

# Got workplace issues? Let's try to mediate

**Melanie Burgess** finds more employers are sorting staff disputes out themselves

MEDIATION, often used for workplace conflict resolution, is increasingly popular as being able to de-escalate workplace situations and manage change with minimal fuss saves employers significant money.

IBIS World's 2015 Alternative Dispute Resolution Services in Australia: Market Research Report finds the industry has grown strongly in the past five years.

It has become increasingly popular since the mid-1990s when governments and businesses realised the benefits of settling disputes outside of the courts.

"The rising cost of litigation and the rising incidence of industrial action have contributed to the growing use of industry services," the report reveals.

"Industry profitability has grown steadily over the period and the number of enterprises and establishments operating in the industry has followed suit."

Industry revenue was forecast to grow by 5.7 per cent



**RESOLVING CONFLICT:** Australian Mediation Association chief executive Callum Campbell.

Picture: TIM MARSDEN

**6271 AUSTRALIANS WORK IN THE ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION INDUSTRY**

in 2014-15 to reach \$1.5 billion.

Australian Mediation Association chief executive Callum

Campbell says the most common applications for mediation in the workplace are bullying and harassment, return-to-work issues and procedures, differing working and leadership styles, allegations of discrimination, and role clarification.

"If there is group conflict, we can enhance the way they communicate with each other," he says. "You can use it all the way up to board level."

Campbell says mediators can work in a broad range of roles from in-house human resources to family law.

They must have strong communication skills including the ability to actively listen, question and clarify, summarise, identify emotions, reframe issues and empathise.

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## It's important for mediators not to take sides, to be neutral and not to pass judgment

not to take sides, to be neutral and not to pass judgment or be judgmental," he says.

People with a background in social sciences or counselling often move into mediation and resolution conflict.

Mediators can become

accredited through trainers such as AMA's Mediator Training Academy.

It runs four-week online courses and six-day face-to-face courses throughout the year as well as webinars for continuing development.

### TOP THREE

#### TIPS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE WORKPLACE

##### 1 Try to act immediately

"If the problem doesn't go away and it remains unsolved, a mountain will form out of a molehill," Campbell says.

"People leave these things unresolved and they bubble away in the background. There can be a tipping point and it can cause them to explode in the workplace.

"If two people are in conflict it usually doesn't affect just them but the whole team."

##### 2 Meet the people involved

Campbell says managers should gain a clear understanding of the issue before trying to assist.

"People have very different perceptions of what has occurred," he says.

"Make sure you have that understanding of what the parties need.

"It's not about judging who is right or wrong but the emphasis is on addressing each party's concerns and, by doing that, you resolve the conflict."

##### 3 Get help from a professional

Campbell says it's important to know when to call a professional.

If it's too complicated and the conflict is entrenched, he says that is when you call in an external mediator."

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### MEDIATION & FAMILY DISPUTE RESOLUTION (FDR) CAREERS

*The possibilities are endless..*

The Mediator Training Academy and the Australian Mediation Association (AMA) offer you the opportunity to obtain the necessary basic mediation process knowledge and skills to become an Accredited Mediator in accordance with the Australian National Mediator Standards (NMA Approval).

These mediation courses can also serve as a conduit to becoming a Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner under the Family Law (Family Dispute Resolution Practitioners) Regulations 2008.

**First 50 callers who enrol will receive 10% off their course enrolment**

Web address: [mediator.academy](http://mediator.academy)

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