



10

Nora's Second Pre-Caucus

The mediator opens up with a general question about how things are going and if Nora has any feelings about the mediation process she has been participating in.

Nora – Things are fine . . . the process is fine. Em, Rebecca was nice to me the other day. I was floored. It was wonderful! [Laughing]

Mediator – So maybe there have been . . .

Nora – I think so.

Mediator – . . . some changes . . . already.

Nora – I think so. Yeah.

Mediator – That has been the goal, but we haven't brought you together, so hopefully . . . those steps can be taken . . .

Nora – Yeah. We have had some pleasant exchanges, and that is excellent.

Mediator – Yes, well good. If you didn't have anything else, I just wanted to go back . . . it has been a little over a month since we met . . . and review a few things with you.

The mediator summarizes Nora's comments from her first pre-caucus, and Nora corrects a few notions but mostly agrees with the mediator's understanding of the situation. Nora thanked the mediator for the summary.

Mediator – And you want to right the relationship,

improve the relationship, but your concern are the emotions that come from Rebecca.

Nora – Yes.

Mediator – Which it sounds as maybe . . .

Nora – Maybe things are simmering down.

Mediator – Right. And we shared with Rebecca the positive things you said about her. And asked her if there was anything we could share with you.

Nora – OK

Mediator – So, she also wanted to share the positive things . . . she brought these up before I had a chance to ask her.

Nora – Oh, good.

The mediator shares the positive things Rebecca said about Nora: her strong belief system, how she treats people well, and her excellent understanding of lab equipment. Then, the mediator goes on to explain some of Rebecca's concerns. These include the fact that Rebecca feels like "a cop," in general, when she tries to get the information from the staff for the report. The mediator explained that this is a general feeling that Rebecca has, rather than pinpointing only to her adversary. Nora acknowledged how this last comment might be so. We pick up the conversation as the mediator goes from the general comments to more specific ones.

Mediator – Now, this is something you have already alluded to, Rebecca gets the impression at times, that you think your work is more important than hers.

Nora – And I can understand how someone may feel like that, but that doesn't mean it's true. I'm just expecting others to tell me what their needs are and we will get it done.

Mediator – Talking things through with each other.

Nora – Right, I told you there was a problem there.

Mediator – Then the last thing, is, Rebecca feels you

sometimes treat her differently than other people in the lab. She is not sure if it is something she's done or the way she responds. And the example Rebecca gave is that she has heard you raise your voice at her and at no one else.

Nora – Mmm . . . yeah . . . I . . . [nodding].

Mediator – Those are the areas she wanted to share.

Nora – OK, can I give you my responses to these . . . ?

Mediator – Yes.

Nora – OK, repeat them one by one and I will respond to them.

Mediator – The cop issue.

Nora – I think I gave the example of Peppermint Patty getting to be the crossing guard [laughing]. I think she's mellowed out some on . . . on that . . . some people can take their jobs a liiiiiittle bit too seriously. But I don't know if I would exactly share that with her . . .

Nora was able to express her feelings, but realizes that the wording will have to be changed in order not to offend. This is a valuable aspect of the pre-caucus.

Mediator – The responses you are giving me right now will get refined later.

Nora – We . . . we will decide on how we want to respond . . . the official response. [Laughing, then silence] Yes, I understand that she's got that task. People take on obligations, and I sometimes wonder why they take these on. Actually the best boss I've ever had is our present boss who has the job despite the fact that he didn't want it. Everybody I've ever worked for before who wanted that job has been a very difficult boss to have . . . there was a reason why they wanted to be the boss. While I understand that it is something that needs to be done . . . people take on different things because they have a reason, their own reason for needing to take those things on. I think she is getting better. If it's truly something that needs to get done, I am as interested as the next person to make sure it is taken care of.

Mediator – Anything more about that?

Nora – No. No . . . I am part of the team, we will make it work, if it is really important.

The party has admitted that there may be a need for change on her part, without the mediator having to moralize. This is not necessarily going to happen every time, and in fact, when we come to the joint session, we shall see this issue develop further.

Mediator – Rebecca was concerned that it was implied as well as directly stated that your work was more important than hers.

Nora – Well, we'll have to get that straightened out.

Mediator – OK.

Nora – We'll have to . . . I think I know how that came about so let's get it fixed.

Mediator – Is that back to the Larry . . . ?

Nora – Back to the Larry thing. And if that is not the issue, then let's find out what the issue is and get it fixed.

Mediator – In addition to it being directly stated, she actually had heard it from others, that you had stated that your work was more important than hers.

Nora – [Pause. Nora, who has been quite cheerful to this moment, begins to shake her head, raise her eyebrows, and shrug her shoulders as if searching. She continues in a serious tone.] I don't know how to respond to that, I don't remember saying something like that . . . although maybe, maybe taken out of context . . . I don't know . . . but that's not how I feel, sooo . . . we'll just have to get that fixed, get that straightened out . . . sorry if . . . [Pause] Now, she is saying that I said that to somebody else and they said that to her?

Mediator – Yes.

Nora – Weeell, I'll have to think if there is anything I have ever said that could have been misconstrued that way. I might have said at one point . . . when I had three people

working for me . . . that I had more things going on than other people, which was probably true, but it doesn't mean it was more important.

The mediator lets Nora know that he is listening, and Nora expands a bit on what has been said. Nora's usual smile returns to her face.

