

MEDIATE THIS !

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY: 'MEDIATE THIS!' MARKS ONE YEAR

BY STEVEN P. DINKIN

Dear Reader:

Imagine a practical tool kit assembled out of professional mediation strategies that anyone can use to resolve disputes across the human spectrum - family feuds, neighborhood quarrels, workplace clashes, even ideological wars.

That was the idea behind the launch of "Mediate This!" on Jan. 21, 2018. On a morning when the Union-Tribune carried a headline about a federal government shutdown, our debut column explored how an apartment dweller could approach an upstairs neighbor about loud thumping sounds at night.

We didn't realize it then, but the lead news story and our column were conveying the same human narrative: how entrenched anger and resentment can trap us in conflict and how finding the courage to open up a dialogue can set us free.

A year later, this column has become a window into how much people yearn to improve their skills for handling disagreements, especially at a time when rancor is tearing our nation apart.

"I really love the idea of a

science of conflict," a reader wrote in response to a column. "There is lots of food for thought for me in that."

Our column scenarios have been familiar to the mediators who handle cases at the National Conflict Resolution Center. Nearly all of the submissions have fallen into one of four categories:

- Clashes between family members over rules and responsibilities;
- Tensions between colleagues who share large workloads and cramped workspaces;
- Disputes between landlords and tenants, and also merchants and customers;
- And in the most prevalent category, friction between neighbors living at close range 24/7.

Three of our most popular columns (judging by reader feedback) looked at contemporary public access issues: service dogs in eateries, dubious use of disabled parking placards, and scooter renters who ride illegally on sidewalks because they are afraid to ride legally in the street.

These modern muddles show that a central source of strife is a visceral reaction to unfair conduct that breaks the rules.



The top of the front page of the U-T's Jan. 21, 2018, edition, featuring the federal shutdown story mentioned in today's column.

When that happens, we mediators reach for the most useful implement in our tool kit: empathy.

Empathy has special power when it works in both directions. We ask the person who has done harm to imagine how it feels to be on the receiving end. And we ask the person who has been harmed to contemplate why good people behave badly.

When people try to see conflict situations through the eyes of their adversaries - and the human imagination can handle that task with a little prompting - rational thought begins to

emerge from the fog of acrimony.

That revelation was central to two well-received columns on big-picture issues: the controversy over National Football League player protests (Sept. 23) and partisan bickering in the run-up to the midterm elections (Nov. 4).

In both cases, we looked at how America's growing addiction to "us-vs.-them" tribalism has locked us in a stalemate where nobody wins and everyone feels diminished.

Mediators are in the business of delivering solutions, not victories. We help clients ac-

quire the skills they need to move forward in life by cooperating with others. As people become proficient in those skills, areas of mutual benefit gain precedence, and points of friction lose their sting.

Right now, that's our best hope of achieving progress toward substantive goals. If enough of us learn to do this, we can begin to mend our frayed social fabric.

Or, as one reader wrote, "I tend to muddle my way through any particular conflict and forget about it until the next time. Every time feels brand new and confusing. But patterns in conflict and specific strategies to address different types? Mind blown."

Thanks for sending us so many intriguing conflict scenarios, and please keep your submissions and feedback coming.

Steven P. Dinkin is a professional mediator who has served as president of the San-Diego based National Conflict Resolution Center since 2003. Do you have a conflict that needs a resolution? Share your story with The Mediator via email at mediatethis@ncrconline.com or as an online submission by visiting www.ncrconline.com/MediateThis. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

NOTEBOOKS

From Union-Tribune reporting staff

OUTDOORS: ERNIE COWAN

Conditions pointing to super bloom

It was chilly, even for a December day, and the pattering of raindrops on the hood of my parka was out of character for a desert hike.

With head down, I continued to walk through the light rain, knowing that each drop brought hope for another beautiful spring wildflower bloom in just a few months.

I was hiking from Indian Hill back to my truck in the southern part of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. Little did I know then that this would be the beginning of what is shaping up as at least a good wet winter, and perhaps another epic spring wildflower season.

Since that time, a series of storms have made their way over the coastal mountains, bringing precious moisture to the arid sands of San Diego's eastern desert.

December rains are not unusual in the desert, but the storms that followed this season have been ideally spaced and abundant. And Nature abides.

Already, eastern portions of Anza-Borrego have come alive with unseasonably early blooms of desert sunflowers, clusters of purple sand verbena and beautiful displays of the large, white desert lilies.

I've written before about the eternal optimism of veteran desert travelers. With the first drops of rain each winter our hopes soar for an epic bloom. Thankfully that is more often not the case.

If every spring wildflower show was spectacular, it would become ho-hum and routine. There are always spring wildflowers, but some years desert visitors must hunt for the isolated pocket of blooms. It might be five, 10 or 20 years between those memorable spring shows that will be talked about for a long time.

