The Conflict Resolution Crisis

Bernie Mayer

Aled Davies: Hi everyone. My name is Aled Davies, founder of MediatorAcademy.com, home of the passionate mediator. This is where we interview the very best mediators and authority leaders from right around the world. We learn about new opportunities in the field of mediation, how to sharpen our skills, how to develop our thinking, how to overcome some of the challenges and dilemmas we all face as mediators, and also how do we stay ahead of the game?

Right, the big question for today's interview is this, how do we address the crisis in conflict resolution? 'What crisis?' you ask. Well, let's start with this, how do mediators become more broadly accepted by mainstream society?

Now, my guest today is an icon in the world of conflict resolution. With over a quarter of a century of experience in the field, he was a founding partner at CDR Associates, the internationally recognised mediation and conflict resolution organisation, and originally trained as a psychotherapist.

He's worked across the globe as a mediator, facilitator, teacher, trainer, dispute systems designer, and programme administrator. A true scholar as well as a leading practitioner in the field. He earned his PhD in social work with an emphasis on conflict resolution, and is now a professor of dispute resolution at the Werner Institute, Creighton University.

He is the author of many works including 'Beyond Neutrality', and 'Staying With Conflict' both published by Jossey-Bass and his most recent work, 'The Conflict Paradox: Seven Dilemmas at the Core of Disputes' and that was published in January, 2015.

All right, without any further ado, let's welcome Dr. Bernie Mayer onto Mediator Academy. Bernie, a warm welcome.

Bernie Mayer: Thank you. Thank you for that very nice comment. It's nice to be here.

Aled: Always a pleasure. I very recently, and I wish I read this when it came out because, confronting the crisis in conflict resolution, I think we are facing crisis in the U.K. certainly, in mediation, but I'm sure further afield. But as I read I thought this is really poignant. This is really current. When I saw it was published 11 years ago and I'm sure actually even though it was published 11 years ago, the thinking started a lot before that, am I right?

Bernie: Absolutely.

Aled: I just thought to myself, 'Wow, you're ahead of the game.' Many of the views that you express certainly reflect a lot of the conversations that are very much alive.
today across the mediation community or the mediation communities in the U.K. Tell me, Bernie, 11 years on, is there still a crisis?

Bernie: Yeah, I think so. I think pretty much what I said in that book is still very relevant. In fact, in some ways it made certain elements of it have even solidified. On the other hand, there's some good news too about things that have happened or begin to help us address some of the issues I've raised in the book as well and maybe we can unpack some of that as we talk.

Just as two examples of what I think is still relevant, and what I think we have accomplished over these years, I still think mediation as a service is tremendously under-used. As we've often said, the need for mediation is far greater than the market for it.

I also think that the number of people who would like to be working as mediators, and really as mediators as a profession is far greater than the demand. I don't actually think this is about marketing.

I've gone to conferences for ever – 30 years – where people have talked about how we just need to market better. Of course, we always need the market better but I don't think that's a fundamental nature of the problem. I think the nature of the problem identified there and I still believe is true is a disconnect on what people perceive their needs to be.

So we can unpack that a little bit if you would like.

Aled: Yeah, okay.

Bernie: On the other hand, the part where I think we really have made some progress is I think our field, and we can tell about what we mean by 'our field', now does view itself in a much broader context than simply as third-party-conflict resolvers. I think that we are a field whose consciousness of itself is evolving.

What I suggest we think about ourselves is concert engagement specialists, with a variety of roles. I think a lot of signs that's beginning to track and beginning to happen and beginning to have some impact. Yes, I think there's still a crisis. I still think the crisis is growing, much as I've described, but I don't think we've stood still in response to that crisis itself.

Aled: Well, look, it's really encouraging to hear that you think there was a green shoots of recovery there. Let's keep that as a carrot for our viewers. Before we get there though, I want to understand a bit more about this crisis. Tell me a little bit about some of the main concerns that you outline in your book that you feel are holding us back as a field, and if we're not a field what are we?
Bernie: Well, I think we are a field and it's helpful to think of it but the question is, 'What is that field?' I think of our field as a field of conflict intervention and not a field of mediation.

