



# **THE GOOD FRIENDS (KALYĀṆAMITTA-DHAMMA) AS FOUNDATIONAL QUALITY OF THE MEDITATOR**

**Sarankorn Jombunud,<sup>1</sup> Bunna Maley,<sup>2</sup> Pisit Maneewong<sup>3</sup>**

**Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University**

**Thailand<sup>1</sup>**

**Steel Squadron Chaplain RFAS, 3D Cavalry Regiment Texas,**

**Virginia,<sup>2-3</sup>**

**United State of America (USA)<sup>2-3</sup>**

**Email:** Bunnamaley789@gmail.com,<sup>1-3</sup>

**Received:** January 31, 2022; **Revised:** April 5, 2022; **Accepted:** May 31, 2022

## **Abstract**

This article focuses on the qualities of a mediator studied from various views of western perspectives. Apart from skills and techniques that a mediator needs to master in order to be an effective and professional one, some personal qualities are really important as they can help implement a mediator to be more effective, respectful, and reliable in acquiring the skills and performing the work. There are many qualities that a mediator should possess suggested by various experts. Many of them are similar. In this article, the author combined all the similar qualities and presented that there are six important qualities that can be drawn from the western experts. In addition to the western perspective on qualities of a mediator, the good friends, a Buddhist teaching on the seven qualities of a good friend, is studied and compared to the six qualities of a mediator drawn from the western perspective. After the comparison, it is found that some qualities are exactly matched and many are compatible to each other. Thus, the good friends presented here to be foundational qualities for a mediator or a mediator-to-be in enhancing the mastery of the skills and work performance in the mediation process.

**Keywords:** The good Friends (Kalyāṇamitta-Dhamma); mediator; qualities



## Introduction

It is unavoidable that living with other people can create conflicts among each other. No matter how big or small communities we are living in-in a family, in school, in a workplace, in local community, in a country, or among countries-conflicts can happen as they are part of our lives that we have to handle with all the time. Sometimes, a conflict can occur within an individual. This kind of conflict is inner or in the mind of that person. A person has to handle this inner conflict, try to resolve, and make peace within the mind of his own. He has to find the solution by himself or get some guidance from others, but it is the inner work of an individual. However, there are times that conflicts occur between two or more people, or even many groups of people. These kinds of conflict are outer which cannot be resolved within one's own mind, but need an outward action of all parties to discuss, negotiate, and make a decision together. Many cases, the disputants cannot find the solution to their conflict, so they bring up the problem to someone in a higher position than them to decide or even go to the court to be judged. However, mediation is another process of solving the conflict without judging. This process requires a person to act as a mediate person or a mediator to help all parties resolve their conflicts and come up with their own decision and agreement. So, a mediator is an important person in this process of conflict resolution. A person, who wants to be a mediator or has to act as a mediator, has to possess some qualities that would help the process of mediation to be effective. In this article, the qualities of a mediator from the western perspectives are studied and compared to the Buddhist concept of the good friends and to present that the good friends can be foundational qualities for a mediator.

## Mediator: The Master of Meditation

Christopher W. Moore (2014) explained that a mediator is the third party who is accepted by all parties of disputants. A mediator has no power to make decisions for disputants but the duties of a mediator are to help all parties improve their relationship and communication, use problem-solving and negotiation skills to enhance more understanding among all parties, and help them reach mutual agreement. A mediator is someone who is independent from all benefits among the disputing parties. He also must not have prejudice nor

specific ideas on how the conflict should be resolved. He has to be able to understand and identify the problems, needs, interests, and relationship among disputants. In a mediation process, a mediator has roles to help disputants to (a) open or improve communications between or among them, (b) establish or build more respectful and productive working relationships, (c) better identify, understand, and consider each other's needs, interests, and concerns, (d) propose and implement more effective problem-solving or negotiation procedures, and (e) recognize or build mutually acceptable agreements. (Moore, 2014).

In order to be able to handle a process of mediation as mentioned above, a mediator has to acquire many skills. There are many skills a mediator has to train; for example, the skill to control the flow of the session, listening skills covering “empathic listening, validation, paraphrasing feelings, and pure content paraphrasing,” the ability to listen to non-verbal communication, the skill of reframing the sentences to get the main message, and the skill in asking question to gain information (McCorkle & Reese, 2018).

There are three stages to develop oneself to become a mediator. The first stage is to acquire certain techniques like active listening, issue prioritizing, generating options to parties, and demonstrating empathy. The second stage is to develop oneself to the deeper understanding of how mediation works, its effectiveness, mediation process, and professional and ethical boundaries. The third stage is the growth as a mediator which refers to the growing awareness of personal qualities that influence the mediation process. (Bowling & Hoffman, 2000).

