN>).

Bill is located in Chandler, Arizona in the USA, where he lives and works. Although I am based in Kenya, Bill participates regularly in the live simulations in our virtual Master Mediator (/courses) program, where I am also a coach. He recently told us, "These simulations are great!" They are especially great when Bill is present. Anyone participates in them when he's there is in for a great learning experience. For that reason, and many more, I was delighted he agreed to this interview.

A CONVERSATION WITH MR. SMITHERMAN

I asked Bill to share with us what he learned from his career and his [training from IMA](https://courses.imamediation.com/) (https://courses.imamediation.com/). Here's a snapshot of our interview.

Jayne: What inspired you to become a mediator (<http://imamediation.com/courses/>)?

Bill: My inspiration to become a mediator (<https://courses.imamediation.com/>) came from my ability to resolve disputes, and arguments (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2017/7/22/5-ways-to-respectfully-disagree-without-giving-in-or-giving-up>) between people. My interest in law led me to become a paralegal, which provided me with a perspective of how the law works. Through this and other work experiences, I learned the basic principles of how to negotiate between parties at odds (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2017/7/22/5-ways-to-respectfully-disagree-without-giving-in-or-giving-up>), peacefully. There is nothing like the feeling you get when you assist in bringing parties together in a win-win (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2017/11/22/in-conflicts-shifts-happen>) situation.

Free checklist.

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Jayne: What sets you apart from others in the field of dispute resolution?

Bill: My ability to listen (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2022/5/11/five-powerful-open-ended-questions-mediators-use-for-active-listening>) keenly, remain neutral (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2020/1/30/how-to-stay-calm-when-conflicts-get-tense>

five-powerful-strategies-of-expert-mediators) in disputes, a calm demeanor (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2020/1/30/how-to-stay-calm-when-conflicts-get-tense-five-powerful-strategies-of-expert-mediators>), patience (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2018/3/2/keep-toxic-people-at-bay-seven-proven-strategies>), positive persona, senior-level leadership and diverse experience in various areas of business and labor management, civil and human rights, and desire to assist (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2020/1/30/how-to-stay-calm-when-conflicts-get-tense-five-powerful-strategies-of-expert-mediators>) in the resolution of differences between parties.

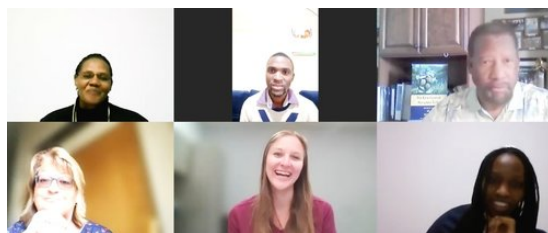
Jayne: What is your default response to conflict?

Bill: My default response to conflict is to try harder to find a win-win (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2017/11/22/in-conflicts-shifts-happen>) solution between parties. For each problem, there can be a resolution (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2019/5/1/build-conflict-resilience-with-these-three-strategies>).

Jayne: What was your previous experience with mediation before joining IMA's Master Mediator program (<https://imamediation.com/courses>)?

Bill: I led conciliation and mediation (<https://imamediation.com/solutions>) meetings between federal, state, local government agencies and individuals in my job duties as a Senior Executive Service leader for an office in the U.S. Federal government. I trained federal government employees and community groups in the skills of mediation (<https://imamediation.com/solutions>), and federal contract compliance for over 25 years.

Jayne: How has your understanding of mediation changed since you began the IMA Master Mediator program (<http://imamediation.com/courses>)?



(/courses)

Bill: As President of my own mediation business and as a senior-level mediator, IMA courses (<http://imamediation.com/courses>) keep me informed of the changes in current mediation techniques.

The courses offered by IMA (<http://imamediation.com/courses>) also reinforce decisions I have made in conducting mediations follow the current guidelines, laws, and regulations.

Jayne: What is your vision for the field?

Bill: The future

(<https://imamediation.com/blog/2021/9/1/reimagining-the-future-of-peace-the-power-of-mediation-and-restorative-justice>) for mediation is assured. Currently, the need for mediation

Mediation offers an opportunity to begin a conversation at a conference table, not on a battlefield!

