

# JEREMY LACK

## A career between science and law

**Jeremy Lack is an independent lawyer and mediator, and the co-founder of neuroawareness.com, which aims to apply neuroscience to conflict prevention and resolution. He specializes in international disputes and works as a facilitator or Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) Neutral, as he prefers to call himself.**

Born and raised in Geneva, Jeremy Lack combined science and law in his academic studies. His interest in those disciplines led him to specialize in intellectual property law. Trained as an English barrister, he also received his first training in mediation and arbitration by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). “That opened my eyes to a whole new way of dealing with conflict”, he remembers.

### **Creating a common culture**

As an ADR neutral, Jeremy Lack’s role is to find the most effective and appropriate way to resolve each conflict. To do so, “We need to create a common culture among people having at least three cultures each: a family culture, an educational culture, and a professional culture”. People also operate based on three natural behavioral operating systems, which are social, emotional and cognitive. “These are mental models of behavior that affect patterns of group behavior and influence each individual’s



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way of thinking, especially in situations of conflict”. They determine the way they behave in a discussion. Creating common ground is thus crucial to enable constructive dialogue. But how do we measure the quality of mediation? For him, the metrics are, “Reduce the tension. After that, try and orient attention to facilitate exchange of information based on interests and not positions. When people are simply listening to one-another, to me, that’s a success”, he says.

### **French to defuse conflicts**

Let’s put ourselves in his shoes for a minute. Imagine two teams waiting in two different rooms. In room A, team 1 speaks English and categorically refuses to speak French. In room B, team 2 speaks French and is not ready to use another language. There are no interpreters. What do we do? This happened to Jeremy Lack, as he

found himself in the middle of two parties who would not negotiate. What was his tactic then? With a humorous touch, he decided to bring them together and use Frenglish (rather than a third language) to appease the problem. In the end, this obstacle became a benefit, as it enabled the teams to collaborate on the translation, thus ensuring optimal mutual listening.

As he explains, the hardest part is often not the settlement itself. “The most difficult thing can be getting people to make small steps when they first meet each other. Will the participants shake one-another’s hands when they walk into the room, maintain eye contact, agree to use first names, or even share a meal together?” Mediation, from his point of view, is all about small steps to orient attentions, enable dialogue and finding subtle ways to break the ice so that people can work together, activating pro-social patterns of behavior that are innate in us all.

### **The benefits of neuroscience**

As a lawyer, Jeremy Lack was originally trained to think in terms of positions and advocating relevant facts and laws. But in mediation, the approach is quite different. One of the main questions that interests him is what happens to a normal brain during conflict? This naturally led him to neuroscience. Luckily, expertise in this field was close by. The Swiss Interdisciplinary Centre for Affective Sciences (CISA) at the Campus Biotech in Geneva has one of the world’s largest groups of experts on neuroscience and

emotions. He began collaboration with a team of neuroscientists, led by Professor David Sander and Dr. Olga Klimecki. Their research projects, focusing on brain behaviors, cross border conflicts and emotions, provide valuable knowledge that Jeremy Lack can put into practice in his work. “The more we can understand about how individuals think, and how we think in groups, the better our insights will be into how to design processes and how to redirect conversations”, he says.

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The process itself is pivotal and has an impact on the quality of the outcome, depending on which patterns of social plasticity are activated. External factors can often encourage people to collaborate and listen to each other. What words are being used? Are they “parties” or “partners”? Is the place where the discussion is held neutral? Do people feel comfortable? Are the surroundings peaceful? Are people sitting together around a round table or across a rectangular table as two teams? Do the windows offer a nice view? A lot of what we communicate is non-verbal: tone, pauses, hesitations, facial expressions, as well as body language. They are all automatically unconsciously interpreted and often express more than we realize. All those questions are on Jeremy Lack’s mind when he begins a new mediation.

### Human nature as a handicap

To the question “Is peace possible?” his answer is clear. “Yes, but as animals, we are handicapped by our limited abilities to think peacefully. We are naturally programmed to fight or to convince. Peace is something we all desire but our fundamental patterns of behavior and instincts are often at odds with achieving this goal”. Does that stop him? Not at all. “A world where there is never any conflict? I don’t believe that’s achievable or even desirable! The question is how we manage it. When conflict is channeled properly, many positive results can be

achieved”. To him, conflict harnesses energies and resources. The issue is to mobilize and deploy them to enable constructive change. So what is peace to him? Simply “educating children and adults on better ways of understanding our patterns of thinking during conflict and working through them differently”, without the use of violence, he underlines. Listening to him, every dispute can be appropriately managed and positive outcomes can be achieved. One thing is sure, Jeremy Lack never seems to get bored: “You are constantly learning as you do this job”, he says with a smile.

*Laurane Briguet*