Although these skills can be learned and practiced, it is better if a person who wants to become a mediator has already cultivated and possessed some basic qualities. These qualities will be advantageous for them as they will be foundational which will help them to easily acquire the further skills needed for a mediator.

## **The Master Qualities of a Mediator**

**Qualities to Possess as a Mediator:** A number of necessary qualities of a mediator are mentioned and suggested by various experts, mediators, and scholars. Lande and Wohl (2006) concluded that the important characteristics



and skills that a mediator should possess are (1) process management-covering the time and sequence setting, manage and presenting the right people in the process, asking appropriate questions, and keeping the process flowing; (2) judgement-knowing and sensing what will work for the participants, what information should be obtained and shared, and having common sense; (3) interpersonal skills-being able to create trust, having certain skills like active listening, empathy, sincerity, emotional detachment, and the ability to promote constructive communication; (3) persistence-having patience and knowing when to keep the mediation process going or to stop; (4) substantive knowledge - knowledge about legal issues, and ability to impart the knowledge and persuade the parties.

According to Helen Collins (2005), there are ten most important personal qualities that a mediator need. These ten consist of empathy, multivalent thinking, authenticity, emotional intelligence, presence, neutrality, intuition, valuing what the parties bring, artistry, and curiosity. The most crucial one is empathy which also includes engagement, compassion, and understanding. The multivalent thinking allows a mediator to be flexible to think and feel on different levels immediately and appropriately handle the mediation process. A mediator's behavior has a great influence on the parties; and authenticity in a mediator helps allow the parties to express themselves from their center or from their heart. Emotional intelligence also includes patience and the ability to feel comfortable with emotions and to control emotions. Next is to be fully present with the parties, situation, and the whole process. A mediator should bring all his body, mind, and spirit into the process. Neutrality or impartiality is really important for a mediator to be seen as fair and trustworthy which helps prevent bribery, coercion, and side taking. Intuition is a quality which is hard to teach or learn. It can be developed through experiences which allows a mediator to have proper decision during the mediation process. Valuing what the parties bring also refers to respect the parties' abilities and skills in their solution to their own problems. Artistry is the result after a mediator has mastered technical skills; and combine and integrate them into his own resources of knowledge, abilities, and qualities. The last but not least is curiosity which helps the parties feel that a mediator cares about their situation, feelings, and giving the sense of being heard.

The mediation skills can be taught; and experiences can be gained from dealing with various people in many circumstances which will develop a mediator to be more skillful. However, there are some traits, albeit not “intangibles,” that Sam Imperati (2020) considered as “invaluable” to make a good mediator. These traits are alertness, patience and tact, credibility, objectivity and self-control, adaptability, perseverance, appearance and demeanor, and initiative. Alertness is the ability to concentrate and evaluate the information being provided. Also, it is to be alert or aware of the surrounding environment. Patience and tact help establish harmonious relationship between the mediator and the parties. Credibility can be expressed through professional, believable, and consistent manners. Objectivity helps in evaluating information without biases; and self-control is vital to prevent the expression of emotion. Along the process of mediation, there may be many difficulties. The ability to adapt oneself to all types of situations and perseverance would help a mediator to get through all difficulties. Last is appearance and manner would reflect professionalism, strength, fairness, and efficiency of a mediator.

Frasor and Bryan (2017) presented five characteristics of a great mediator including trustworthiness, approachability, dedication, perceptiveness, and impartial. Most of these characteristics are similar to those that Imperati (2020) had mentioned except approachability and perceptiveness. Approachability here refers to the characteristics of a mediator to be friendly, empathetic, respectful, and willing to listen carefully in order to reach the emotions and needs that underlie the conversation. Perceptiveness is the ability to grasp the essence of information or situation, to understand the complexities and to provide options to disputants.

**Qualities to Find in a Mediator:** Apart from the views on the qualities of a mediator that a person should develop when one wants to become a mediator, qualities of a mediator can be viewed from the side of the conflicting parties if they need to have a mediator to their problems. There are some checklists to help in finding a potential mediator.

The staff of Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School (PON Staff, 2020) suggested five checklists when hiring a mediator. Although these checklists may apply for those who already have experience in having a mediator to a conflict, they can also be applied to identify the good qualities of a



mediator. The first checklist is that a mediator operates from an interest-based perspective which would respond to meet the interests of both parties without any effort to win over the other. The second is to develop relationship of trust and confidence. The relationship building is the key that really helps in bargaining. Being creative is the next one which helps expand the options to generate more strategies in negotiation. The fourth is patient and tenacious. A mediator needs to be flexible and persistent to the conflict and helps the parties of all sides to reach negotiable agreement. The last checklist is the question to ask if you would hire this mediator again.