Mediator – The last issue, the fact that Rebecca feels that she is sometimes treated differently than others in the lab. Wondering if she does something, or has done something, she feels that you have raised your voice at her when you haven't necessarily at other people.

Nora – [With a smile, nodding her head when she speaks.] OK, I have several responses to that.

Mediator – OK.

Nora – I'll respond to the example first.

Mediator – OK.

Nora – Em, first of all, let's define "raising my voice." I can think of two incidents where I was irritated with her . . . where she interpreted it as "raising my voice." I would never have called what I did raising my voice or yelling, she said I was yelling at her. [Nora pauses, raises both of her hands and still smiling continues.] Believe me, if I want to yell at somebody, *I will yell at somebody*. It's not what I did. I know how to yell at somebody and I don't do it to anyone who is not my child. But . . . that wasn't yelling at her . . . yes, there was some annoyance in my voice when after the third time . . . [Nora goes on to recount a situation where there had been a miscommunication between the two of them. Rebecca had wanted to discard some older piece of lab equipment and Nora felt it should be kept. As Nora tells her own story, she raises her voice quite a bit when it comes to the "raising the voice" incident.] Yeah, I guess I did raise my voice but that wasn't what I call yelling at her. I was annoyed and irritated. [Nora goes on to explain how that same piece of lab equipment was needed by someone else in

the lab a short while after Rebecca had wanted to discard it. Nora speaks about another situation where she was irritated at Rebecca, but again would not call what happened “raising her voice.”] I would not say that I am treating her differently, but rather, I seldom have occasion to get annoyed at anybody else at the lab. We’ll no . . . occasionally I have gotten annoyed at people working for me, when they have done something really stupid.

Mediator – Yeah.

Nora – I’m not a yeller. But I am capable of being annoyed. So, I go around yelling at her and not at anybody else? That would be an odd thing to think.

Up to now, Nora has been trying to preserve her self image for the mediator. As she speaks and is heard, she will be in a better position to recognize that even this level of “raising her voice” may be a problem in her troubled relationship with Rebecca.

Nora – It sounds a little paranoid to me. Now, on the other hand, where I feel a little paranoid is . . . I feel she treats me differently than the rest of the people in the lab. The specific example is where, besides me, there are five other professional women in the lab. [More serious, Nora continues] And somehow, they all seem to know what the others are doing on the weekend, and where they went, and who went hiking or to the beach, and who is seeing who. And if I walk up and there’s two people talking, such as Rebecca and Adriana, not only do I not know what they are talking about, but no one includes me in the conversation. So, I don’t know exactly how that all works. I don’t think I’ve been unfriendly to anybody. I certainly don’t think I’ve been in the loop.

Supposedly, the conflict was about a report, but through this conversation we observe the importance of other underlying interpersonal issues.

Mediator – Right.

Nora – When I try and bust into the loop I don't feel particularly welcome, particularly when Rebecca is part of that conversation. You know, I'm fine with everyone individually, but I get the impression that everybody else is doing things with other people, with each other . . . and I'm not. Which . . . since I tend to be busy it's not a huge thing . . . I'm not expecting people at the lab to be my friends [begins to smile again], but on the other hand . . . I do feel a little bit left out.

The mediator summarizes very briefly, and asks if there is anything Nora wishes to add.

Nora – Mmm . . . I don't think so. I'm looking forward to things getting resolved . . . especially if there have been misunderstandings. I really want to get those taken care of. I may not be able to meet all the expectations, but we can be clear as to which ones I can meet and which ones I can't.

Mediator – That leads into the next question. Do you feel comfortable with the idea of a joint session next time we meet: to have both Rebecca and yourself together?

Nora – Sure, we can do that. We can do that. I'd like to know the list of questions ahead of time, of whatever we are going to be discussing. Realizing, of course, that life does not always follow a list.

Mediator – OK, of course.

The mediator asks Nora to come up with two or three expectations for the joint session.

Nora – My personal goals would be, foremost, to communicate to Rebecca somehow that she is important to me, that her work is important to me, and that she, as a person, is important to me.

This last comment was expressed in a very sincere, touching way. Once again, the time lapse between the pre-caucuses has permitted the parties to begin the process of mutual validation. Nora continues with her goals for the mediation.

Nora – And as an outpour of that, I want to have the air clear between us, so that the number one goal is not interfered with. Do you know what I mean? So there is not a miscommunication there. I want to have some sort of understanding . . . if somehow I can establish that as a baseline . . . perhaps then, if other things that may happen as life goes on, misunderstandings or miscommunications . . . that I am not doing things to deliberately make her life difficult . . . maybe then she will cut me some slack . . . in terms of thinking the worst of my intentions. And I would like her to understand that if she has a need in her work, or otherwise, if somehow that can be communicated to me we can work it into the priority list.

Mediator – Be able to talk about work or what happens in the weekend. At this time both of you are hesitant to speak to each other, not knowing how the other will react.

Nora – Right.

NEXT STEPS

When we return, Nora and Rebecca will have a chance to converse with each other directly, and begin to resolve their own differences. Much progress has been achieved already. For instance, both women have recognized that they may be doing something to merit a negative reaction from the other. Even though they have not met in a joint session, Rebecca and Nora are beginning to validate each other during their brief work encounters.