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MEDIATION

A Mediator Looks at

But vs. And

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a coordinating conjunction as: “a conjunction (such as *and*, *or*, or *but*) that joins together words, phrases, or clauses of equal importance.”

In mediation as well as in other forums, these two, three letter conjunctions can do much more than simply coordinate! Consider Webster’s definition that the two clauses are of “equal importance.” Often, the use of *but* can make the two parts of the sentence very unequal! The choice of which to use can subtly manipulate and send a message of exclusion or inclusion. In many instances, “*but*” excludes, denies, discounts or in some way rejects the previous independent clause:¹

But	And
Excludes or is dismissive of that which precedes it	Expands and includes what precedes it
Negates, discounts, or cancels that which precedes it	Acknowledges what precedes it
May easily be perceived as pejorative	Perceived as more neutral
Suggests the first issue is subordinate to the second	Suggests there are two issues to be addressed

“I may owe her, but I don’t have any money” leaves unspoken but nevertheless implies: “therefore, I’m not paying.”

“I may owe her, and I don’t have any money” implies there may be two distinct issues to be addressed.

“Yes, I would like to resolve this, but we’re not making any progress” leaves unspoken but implies: “so it’s not going to resolve.”

“Yes, I would like to resolve this, and we’re not making any progress” implies: “we may need another approach.”

“*But*” tends to sour the air in the room making our task of assisting parties to find resolution more difficult while “*and*” opens a window of opportunity for addressing multiple issues, and using new approaches, while mitigating the taint of pejorative shadings. “*And*” avoids sending the message that the speaker is dismissive of that which preceded the conjunction. Since all parties want and expect to be heard, mediators will do well to let a little fresh air in by encouraging parties to substitute “*and*” for