

**Mediation to resolve a workplace dispute** Advertising Feature

# Early intervention can turn down the heat

Helping parties in conflict to see a mutual way forward can help find a resolution without a costly hearing.

Workplace disputes have been front of mind recently, from allegations of sexual misconduct to walkouts by employees frustrated at the handling of sexual harassment complaints to unfair dismissal cases now before the Federal Court.

Conflict at work can be emotionally and physically costly for those involved and can result in unexpected collateral damage to other staff members and an entire firm.

Nina Harding has worked as a mediator for 25 years, helping to resolve disputes in small and large workplaces including universities, boardrooms, council chambers, doctor's surgeries, charities and factories.

Harding has a Master of Laws degree but found mediation an enormously positive career move as it comes with the benefit of helping parties in dispute avoid real damage.

"Individuals describe to me feeling a loss of faith and trust in their colleagues or organisation and waking in the morning with a sense of dread about going to work," says Harding.

"This can have a ripple effect on a whole team or workplace. It causes anxiety, divides colleagues and can affect productivity."

The Fair Work Commission suggests some of the most common reasons for conflict at work include cultural differences, fairness issues and a lack of clarity about roles or policies and procedures.

In the three months to the end of 2018, the commission received more than 190 com-



Lawyer and mediator Nina Harding has 25 years' experience in conflict resolution.

plaints about bullying. Most of these were resolved before a decision was made by the commission.

However, there can be an enormous cost to an individual and an employer if complaints have to go all the way to a commission hearing, says Harding.

"I've seen people leave organisations because they became too invested in a dispute; it can consume people, it can be difficult to find a way out of workplace conflict."

A range of powerful social movements including #Metoo is helping Australians to view conflict at work differently.

People want a voice, want their rights upheld and many are more prepared to speak up or make a complaint.

Harding recommends mediation of workplace disputes as early as possible, before conflict becomes entrenched.

"I have found the common feeling between individuals involved in these disputes is find-

ing it infuriating not being able to understand how someone thinks and, similarly, their frustration towards not being heard, respected or understood," she says.

"Mediators encourage people to believe in the possibility of change, a better future and help make those changes possible... We get

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Harding also facilitates large meetings and teaches mediation, dispute resolution and complaint handling workshops. With colleague Rachael Brady, an experienced workplace coach, Harding has created two new training workshops - Workplace Conflict Skills for HR and Workplace Conflict Skills for Managers.

With both workshops and mediation services, Harding hopes to help employees and employers understand and better navigate conflict in the workplace.

"The most impressive leaders I see have developed good conflict resolutions skills that they use at work, with customers and even at home," says Harding.

## Workplace conflict can be confusing, stressful and costly: Mediation can help

Nina Harding has mediated over 2,000 business and workplace disputes

Nationally Accredited Mediator  
Recognised expert  
25 years of experience

Mediation  
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