A mediator builds the right atmosphere. A mediator will help all parties “stay in control of the discussion in order to resolve the issue respectfully.” The right atmosphere will help the discussion to be “constructive and compromised-oriented.” Secondly, a mediator gives control to their clients. A mediator will not make a decision for the disputants, but he will ask questions to help them find the answers and reach their own decision and agreement. However, if an agreement cannot be made, a mediator may help them reset their goal. Lastly, a mediator does not act as a lawyer or a judge. A mediator has to “subtly navigate conversations” to lead the disputants “to refine expectations and come to the willingness to negotiate.” From the all above mentioned qualities by a variety of experts, there are many similar qualities that are given emphasis on. In this article, the author has combined these similar qualities and generated them into six qualities that a mediator should have as follows:

1. Friendliness-having empathetic feeling and creating good relationship.
2. Objectivity-having no bias, handling the process from mediation principles of interest-based for all parties.
3. Trustworthiness-reliability, keeping promises and secrets.
4. Patience-having self-control over negative feelings, a willingness to listen.
5. Perceptiveness-understanding the underlying message, having the ability to explain and offer options.
6. Dedication-having determination to put effort and dedicate time until the final process.

These six qualities can probably be a foundation for a person to investigate oneself whether he already possesses these qualities or needs to

cultivate some more qualities which will help facilitate a person to become a good mediator.

**The Buddhist Concept of the good friends (Kalyāṇamitta-Dhamma):**

In Buddhism, there is a word Kalyāṇamitta which means a good friend. Being associated with good friends is very important and beneficial to one's life. A good friend can guide, help, support, and take a person to the righteous way of life. In Kalyāṇamittādi Vagga, a good friend is mentioned as follows:

“Mendicants, I do not see a single thing that gives rise to skillful qualities, or makes unskillful qualities decline like good friends. When you have good friends, skillful qualities arise and unskillful qualities decline.” (AN 1.71)

Here, the Buddha suggested that a good friend is really important as he will help a person to enhance meritorious qualities and reduce evil ones. Thus, it is also important to take a look on the qualities of a good friend as a guideline for us in associating ourselves with those who can bring progress and happiness to our life, and to cultivate ourselves to be a good friend for others.

The Buddha suggested that a friend has to possess seven qualities the good friends which are “likable, agreeable, respected, and admired. They admonish you and they accept admonishment. They speak on deep matters. And they don't urge you to do bad things.” (AN 7.37) These qualities if endowed in a person, he then is a good friend we should associate with. This kind of person will be a friend who is “benevolent and compassionate” and that we should “keep company with such a person, even if they send you away.”

P. A. Payutto (2017) explained each of these seven qualities of a good friend or Kalyāṇamitta-Dhamma as follows:

1. “Piyo: endearing” A good friend has kindness and compassion that he will have a concern on his friend. He will create good relationship and comfortable atmosphere with his friends.

2. “Garu: worthy of respect” He will hold on his principles and have proper behaviors which bring the feeling of safety and dependability to his friends.



3. “Bhāvanīyo: inspiring” He is intellectual who always trains and improves himself. He can be a good model that his friend can appreciate and be proud of.

4. “Vattā: capable of speaking effectively” He is a good advisor. He knows how, when, and what to speak, and can explain things clearly.

5. “Vacanakkhamo: patient with words” He is willing to listen and have tolerance towards improper words and criticism.

6. “Gambhīraṇca katham kattā: capable of expounding on the profound” – He can explain something that is difficult or complicated to be understandable.

7. “No caññhāne niyojaye: not leading in wrongful ways” He will not lead his friends to useless or improper ways.

These seven qualities of a good friend are like a quality-checklist to consider whether the person we are in contact with is a true friend or not. They are also criteria to investigate ourselves whether we already have these qualities or not, and what qualities we need to cultivate more in order to be a good friend, a teacher, a counsellor, or even a mediator.

**The Comparison of the good friends (Kalyāṇamitta-Dhamma) and the Qualities of a Mediator:** As mentioned above, a mediator acts like a facilitator, a helper, and a counsellor to all parties of disputants in managing the process to bring them to reconciliation and regain more or less a good relationship and atmosphere. A mediator, hence, is like a good friend according to Buddhist perspective. As the good friends is the qualities of a good friend, it can also be applied to be the qualities of a mediator. Prior to this section, the six qualities of a mediator drawn from some sources of western perspectives are proposed. In this section, the good friends brought as qualities from Buddhist perspective that can be comparable to those six qualities drawn from western perspective.

