

Letter to the Editor, Looking Beyond APM® from Lawrence D. Tobias MSc, MBA



I had the distinct pleasure of attending a recent NJAPM General Meeting where I enjoyed the usual networking warmth, food, beverages, and the opportunity to meet the board and other members. One of my concerns as stated at the meeting is the value of the Accredited Professional Mediator (APM) designation. In this letter, I first discuss my concerns, and then provide some suggestions that I feel are important for the organization to consider in addressing these concerns.

APM® Designation

I believe that the NJAPM's initial intent for this designation was to create a means of further distinguishing an NJAPM member from other mediators with less than noteworthy skills, training, background and experience. However, based upon comments that I heard at the meeting, few, if any APM-designated mediators currently attribute any of their mediation work to the title alone. In their own words: "No one chose me as a mediator because of my APM designation."

APM-designated mediators indicated at the meeting that although the general public appears disinterested in the APM designation, the exclusive NJAPM directory listing for APMs does create mediation opportunities for them. This is unfair to non-APM NJAPM dues-paying members who may actually have better overall training, and real-life experience. Consumers are not made aware of these distinctions because non-APMs, regardless of qualifications, are excluded from being listed in the NJAPM directory.

Where Do We Go From Here?

In lieu of devoting considerable time, effort, and talent towards branding the APM designation, I suggest

that we focus primarily on branding NJAPM, and thereby gain both greater recognition and potential for all NJAPM members, including those with the APM designation, in the following manner:

(1) **Let us make NJAPM membership itself more rigorous** in a way that builds credibility for members. Criteria for membership could include mediator education or mediator experience. The education requirement could be met by completion of either the civil or family mediation programs required for listing on the respective court roster, or equivalent education/training programs offered by other organizations, which could be determined and certified by the board. Prospective NJAPM members would still be permitted to attend NJAPM functions while their applications were pending.

(2) **Upon gaining membership in NJAPM, all members would be listed in the NJAPM directory** which would be available to all parties seeking a mediator via the NJAPM website. The format for the listings could be determined by a subcommittee, with attention to SEO (search-engine-optimization) criteria. Listings could include designations for general members, APMs, NJAPM board and committee memberships, memberships on court rosters, mediator-related education, mediator-related experience, and relevant life-experience. Members would have the ability to create, modify and update their listings, with responsibilities for quality control of the listings relegated to a NJAPM committee. Ideally, each member would be able to monitor both clicks on their particular listing, and compare this with

the inquiries they receive via the website.

(3) **Focus on branding the NJAPM mediator beyond NJ.** NJAPM mediators work both within and out of state; therefore, focus on the mediation branding aspect, and less on NJ

(4) **Establish an ROI** (return on investment) normative value approach to understanding the return from various promotional efforts on the part of NJAPM and their evolving impact on public perception.

(5) **Simplify the process for achieving APM designation** including negating the membership penalty fee for the APM designation.

(6) **Emphasize the value of our board member's contribution in the directory** – this will be good for NJAPM, benefit board members in terms of their public perception and related employment opportunities, and provide incentive for all NJAPM members to aspire to participate in and improve NJAPM.

(7) **Emphasize the value of committee participation** by including these criteria in the directory.

(8) **Finally, establish a membership retention committee** to ensure that NJAPM members are motivated to remain as members.

Regards, Larry

Lawrence D. Tobias MSc, MBA has a background in healthcare, marketing, strategic planning, sales and contracting. He has completed the coursework in both civil and divorce mediation to qualify for the respective court rosters. He has been a member of NJAPM for several years, and recently served on the marketing committee for the NJAPM Elder Care Mediation Special Interest Group. He is also a member of the American Society