

## **A February Meeting Review**

**by Paul Bailey, CRN Board of Directors**

Dr. Mike Hemphill (M.A., Ph.D.; University of Iowa), Professor of Communication and Dean for Academic Affairs at the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service, spoke on communication and conflict transformation.

He regards communication not as a tool but a process to engage with others and create (or re-create) the world through interaction with others. These interactions takes place with symbols because the actual events are long gone. Mediators have only these symbols to help parties make sense of their conflict; but symbols are ambiguous, arbitrary and artificial. When symbols have different meanings for people, misunderstanding follows. One method of getting beyond the confusion and misunderstanding is the “power of paraphrase”.

Three additional techniques he suggested are:

1. The “conversational triplet”, comment, reaction, and confirmation. The key to successful communication often lies with the structure and content of the confirmation.
2. The “logical force”, our patterns of interaction we fall in to. Successful communication can sometimes come from accepting uncertainty in lieu of comfortable, known patterns of interaction that are wrong or inadequate.
3. The “ante-narrative”, the details of the experience before they became symbols, a part of a narrative. The mediator must help the parties understand, or acknowledge the experience and not the narratives that were generated by the parties.

And for those of you who drive the tollway, Dr. Hemphill provided a technique for dealing with irate drivers.

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