The following tables are the comparison between seven qualities of the good friends and the six qualities of a mediator proposed earlier. They can be classified into two categories: the identical qualities and the comparable qualities. The identical qualities are the qualities of the good friends and the six qualities of a mediator that are exactly matched. The comparable qualities are the qualities that are resemble or compatible with one another.



**Table 1:** The Identical Qualities

<b>Kalyāṇamitta-Dhamma</b>	<b>Six Qualities of a Mediator</b>
No.1 Piyo: endearing	No. 1 Friendliness
No. 5 Vacanakkhamo: patient with words	No. 4 Patience

These two qualities of Piyo or endearing and Vacanakkhamo or patient with words from Kalyāṇamitta-Dhamma are identical or exactly matched with the qualities of a mediator in terms of friendliness and patience. A mediator should be friendly (the first quality) and endearing (piyo) to all disputants that he is dealing with. Being friendly by using verbal and non-verbal communication such as greetings, making small talks, smiling, having eye-contact, and using gestures while speaking and listening, etc. makes him become more endearing to all people he is engaging with. This will help break the ice and create a more comfortable atmosphere and enhance good relationship between the mediator and disputants. Although a mediator has to be friendly, he should not have a close relationship to one party of disputants, otherwise a bias can easily occur and this can lead to corruption like taking bribes from one party.

The fourth quality, patience (vacanakkhamo), is another important one. During the process of mediation, the situation may arouse a mediator to feel bored, triggered, angry, or any negative emotions. To find the cause of the conflict, a mediator needs to listen to all parties which may take a long time, and at the same time a mediator needs to maintain the good atmosphere during the session. This requires a lot of patience in order to have self-control over his emotions to unpleasant situations or improper words. Moreover, he has to have patience to work on that issue until the final step without giving up during the process.

**Table 2:** The Comparable Qualities

<b>Kalyāṇamitta-Dhamma</b>	<b>Six Qualities of a Mediator</b>
No. 2 Garu: worthy of respect	No. 2 Objectivity & No. 3 Trustworthiness



No. 4 Vattā: capable of speaking effectively	No. 5 Perceptiveness
No. 6 Gambhīraṇa katham kattā: capable of expounding on the profound	
No. 7 No caññhāne niyojaye: not leading in wrongful ways	No. 6 Dedication
No. 3 Bhāvanīyo: inspiring	-

**Table 2** shows the qualities of a mediator proposed by the author earlier that are comparable or compatible, though not exactly matched, with the qualities of the good friends.

A mediator can be worthy of respect (garu) with the quality of objectivity and trustworthiness (the second and third qualities). A mediator is the third party to the process of mediation. Thus, he must not have prejudice on one side of disputants. In other words, he must be neutral to the conflict, to the gain or loss of disputants, and must not try to help one side to win over the other. This is to apply the second quality-objectivity. Also, a mediator has to stick to the principle of mediation by using the interest-based perspective to find the shared interests among disputants. Holding on to the principles allows a mediator to reach the resolution and gain respect from all parties.

In addition to objectivity, a mediator has to be a reliable person. To have the quality of trustworthiness (the third quality), a mediator has to keep his promises and has to do as he said. He also has to keep secrets of each disputant. Having this quality allows a mediator to gain trust and respect from all parties. With trust, the disputants would feel more comfortable to reveal their problems, needs, and interests to the mediator which will help the mediator to find the real cause of the conflict and options to resolve the conflict faster.

The qualities of being able to speak effectively (vattā), understand and explain the complicated things (gambhīraṇa katham kattā) can be comparable to the quality of perceptiveness (the fifth quality). Perceptiveness refers to the ability to understand the underlying message that may not be conveyed directly from the disputants. A mediator needs to listen attentively in order to grasp the gist of the information and the real needs or interests of the disputants. At this point, he has to know what, when, and how to speak. Hence, he can clearly

explain the conflict, causes, and offer alternative solutions that are appropriate to the situation and compatible with the interests of all parties.

As a good friend will not lead his friends to the wrong ways (No caññhāne niyojaye), he will guide them to the right. This is similar to the duty of a mediator that he should have dedication to the whole process of mediation (the sixth quality). With dedication, a mediator will put efforts and devote his time all through the process in order to help all parties as much as he can without withdrawal as he sees that mediation can bring peace, regain relationship, or at least bring a mutual agreement among all parties.