(<https://imamediation.com/solutions>) is taking center stage around the world (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2021/10/6/international-mediator-thankless-job-with-invaluable-skills-for-a-more-peaceful-world>). Due to the uptick of disputed issues, both foreign (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2020/2/20/mediation-skills-empower-kenyan-women-leaders-to-transform-conflict-into-opportunities>) and domestic (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2019/7/3/boundaries-and-barbecues-a-recipe-for-healthy-conflict-resolution>), there is an overwhelming need (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2021/9/21/international-day-of-peace-challenges-us-to-foster-equitable-and-sustainable-global-recovery>) for skilled mediators (<https://courses.imamediation.com/>) to assist in finding alternatives to disputes across the board. *Mediation offers an opportunity to begin a conversation at a conference table, not on a battlefield!*

Jayne: What motivates you to promote peaceful resolutions to conflict?



(/courses)

Bill: I embrace the challenge of mediation through my belief that peaceful resolutions (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2018/3/21/10-lessons-on-school-violence-learned-while-pursuing-world-peace>) to conflict or abject differences (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2017/7/22/whats-everyone-really-fighting-about-3-powerful-lessons-of-a-mediator>) can be resolved in a meaningful way, by having

parties show compassion (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2018/9/28/four-timeless-ways-to-cultivate-respect-in-a-polarized-world>) for one another. Everyone has an opinion (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2017/7/22/5-ways-to-respectfully-disagree-without-giving-in-or-giving-up>) about something!

A key in mediation is to listen (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2018/3/16/heres-why-listen-and-silent-share-the-same-letters>) and expose the commonality (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2020/1/30/how-to-stay-calm-when-conflicts-get-tense-five-powerful-strategies-of-expert-mediators>) of an issue or source of conflict (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2017/7/22/whats-everyone-really-fighting-about-3-powerful-lessons-of-a-mediator>) between parties. It is said, Rome was not built in one day, nor was Earth! Therefore, one can deduce there is a theory about the meaning of both. Acceptance of the theory or concept of both can lead to an agreement that both may be true (<https://kateotting.squarespace.com/blog/2017/7/22/5-ways-to-respectfully-disagree-without-giving-in-or-giving-up>) if both theories are accepted.

Jayne: What motivated you to participate in the IMA Master Mediator (<https://courses.imamediation.com/>) program?

Bill: I met Kate Otting (<https://imamediation.com/about>) years ago at a mediation training and again through the Arizona Association for Conflict Resolution (AACR). I was a new member, and Kate was President of AACR. She asked me to sit on a committee and to be a co-presenter at one of our meetings. That's all it took for us to become cohorts and friends. She motivated me to participate in other AACR activities and later, IMA's Master Mediator (<https://courses.imamediation.com/>) program. We share the same passion for mediation.

Jayne: What did you hope to gain by participating in the IMA Master Mediator program (<http://imamediation.com/courses>)?

Bill: I am interested in gaining additional knowledge (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2017/12/1/seven-strategies-for-drama-free-communication>), consultancy and international exposure (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2021/10/6/international-mediator-thankless-job-with-invaluable-skills-for-a-more-peaceful-world>) to what



(/courses)

is going on in this country and around the world at large, that mediation might help resolve.

Jayne: Which specific mediation skills learned through the IMA Master Mediator (/courses) have been most impactful in your life or work?

Bill: Different approaches to resolution of old problems. Through the IMA Master Mediator program (<https://imamediation.com/courses>) I am a part of a global network of professional mediators of all levels, with vast experiences. I have also been learning how "team" mediation can be useful in alternative dispute resolution.

"Through the IMA Master Mediator program I am a part of a global network of professional mediators of all levels, with vast experiences."

Jayne: What mediation skills are you actively working to improve?