You could argue mediation is a field but just like you could argue that play-therapy is a field. But I think it's far wiser to think of ourselves more broadly as a conflict-intervention field, and that's the field that I would like to talk about the crisis in. Here is what I think the crisis is. One is, we are supply driven not demand driven, and up to a point that's fine. As I said a moment ago, there's far more people to this day who want to be mediators, who want to be conflict professionals than there are jobs available.

While, up to a point, it's all right to have more who want it than there are jobs available, because people will then go out and find creative ways of doing that work. On the other hand, if it's too much, it breeds cynicism, discontent, and one of the things that we have done to ourselves is we created the business model, many of us and I include myself in that, where a good part of our income over the years has come from training people to be mediators. We train people to be mediators, but there aren't jobs to be done.

There's good skills that come out of those trainings, but still there is a problem there. Not only for a professor in a master's degree programme. So now we're putting all sorts of master's degrees out there in dispute resolution or conflict intervention or peace studies. Again, there's not that many jobs there.

We do a pretty good job in my programme of making that clear to people from the beginning. They read this book at the very beginning. They know, at the onset, what we're facing. I think a lot of people are able to use it within their existing jobs, but nonetheless that's one source of the crisis. A second- go ahead.

Aled: It's supply-driven so there's imbalance between the supply and demand curve. What's the resistance behind mediation? Why is there not the demand side of the equation stacked? We all know it's a wonderful, successful, effective, approach to the resolution of some disputes. What's the problem with it?

Bernie: I think there are several. One is that we offer a service that is geared towards a fairly narrow range of conflicts. Those that are serious enough to need outside help, not so serious enough that the people are absolutely bound and determined to want to go to war about it. That actually is a fairly narrow range of conflicts. We try to expand it, and we've had some success in expanding people's thinking about it both preventatively and where people are engaged in much more serious conflicts, but it's still a fairly narrow range. One of the things that I have asked people often including mediators is, 'If you're merely embroiled in a big conflict, who do you go to first?' I can ask you that, who do you go to first if you're in a big conflict?

Aled: If I'm embroiled in a big conflict, instantly I would talk to my partner.
Bernie: What would you want from your partner?

Aled: What would I want? I would want her to empathise with me, to tell me that I'm right.

Bernie: The other side are jerks?

Aled: Yeah, and validate some of my thinking and my decision to say, 'I think I need to call a lawyer.'

And she'll, 'That's probably a good idea Aled. Go and do that.'

Bernie: All right. You are like everybody else. Who do we go to first? Somebody who's going to validate us and say we're right. Secondly, we might then go to somebody who'll give us some empowerment and some advocacy assistance. Or we might go to some expert, somebody who has expert information about the situation.

Way down the list we may think of a third party or that may never happen. If you ask this and get honest answers from mediators, you'll get that exact same response about their own conflicts. It says that we created a field. We created a way of thinking that addresses a very narrow part of what people experience or need to be in conflict. We can better do that.

Aled: Now we are trying to now apply it to a broad range of conflicts when actually it's almost like retrofitting a solution to whole range of conflicts that actually don't want it, need it, don't understand it?

Bernie: Well, right. It doesn't speak to what people experience their needs. In 'Beyond Neutrality' I talked about the six things people need in conflict and it's something it takes a certain amount of hubris to do because I’m talking about all conflicts, but still I think it makes a point.

I talk about: people's need for voice; people's need for validation; people's need for vindication; people's need for procedural justice; people's need for impact and people's need for safe. I think mediation, in a way, addresses some of those but not only [sounds like 00:11:50] people to really grasp. Whereas, if you compare what our answer to those needs are to, let's an advocate's is or an attorney's is, they are very different. I think that's part of the problem here.

If we all we say . . . you know the saying: 'If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail'?

Aled: Yeah, yeah.

Bernie: Well, I once was on a panel that said, 'If mediation is our position what is our interest?' I've always thought that I didn't come up with that name. My friend Bill
Botopshick [sounds like 00:12:25] but it was a very clever point because we're saying, 'Hey, we've got this service. We're offering it to you. It's third party neutral intervention. It may be mediation, it may be facilitation, it may even be arbitration. But that's what we're offering. That's a very narrow range.

In fact, what people need in conflict is far broader than that, and we have skills we can be applied in far broader ways.