Lastly, Bhāvanīyo or inspiring is another quality from the good friends. Although it is not matched with the western qualities proposed above, it should be added to the qualities of a mediator. With this quality, a mediator whether amateur or professional will not stop learning, improving himself, and gaining more knowledge and experiences. This will make him gain appreciation, be a pride for his clients, and be a good model for other mediators.

**The good friends (Kalyāṇamitta-Dhamma): Foundational Qualities for a Mediator** skills and experiences are really essential in developing a mediator to be more professional and effective in handling the mediation process. However, it is undeniable that some personal qualities, if cultivated before or along the mastering of mediation skills and techniques, could be an enhancement and advantages to implement a person to be more potential in advancing his way to become a good mediator. Many necessary and important qualities are suggested from various western theories and perspectives. Many of those are similar to some Buddhist concepts such as Kalyāṇamitta-Dhamma. These seven qualities of a good friend can be applied into various means of life as well as the foundational qualities of a mediator. Acting like a good friend who tries to help and maintain relationship of all sides, a person who wants to become a mediator, an amateur, or a professional one can apply these seven qualities of Kalyāṇamitta-Dhamma and internalize them. These qualities - endearing, worthy of respect, inspiring, capable of speaking effectively, patient with words, capable of expounding on the profound, and not leading in wrongful ways - can be gradually practiced and developed until they become internalized. The internal qualities, then, would reflect outwardly into effectiveness in speech



and action which would greatly help a person to master technical skills with ease and perform his work as a mediator more effectively.

## Conclusions

In a process of mediation, a mediator is like a facilitator, a counselor, or even a friend who tries to help all parties of disputants understand the needs of one another, create good atmosphere, regain relationship, and resolve the conflict by reaching the agreement of their own decision. Being a mediator has to be trained to have certain skills in handling the process of mediation. However, some foundational qualities that a mediator possesses will be advantageous in acquiring mediation skills and in managing the process of mediation. There are many qualities of a mediator from western perspective as guidelines in cultivating or using as a checklist for an effective mediator. As for Buddhist perspective, the concept of the good friends presents seven qualities of a true friend which can be comparable to those qualities from western viewpoint. Thus, a Buddhist mediator or those who have interest in Buddhism can rely on these seven qualities of the good friends as foundational qualities of a mediator. These seven qualities, if cultivated in a person, would be beneficial for him in acquiring more skills of mediation and becoming an effective and compassionate mediator who is a true friend for all parties.

## References

- Bowling, D., & Hoffman, D. (2000). **Bringing Peace into the Room: The Personal Qualities of the Mediator and Their Impact on the Mediation.** *Negotiation Journal*, 16, 5–28.
- Collins, H. (2005). **The most important personal qualities a mediator needs.** Retrieved, July 15, 2022, from <https://www.icfml.org/uploads/2020/03/collins2005.pdf>.
- Fraser, Wilson and P.C. Bryan. (2017). **5 Characteristics of a Great Mediator.** Retrieved July 15, 2022, from <https://fwblawtx.com/5-characteristics-great-mediator/>.
- Imperati, Sam. (2020). Traits of a **‘Mediator. Mediate.com: Everything Mediation.** Retrieved, July 15, 2022, from <https://www.mediate.com/articles/imperati1.cfm>.
- Lande, J., & Wohl, R. (2006). **Listening to Experienced Users.** *Dispute Resolution Magazine*, 13, 18.
- McCorkle, Suzanne and Melanie J. Reese. (2018). **Mediation Theory and Practice.** (3<sup>rd</sup>ed.). California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Moore, Christopher W. (2014) **The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict.** (4<sup>th</sup>ed.). California: Jossey-Bass.
- Payutto, P.A. (2017), Translated by Bruce Evans. **A Constitution for Living: Buddhist Principles for a Fruitful and Harmonious Life.** Bangkok: Palidham.
- PON Staff. (2020). **Mediation Checklist: 5 Questions to Ask When Hiring Mediators.** Program on Negotiation: Harvard Law School. Retrieved July 15, 2022, from <https://www.pon.harvard.edu/daily/mediation/hiring-a-mediator-a-checklist/>.
- Sujato, Bhikkhu. (2018). **Tr. Dutiyamitta Sutta: A Friend** (2<sup>nd</sup>) (AN 7.37). SuttaCentral. Retrieved July 15, 2022, from <https://suttacentral.net/an7.37/en/sujato>.
- Sujato, Bhikkhu. (2018). **Tr. Kalyanamittadi Vagga.** (AN 1.71). Sutta Central. Retrieved July 15, 2022, from <https://suttacentral.net/an1.71-81/en/sujato>.