



INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR ETHNO-RELIGIOUS MEDIATION

"Fostering a culture of peace among ethnic and religious groups"

11 W. Prospect Avenue, 3rd Floor
Mount Vernon, New York 10550

www.icermediation.org

U.S. 501 (c) (3) tax exempt public charity, nonprofit and non-governmental organization in Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

MEDIATION ACADEMY

Specialized Mediation Training The Mediation of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts

Mediation Project

Stage (1) - Mediation Case Study (Sample case developed by Basil Ugorji, 2016)

Proposed Case Study: The Islamic Veil Conflict in a Restaurant

What Happened? Historical Background to the Conflict

The Islamic Veil Conflict is an organizational conflict that occurred in a New York based restaurant between the restaurant General Manager and the Front-of-the-House Manager (also known as the Maître d'hôtel). The Front-of-the-House Manager is a young Muslim woman who is one of the oldest employees of this restaurant and who, because of her strong religious beliefs and values, was permitted at the time of employment by the first General Manager of this restaurant to wear her Islamic veil (or scarf) to work. The Front-of-the-House Manager is often characterized in this restaurant as the best employee because of her work ethics, good relationship with work colleagues and customers, and dedication to achieving good results. However, the owner of the restaurant recently hired a new General Manager (male) to replace the outgoing General Manager (who resigned to open his own restaurant in another city). The new General Manager was hired few days before the San Bernardino mass shooting in California.

Since the terrorist attack was committed by two Islamic extremists (one woman and one man), the new General Manager of the restaurant ordered the Front-of-the-House Manager to stop wearing her Islamic veil to work. She refused to obey the General Manager's order and continued to wear her veil to work, stating that she has worn her veil to the restaurant for more than 6 years without any problem. This resulted in a serious conflict between the two highly ranked employees of the restaurant – the new General Manager on the one hand, and the Front-of-the-House Manager on the other.

Each Other's Stories – how each person understands the situation and why

General Manager's Story – *She is the problem*

Position: The Front-of-the-House Manager MUST STOP wearing her Islamic veil in this restaurant.

Interests:

Safety / Security: I want our customers to feel safe when they come to eat and drink in our restaurant. Seeing a veiled Muslim manager in our restaurant may make customers feel uncomfortable, insecure, and suspicious. The increase in the Islamic terrorist attacks, especially the terrorist attack at a restaurant in Paris, and the San Bernardino mass shooting in California, not to mention the fears that the 9/11 terrorist attack have provoked in the minds of New Yorkers, may make customers feel insecure when they see you covered with a Muslim veil in our restaurant.

Physiological Needs: My family and I depend on my work in this restaurant for our physiological needs – housing, clothing, food, health insurance, and so on. So, I want to do

everything to satisfy our customers in order to retain old ones and motivate new ones to come back. If our customers stop coming, our restaurant will close. I don't want to lose my job.

Belongingness / We / Team Spirit: By wearing your Islamic veil, you look completely different from the rest of us, and I am sure you feel that you are different. I want you to feel that you belong here; that you are part of us; and that we are all the same. If you dress like us, both employees and customers will not look at you differently.

Self-Esteem / Respect: I was hired to replace the outgoing General Manager because of my track record, experience, leadership skills, and good judgment. As the General Manager of this restaurant, I need you to acknowledge my position, know that I am in control and in charge of the general day-to-day management, operation and activities of this restaurant. I also want you to respect me and the decisions I make for the best interest of the restaurant, the employees and the customers.

Business Growth / Profit / Self-Actualization: It is my interest to do everything I could to grow this restaurant. If the restaurant grows and is successful, we all will enjoy the benefits. I also want to stay in this restaurant hoping that with my good management record, I could be promoted to a regional management position.

Front-of-the-House Manager's Story – He is the problem:

Position: I will NOT STOP wearing my Islamic veil in this restaurant.

Interests:

Safety / Security: Wearing my Islamic veil makes me feel safe before the eyes of Allah (God). Allah promised to protect women who obey his word by wearing the hijab. Hijab is Allah's commandment for modesty, and I have to obey it. Also, if I don't wear my hijab, I will be punished by my parents and my community. Hijab is my religious and cultural identity. The hijab also protects me from physical harm that could come from men or other women. So, wearing the Islamic veil makes me feel safe and gives me a sense of security and purpose.

Physiological Needs: I depend on my work in this restaurant for my physiological needs – housing, clothing, food, health insurance, education, and so on. I am afraid that if I am fired I will not be able to provide for my immediate needs.

Belongingness / We / Team Spirit: I need to feel that I am accepted in this restaurant irrespective of my faith or religious belief. Sometimes I feel discriminated against, and many employees and customers show some form of hostility toward me. I want people to feel free and relate to me as I am. I am not a terrorist. I am just an ordinary young Muslim woman who wants to practice her religion and keep the values with which I have been raised from childhood.

Self-Esteem / Respect: I need you to respect my Constitutional right to practice my religion. Freedom of religion is inscribed in the Constitution of the United States. So, I want you to respect my conscious decision to wear my hijab. By the way, hijab also makes me feel pretty, happy, pure and comfortable. I also need you to acknowledge all the work and sacrifices I have made for the success and growth of this restaurant. I want you to recognize me as a person, an ordinary woman like the rest of the women in this restaurant, and not as a terrorist.

Business Growth / Profit / Self-Actualization: For the past 6 years, I have genuinely and professionally done my work so that I can stay in this restaurant and possibly get promoted into a

higher management position. So, my goal is to contribute to the growth of this restaurant hoping that I will continue to reap the benefits of my hard work.