While our last super bloom was just two years ago in the spring of 2017, conditions right now are pointing to another spectacular event this year.

Time and conditions will tell. The miracle of a truly beautiful wildflower bloom lies with water, wind and temperatures.

The water already seems to be there. Last week, the latest storms dumped more than a half inch of rain from Borrego Springs to Ocotillo Wells. Combined with other storms that began in December on New Year's, the sands are wet.

Spring also brings two things that can hurt emerging delicate blossoms. Sudden spikes in temperature can wilt the flowers,



The desert five-spot is found in small concentrations.

and harsh winds can dry and shred them.

In 2017, conditions meshed nicely, and the desert was alive with a blanket of flowers.

It was also hard on the tiny community of Borrego Springs that normally hosts about 3,000 residents.

You might call 2017 the first social media flower season. When as many as 200,000 arrived in the tiny remote community to see the flowers, many wondered why?

The answer seemed to be news of bloom spread through social media. Borrego had never experienced this before and had to scramble to provide additional restroom facilities and services.

Here are a few survival tips if Super Bloom 2019 happens this year.

The biggest crowds are on weekends. If you can get away during the week, you will have smaller crowds to deal with.

Pack a picnic and enjoy a quiet lunch in the beauty of nature. Bring plenty of water. Even in winter, it can get warm in the desert.

Get away from the crowd. If you have a high clearance vehicle, many roads within the park will allow you to get into more remote areas. Most wildflower hunters stay on paved roads.

Hiking is also a good way of getting away from the crowds. Maps and trail guides are available at the park visitor center and at the State Park Store operated by Anza-Borrego Foundation in the Borrego Springs Mall.

For the latest bloom information, call the Anza-Borrego Wildflower Hot Line at (760) 767-4684.

Email ernie@packtrain.com

THE READERS' REPRESENTATIVE: ADRIAN VORE

Too much detail in report about rape?

Reporters strive to include details in articles. They help readers see, hear, feel and understand. There are times, however, when details can be unneeded. In the case of crime stories, some details can be too gory, too invasive and too painful. They can be left out of an article, while still giving readers enough news to understand what happened.

A story on an arraignment in a rape case angered reader Karen Blevins of San Carlos. Blevins is a registered nurse and public health nurse who has met hundreds of rape victims, she said.

The defendant in the story is accused of raping a neighbor. He is an ex-con living in a half-way house in City Heights. Prosecutors said he sneaked into the home of a neighbor through an unlocked door about 1:30 a.m. on a Sunday. The 21-year-old victim lived in a small house with her boyfriend. At the time of the attack she was waiting for him to arrive home.

"As the woman sat on her bedroom floor in her nightie, looking into a mirror to remove her makeup, she saw a stranger's face reflected in the mirror," the story read.

"The man stepped into the room with a knife, put his finger to his lips and told her, 'Shhh,' the story reported a prosecutor as saying.

The rape occurred after that, the prosecutor said.

Blevins objected to the amount of detail, particularly the reference to the "nightie" and "shhh."

"The content of the article is inappropriate relative to the sensitive subject matter," she emailed. "To describe in detail exactly what happened prior to the rape is not important....

"Nightie? Really? How is what she was wearing, or that she was sitting on the floor taking off her make up, relevant at ALL? To go into such a detailed description about the alleged rapist's actions leading up to the rape, that '...he put his finger to his lips and told her, 'Shhh,' is so entirely inappropriate."

She said the article was "disturbing." I asked Blevins in an email to expand further on her objections.

"When did what she was doing, what she was wearing, who she was waiting for, or even whether her door was unlocked become relevant to the CRIME OF RAPE? A senseless, violent crime!

"Furthermore, to elaborate on the fact that the rapist put his finger to his lips and told her, 'Shhh' did not help make sense of this crime ... but rather it simply added details that spoke

more to the gratuitous leap the writer had taken throughout the article," Blevins said.

Dana Littlefield, the U-T's public safety editor, edited the story. She has 14 years' experience covering courts in the county.

She said she believed the details showed how vulnerable the woman was while in her own home, where she felt safe.

"This was information provided to us by the prosecutor," Littlefield said. "The information helps set the scene as to what happened to this woman and how she, according to the prosecution, was interrupted in her home at night while she was preparing for bed. The detail about seeing the stranger's face reflected in the mirror she was peering into is particularly chilling.

"Prosecutors often provide details about how a crime occurred not only to convey the timeline of what happened, but in some cases to paint a picture of how vulnerable a victim was. The latter can be used by the lawyers to help bolster an argument for conviction and later, if there is a conviction, to argue for a tougher sentence."

I thought some details were relevant. The unlocked door explains how the attacker entered the home. If it did not say that, as a reader, I would wonder how the person got inside. I think that is a key piece of information that needs to be included in a crime story.

