

Text of interview by Dayton Business Journal and CEO Michael Stephens of Greene Memorial Hospital in Xenia, Ohio (fall 2001):

Q: Why did you think the hospital needed the services of a conflict resolution/mediation firm?

A: Healthcare is filled with opportunities for conflict today. Conflicts between doctors & managed care companies, conflicts between hospital departments working with scarce resources, conflicts between people's perceptions of what a health career was likely to be and what the current environment is, etc.

Q: What, in summary, did the ARIA Group do for Greene Memorial Hospital?

A: The ARIA group began working with us through an educational session regarding conflict management for our leadership group made up of the Board of trustees, Medical Staff leadership, and Executive leadership team. This was targeted at establishing a culture where conflict is viewed as an opportunity to improve current performance. We followed this up with training for the department directors within the hospital and leaders of other parts of our healthcare system (Greene Oaks nursing home, MSA physician group practice, and Women's Recovery Center chemical dependency treatment center). The ARIA group then assisted us with training on how to respond to situations involving conflict, training employees to work through conflicts constructively, etc.

Q: How has working with ARIA and its techniques helped your staff?

A: Probably the biggest help was in giving staff tools to recognize what their preconceived attitudes towards conflict are and tools to use to engage conflict whether the other party is interested in resolving the conflict or not. Most also view conflict as either "Fight or Flight" and that all conflict is negative. Most of us believe that conflict is not worth engaging unless the other party is also motivated to resolve the issue. But the reality is that we all encounter people who aren't interested in resolving conflicts with us, and some who may even enjoy having conflict with us. The ARIA staff worked with our staff on positive tools for addressing these kinds of conflicts in a way, which can help even if the other person isn't interested in helping improve things.

Q: Can you point to any cost savings or give any anecdotal evidence that your staff's use of the ARIA group's processes has helped the hospital's bottom line or its workplace efficiency?

A: It is far easier to identify anecdotal evidence that the ARIA group's processes work than tangible cost savings. There were several situations where the use of these processes helped staff to resolve long-standing differences. There were also certainly situations where engaging conflicts with these processes improved the work environment for staff. In some instances we know that these processes prevented staff turnover and therefore to cost of staff replacement. It is a

great improvement to be able to feel that you have some control over your work environment and conflicts that may come up, rather than the typical "fight or flight" response that comes naturally to most of us.

Q: How do you and your staff view conflict now after working with the ARIA Group?

A: We certainly would not claim to have conquered all conflict issues that we face, but I would say that in general our staff views conflict more as a positive opportunity to make things better, rather than a negative situation to be avoided.

Q: Have conflicts lessened between staff members since ARIA?

A. It's not necessarily that conflicts have gone away, but that we are better able to deal with them with a set of practical tools.

Q. Do you see a trend of Miami Valley businesses using conflict resolution/mediation processes? Why or why not?

A: I see a trend of businesses using conflict resolution process more frequently as a positive tool to achieve improved relationships and results. The alternatives of simply ignoring conflicts or responding with hostility both run counter to the goal of becoming a learning, growing, and improving enterprise.