Bill: Working as or joining a team when warranted. Enhancing my [listening](https://imamediation.com/blog/2020/1/21/blocks-to-effective-listening-and-how-to-avoid-them-part-1) (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2020/1/21/blocks-to-effective-listening-and-how-to-avoid-them-part-1>) and deductive reasoning skills. I want to better understand what makes parties [entrenched](https://imamediation.com/blog/2017/7/22/whats-everyone-really-fighting-about-3-powerful-lessons-of-a-mediator) (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2017/7/22/whats-everyone-really-fighting-about-3-powerful-lessons-of-a-mediator>) in their ideas and beliefs. I also hope to learn what other ways/techniques can be explored to offer alternatives to unresolved problems or [loosen](https://imamediation.com/blog/2021/9/13/five-strategies-to-destabilize-barriers-to-conflict-resolution) (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2021/9/13/five-strategies-to-destabilize-barriers-to-conflict-resolution>) stern positions.

Jayne: How have you used the skills gained through [IMA training](#) (<http://imamediation.com/courses>) to resolve conflicts in your community?



Bill: I am on the board of directors of a few small businesses, community-based groups, and a not-for-profit faith-based business. In my role on one of the boards of directors, I chair their strategic planning committee. My skills as a senior mediator and experience as a former federal government senior executive, provide insight on how problem areas can be resolved. On another board of directors, I chair their legal redress committee, whose duty is to resolve complaints between parties.

(/articles)

Jayne: What is your target audience?

Bill: My focus is businesses, government employers, educational institutions/colleges and universities, community-based groups, labor-management (unions), and court directed and private citizen disputes.

Jayne: When shopping for a good mediator, what qualities should people consider most important?

Bill: A good mediator must have or exhibit the following:

- good [listening and observation skills](https://app.convertkit.com/landing_pages/352142?v=7) (https://app.convertkit.com/landing_pages/352142?v=7)
- an abundance of [self-control](https://imamediation.com/blog/2020/1/30/how-to-stay-calm-when-conflicts-get-tense-five-powerful-strategies-of-expert-mediators) (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2020/1/30/how-to-stay-calm-when-conflicts-get-tense-five-powerful-strategies-of-expert-mediators>) and [patience](https://imamediation.com/blog/2019/5/1/build-conflict-resilience-with-these-three-strategies) (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2019/5/1/build-conflict-resilience-with-these-three-strategies>)
- a serious approach to the [duties of a mediator](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/dispute_resolution/dispute_resolution/model_standards_conduct_april2007.pdf) (https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/dispute_resolution/dispute_resolution/model_standards_conduct_april2007.pdf)
- the ability to be and remain a [neutral third party](https://www.mediate.com/model-standards-of-conduct/) (<https://www.mediate.com/model-standards-of-conduct/>)
- [awareness](https://imamediation.com/blog/2020/8/5/give-an-a-in-conflicts-the-art-of-possibility) (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2020/8/5/give-an-a-in-conflicts-the-art-of-possibility>) of their own [conscious and unconscious biases](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html) (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>)

- support for civil and human rights
- punctuality
- professional outward appearance
- the ability to manage the temperament (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2020/1/30/how-to-stay-calm-when-conflicts-get-tense-five-powerful-strategies-of-expert-mediators>) of parties in mediation
- self-assurance so as not to be intimidated by a legal presence at a mediation
- and be reputable.

However, to be an average mediator the person must have all of the above, and the will and *instinct* of a crack investigator. While mediators are not investigators, when mediating in the public and private sector, it can be helpful to have baseline knowledge of the laws, rules, regulations, practices and policies that govern situations impacting parties involved.

Jayne: What have you learned about yourself in relation to conflict through IMA's Master Mediator (<https://courses.imamediation.com/>) program?

Bill: Over the years as a senior executive, manager and leader, business owner, trainer, auto worker, hospital worker, community organizer and much more, I learned how to become an avid listener (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2022/5/11/five-powerful-open-ended-questions-mediators-use-for-active-listening>), and to be patient. I have a willingness to look for solutions to problems or situations that appear insurmountable (<https://imamediation.com/blog/2017/7/22/whats-everyone-really-fighting-about-3-powerful-lessons-of-a-mediator>), rather than routine.

Thank you, Bill, for your monumental contributions to our field.