I believe what she was doing in the perceived safety of her home shows her vulnerability. I thought "shhh" and "nightie" could have been deleted. Reporting her routine task and that the attacker held a knife provided enough information.

More on descriptions in crime stories

Littlefield provided additional insight on the decision making about what information to include in stories about sex crimes.

"We try to include as much information as we can to describe the crime itself, without getting too graphic. Of course, intelligent minds can disagree on how much information is too graphic, and we have those conversations in the newsroom frequently. We try not to include information or descriptions that would needlessly embarrass a victim or that would victimize that person further.

"Also, we do not report the names of victims of sex crimes except when that person has given us permission to do so. (This is not to be confused with lawsuits we've written about in which a person sues another for sexual harassment.)"

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

1929 NORTH PARK THEATER SIGNALS END OF SILENT FILM ERA

The North Park Theatre opened in January 1929 as the first local movie house designed specifically for showing "talkies."

The transition from silent films to motion and sound synchronized "talking pictures" marked the end of an era in Hollywood.

At 90 years old, the refurbished theater is now the Observatory North Park concert venue.

From The San Diego Union, Thursday, January 17, 1929:

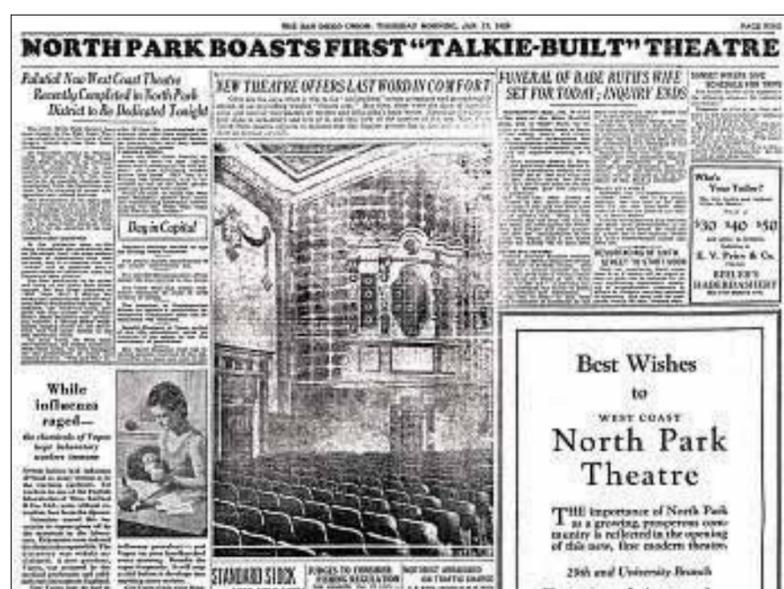
NORTH PARK BOASTS FIRST "TALKIE-BUILT" THEATRE

Palatial New West Coast Theatre Recently Completed in North Park District to Be Dedicated Tonight

The city's North Park district has been chosen by the West Coast Theatres organization as the home of San Diego's fourth deluxe West Coast playhouse.

On University avenue at Twenty-ninth street, the new West Coast North Park theatre, to be officially dedicated tonight, brings to this rapidly developing section the distinction of access to the first local theatre to be specially designed and constructed, from the foundation upward, for the showing of sound synchronized and talking pictures.

The development of the sight-and-sound picture has been so rapid that theatres already built have been hurriedly adapting their projection facilities for the new films,



but the North Park was specifically designed from the start for the showing of the new productions.

THOROUGHLY EQUIPPED

In the projection room, on the stage,

throughout the auditorium and on the screen itself, the most modern methods of construction have been followed and it is expected that the "talkies" will be presented with a greater degree of perfection than has heretofore been possible.

The first production to be shown will bring to the North Park screen tonight the San Diego premiere of "Win That girl," a William Fox sound and synchronized picture starring David Rollins and Sue Carol. In addition, the voice-and-vision program will also include "the Lion's Roar," Mack Sennett's first all-talking comedy; a George Dewey Washington singing recital on the Movietone, and the latest edition of Fox Movietone News.

For some weeks the West Coast new California, the largest downtown West Coast house, has been equipped for the presentation of sound and talking pictures. "Prep and Pep," another William Fox synchronized production, will open there tomorrow for a week's showing, and several important speaking films have been booked for forthcoming release.

CABRILLO WIRED

Also, the West Coast Cabrillo tomorrow will start its new "talkie" policy with a showing of "In Old Arizona," the first all-talking outdoor picture ever made. This, too, is a William Fox production, and is acclaimed as one of the most perfect speaking pictures ever filmed.

Plans are afoot to equip the West Coast Fairmount theatre with sound and synchronizing apparatus, thereby making the San Diego West Coast units 100 per cent "talkie."

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