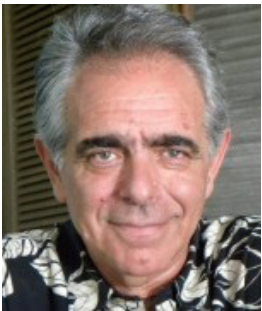


Virtual Mediation Lab Settles Disputes & Trains Mediators Through Zoom



*Giuseppe Leone
Founder at
Virtual Mediation
Lab*

Summary

- Virtual Mediation Lab hosts mediation and training sessions on Zoom.
- Professionalism and discretion are essential to mediation.
- Virtual Mediation Lab relies on Zoom's ease-of-use, privacy features, and high quality.



Virtual Mediation Lab

Every person is unique and has a different point-of-view of each situation. This grand diversity of opinions sometimes leads to disputes. When no one can agree on a solution, they need a third party to help develop a system of resolution. In today's world, that third party is called a mediator. Sometimes, as is often the case with divorces, parties prefer not to see one another face-to-face. In real-life mediation sessions, this is sometimes a compulsory part of the process. What if there was a way to cut the office from the equation and simply allow everyone to meet from wherever and with whomever they feel most comfortable?

Meet Giuseppe Leone, the founder of Virtual Mediation Lab, an organization that hosts online mediation sessions through video, allowing parties in a dispute to have a conversation through a mediator. They also mentor and instructor those new to the mentoring profession.

"The Virtual Mediation Lab project, launched in January 2012, is designed to help mediators around the world practice and improve their skills by participating in simulations of online mediation sessions," said Leone. "During these practice sessions, one mediator would play the role of the real mediator, and another two mediators would act out the roles of conflicting parties."

Giuseppe Leone had to find the right software to be able to accomplish both his training simulations and his real mediation sessions. Eventually, he found what is now his previous solution, which he has been using for years.

"When I launched this project, I had to find a way to accomplish a meeting through video. For this, I first turned to a very popular video conferencing solution that very many people know about."

Then, Mr. Leone got a call from our Head of Product Marketing, Nick Chong. "He contacted me, saying that he would like to have the opportunity to introduce me to Zoom. At the time, I had never heard of Zoom, but I thought I'd give it a try. Soon after, we moved abruptly away from our old software and adopted Zoom as our go-to platform."

Needless to say, Leone was impressed with what he saw when he tested Zoom to make it the sole video meeting solution for Virtual Mediation Lab. The audio and video quality have more than satisfied the needs for his mediation sessions,

creating a clear picture of each participant, and allowing parties to feel as if though they were meeting in the same room.

“Zoom is better than our older solution for several reasons. For one, **the audio and video feed are much higher quality**. This is essential in online mediation because you want to see people very clearly as if you were face-to-face with them. I found that Zoom is a better choice in this department.”

Mediators have to be prepared to protect the privacy of each party, meaning that the ideal video meeting solution will have to maintain an environment where parties may choose what to reveal. Leone’s old solution didn’t succeed to foster such an environment since each participant in the meeting would have to reveal his or her sign-in name. Zoom, on the other hand, allows participants to represent themselves by typing a name into a field. It doesn’t necessarily even have to be the person’s real name. Invitations can be sent out with a blind carbon copy (BCC) for each individual email address, making it an ideal solution for anyone dealing with potentially sensitive matters.

Leone elaborates: “As a mediator, you have to do everything you can to preserve the privacy of both parties. Zoom allows us to make each party aware of the meeting without announcing their contact information to each other. Conversely, with our older platform, the only way that people can see each other is by exchanging a user ID, which obviously is a terrible idea when dealing with difficult cases.”

Of course, mediation isn’t just about discussing the dispute. Sometimes, mediators have to look at heaps of documents. Since most professional video solutions allow for screen sharing, this shouldn’t be a problem. However, once put into practice, users seem to feel that something is missing. Zoom is the place where all the missing pieces come together to build a more complete screen sharing solution. Parties in a mediation session can annotate documents to draw attention towards certain areas or even allow the mediator to control their cursors to point elsewhere.

“During a mediation session, participants will occasionally need to share documents or videos with others in order to justify their arguments,” he said. **“Having annotation in these cases is essential because you can draw everyone’s attention to a specific part of the screen. This isn’t available on many platforms.** The fact that Zoom has this feature is another plus for us.”

To Giuseppe Leone, everything about Zoom added a touch of convenience with a strong dose of utility. Zoom’s mobile device support particularly caught his interest, because it allows parties to join in from a multitude of devices. No longer chained to desktops, parties could walk around freely while meeting. This comes in handy, for example, when a party needs to show evidence of damage in an area that is difficult to reach. “Mobile

device support in Zoom has also been very helpful in satisfying our particular needs,” he explained. “Our old platform allowed us to make calls one-on-one through mobile. However, group conferences just weren’t available.”