TAKEAWAYS AND A CHALLENGE

My wish is for our readers to be inspired by Mr. Smitherman's tireless efforts to promote equal opportunity and expand access to mediation (<https://courses.imamediation.com/>) in the United States and inspire youth (<https://amzn.to/39yfl8O>) worldwide.



([/courses](https://courses))

(<https://amzn.to/3y2zihi>) character in his latest children's book by the same name.

Moreover, I challenge mediators around the world to examine ways in which we all can follow Bill's lead.

At a minimum, I have faith that young readers will be inspired to fearlessly build bridges on their own adventures, along with Bill's Henry Lee Turtle

Will you accept my challenge? How might you inspire a legacy of peace and equity in your part of the world?

♥ 13 LIKES < SHARE

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Prince Chiona 3 weeks ago · 0 Likes

This is awesome and so inspiring looking at the field of mediation being diverse, I like the part where Bill builds a legacy as an author by providing inspiration to children in building a culture of peace , engaging wisely and respectfully

I also like the part during the interview where he stated that a win to win situation must be created among the disputants

My take from this article is what Bill said that a good mediator must observe

-good listening and observation skills

-self control and patience

-having serious approach to duties and ability to remain neutral as the third part



Annjulian 2 months ago · 0 Likes

Thank you Bill for sharing your experience with other mediators. This is really encouraging and the fact that you have gone a notch higher to start at the kids level with the kids book is brilliant. Peace starts with me and the sooner our kids learn that, the society will be happy and this can only be achieved with great minds like from Bill.

Thank you too Jayne for posting this. Great lessons. Derived from the article



Faith Mukami 2 months ago · 0 Likes

What a wonderful legacy! Bill has achieved so much and still continues to forge ahead. Thank you Bill for motivating those of us who are entering the mediation field now, there is much work to be done. Thank you!



Grace Kuria 2 months ago · 0 Likes

Thank you Jayne for this powerful interview with Bill.

The interview is very educative and it reminds us as good Mediators what we must exhibit e.g. good listening and observation skills, self control and patience and others.

It's also important to note that Bill has taken a step to educate small children who will be future mediators which I will emulate.

I have been inspired by Bill's work and hope to use some of his techniques during my mediation practices.

Jayne keep up the good work



Kudra 2 months ago · 0 Likes

Thank you,

The initiative of taking on the conflict resolution journey is quite demanding and requires a good skills set which i believe to find in these well mediators above. Thank you once again for the shared insights.



Emile MORANE 2 months ago · 0 Likes

Hello Jayne,

I am happy for your progress in mediation and so excited to read this article where you interacted with Bill. You fetched from a great source. FASHA HUMANITY, our Organization and UMUTI MU NGANZO, our Music Family learnt a lot about mediation, skills needed in mediation, target groups, techniques of mediation, and the vast experience Bill shared at all layers of Society.

We are based in Kigali, Rwanda and hope to apply the learning we gained from this article.

Keep flying high and sharing with us.

"Long live unity of Humanity, long live Fraternity of Humanity". Kindly watch FRATERNITY by UMUTI MU NGANZO:

<https://youtu.be/fww3PyyDCXY>

<https://youtu.be/lmn1kSp-rSU>

<https://youtu.be/VbB7OfNQJ50>

Keep sharing many more articles.

Emile MORANE

CEO-Founder and Owner of

FASHA HUMANITY

UMUTI MU NGANZO



Fredrick Onyambu 2 months ago · 0 Likes

Peace begins with me. I have the ability to make a difference. When was the last time I apologized? Let's consider who loses when I win. Are the people around me heard and respected, or are they marginalized, ignored, and excluded? Let us resolve to care about what happens to them. Let's start a constructive conversation with someone with whom I disagree. Challenge 'them-and-us' thinking in both ourselves and others. Every one of us has the ability to make our society more just and peaceful.



Teddy 2 months ago · 0 Likes

First I would like to say thankyou for the knowledge that has been poured out, the points really give a good ground to begin mediations even in day to day issues. Engaging the young ones will also be very impactful in future and even present mediations. I would like to say a big thank you.

[Five Powerful Open-ended Questions Mediators Use for Active Listening >](#)



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