When Zoom released version 2.5, our solution proved even more useful to Mr. Leone, since he could have private conversations with each party during the joint meeting. **“Zoom 2.5 allows us to finally be able to switch between the joint session (with both parties) and a private session with one party at a time,”** he said. “We could hold simultaneous meetings and put the private ones on hold. Prior to this version, the only way to put someone on hold was to end the session and invite the person once again via email.”

After examining Zoom and other video conferencing software, Leone quickly found out that some of the solutions he discovered while conducting a review were built initially with a certain purpose in mind. As they released new versions and expanded their offers, they built upon the original pieces of software they developed and kept similar environments, not always to great results.

“I have actually run a review of online video conferencing software for online mediation and basically came to the conclusion **that Zoom is the best choice for online mediators,**” Leone said. “It seems that most other solutions on the market were initially designed for webinars. In online mediation, the main goal is not presentation. Instead, it is a level of visual interaction that builds trust between the parties and the mediator. Another problem with these solutions is that some of them also require revealing some level of information, failing to reach the requirement for anonymity in online mediation.”

In online mediation, the software the mediator uses tells the participants about the mediator’s level of professionalism and care. **“When you use a piece of video conferencing software, it becomes your business card,”** explained Leone. “The ability to brand your software, or the fact that the software is very simple to use, leaves an impression on people. I think that everything should be ‘out there’, available for the parties and the mediator to use whenever they need it, without requiring the parties to open a specific email account just to use one particular feature.”

Looking at other solutions drew Leone closer to Zoom. He saw complicated interfaces, solutions that “almost had it” but didn’t quite fit a model that makes mediation feasible, and lots of categorization. These complexities make life harder for both the mediator and disputing parties who are trying to have a smooth session.

“In other tools, there are many ways to share information, but this makes the interface complicated,” he said. “For participants who have never participated in video conferencing before, as is often the case in mediation, this is not ideal. They need simpler interfaces that don’t make a difference between the host,

presenter, co-presenter, and participant. It's better to just call everyone a participant."

Using Zoom, Leone was easily able to conduct mediation for the United States Postal Service between two parties in Guam while he sat at his office in Hawaii.

"Not too long ago, I was a mediator on the first online mediation for the United States Postal Service," he said. "Whenever there was a dispute between a supervisor and an employee, for example, I took the case. Sometimes, the disputes involve parties in distant islands. In such cases, a mediation session cannot happen without some flying involved. In December 2013, the postal service asked me to fly to Guam, which is about an eight-hour flight away for me. Instead of going through the stress of flying over, I suggested that we have an online mediation session, which will save everyone money and time. As per my suggestion, I mediated a dispute between two parties in Guam from my office in Hawaii with a USPS observer in California. The observer was impressed by how Zoom replicated the face-to-face experience."

Once in awhile, when using a piece of software, the user will need help from the people who developed it. Technical support is often just above the carrier pigeon stage. However, Leone found something very interesting about the way we handle our technical support.

"Zoom's technical support impressed me. It was amazingly professional, reliable, and fast. A couple of times, I even had a video conference with an engineer," said Leone. "Whenever I had a question, I would immediately get an answer. When dealing with the support infrastructure of other organizations, the process was more cumbersome. It's akin to dealing with an apathetic corporate entity rather than an eager and innovative startup like Zoom."

Zoom is a solution that was able to handle the demands of Virtual Mediation Lab. It has helped Leone reach his goals in several ways:

- A **quick and easy** solution means that each party will have a better overall experience.
- **Mobile device support** gives users flexibility.
- Screen sharing with annotation makes the process of looking through a document all the more easy.
- The **protection of anonymity and private meeting rooms** that Zoom presents is extremely valuable for mediation sessions.
- **High-definition audio and video** streams allow parties to feel truly present at the mediation, minus the discomfort of having to dispute while physically together.
- **Reliable and fast support** allows things to get done quickly.

"Since Virtual Mediation Lab began, I've run more than 100 different online mediation training sessions with participants from more than 30 different countries," said Leone. "Since switching to Zoom, my experience has consistently improved. We've used Zoom for 6 months and, despite having used our old solution for nearly 18 months, I find that I'm far more comfortable with Zoom."

Because of Zoom, Virtual Mediation Lab has the ability to progress much further, and Giuseppe Leone has a piece of software that provides all the tools necessary to conduct online mediation as it was meant to be: discreet, efficient, and positive.



About Zoom

Zoom, the cloud meeting company, unifies cloud video conferencing, simple web meetings, and group collaboration into one easy-to-use platform. Our solution offers the first available mobile-screen sharing and an innovative hybrid cloud service, and works across desktop, tablet, mobile and room systems. Zoom services over 40 million participants and more than 100,000 businesses globally.

Website
zoom.us

Innovations

First 3-in-1 Cloud HD Meeting Platform
First Mobile Screen Sharing
First Hybrid Cloud Service