Aled: It's very interesting. I'm still trying to get my head around 'If mediation's our position what's our interest?'. It is very, very helpful to think in that way.

Something that you said there touched on something you say in the book. Now, in the U.K. at the moment, there's an organisation called the Civil Mediation Council, CMC. They had their annual conference very recently. They started to put in place an infrastructure to, I don't want to go as far as to say 'regulate', but they certainly want to provide some structure, some coherency. As well as promote mediation, but also sort of accredit and become some kind of respected authority.

They feel that marketing mediation, promoting mediation, regulating the 'profession' in inverted commas, is the way forward. I'm not entirely convinced by that. I'm not entirely convinced by it because I'm a huge advocate of the lean approach to developing business.

The lean approach is, you start off with a series of hypotheses about what you think the problems is, how you think your solution will resolve that problem about who are the potential customers. Then you, through a series of tests and conversations, you validate or invalidate those hypotheses.

If your questions and your research continues to validate then you carry on that track, if they are invalidated then you pivot and you change direction, until you find what the market wants, not what you think they want.

Bernie: I totally agree with that.

Aled: I don't think that's the way forward, right? I was open to being influenced, but then I read a passage in your book where you say something like: 'Where the conflict resolution . . . ' I read this about ten times. 'Where the conflict resolution prospers, grows and becomes more widely accepted and more influential, depends less on developing the infrastructure of a profession, than on strengthening the clarity that practitioners share about the heart of what they do.'

Bernie: Why that particular passage did you read ten times? I should say: if you read it ten times did you find any grammatical errors in it?
Aled: I read it because I just thought . . . It resonated with me. It really resonated. I thought, 'Hold on a second. First of all, there's a lot of infighting in mediation.' Like it or not, across the mediation community there are people that think it should be regulated, and there are people that are diametrically opposed to that and would resist it and take up arms to oppose it. That's how strongly they feel.

We are in crisis. I don't think whilst you're in a state of crisis you can present a coherent, united, trustworthy service to the broader community because they're going to look at you and go, 'Well, hold on a second, is this a mandated thing? Is it a voluntary thing? Are you going to evaluate me? Is it . . . What's transformative? Hold on a second, he's talking about narrative over there.'

Bernie: I actually think it's fine if we're not united. I don't think we are united, don't think we need to be. There is a lot of different kinds of therapies. There is a lot of different kinds of legal practice. There is a lot of different approaches to most services, professional services, counselling, teaching, medical services.

I don't think we have to be united. I think we have to be respectful. We have to appreciate diversity. I believe that the problem with coming up with standards of practice is that if we try to force standards of practice onto too a diverse field, it's not going to help in any way. It's not going to be credible, number one, and number two, it's going to be about marketing. It's not going to be about protecting the consumer.

I've always felt the problem with a lot of approaches that emphasise standards of practice are, they're a way of saying, 'Hey, I've met the standard. I've been qualified.' It's not so much standards of practice, maybe but certification. 'I've been certified. Now I'm going to market myself as somebody who has been certified.' Does that really protect the public in any way or is it simply about marketing? If it is more about marketing, does not genuinely protect the public, then it's dishonest.

Aled: Yeah. So we come back to then, embedded in that entire drive to certify, is the assumption that it will reassure and meet . . . Satisfy the needs and concerns of the market.

Bernie: Right. Embedded in that is that assumption which I think is wrong. So to go back to what you said a moment ago . . . Well, wait. Let me say one more thing about that first. Look, if certification where really well-drawn standards of practice were to protect the public in some way, were to upgrade our services, that's great.

It's not my thing to get into that. I'm very sceptical at to whether it would do that. But I'm not saying I'm against that, if we could really show that it would upgrade the services the public could expect and the recourse they had if they didn't get adequate services.
I just don't believe it's going to do that. I don't believe it does that in most professions, I don't think it's going to do that in ours.

To get back to what you said a moment ago, yeah, we have to really diagnose what the problem is. Why aren't we being used more? Instead of saying, 'Oh, woe is us. We have this wonderful service, why aren't we use more? People just need to know more about us.' We had better understand it's not because the public is perverse and they just are stupid and therefore they're not using us.

It's because there's something . . . They have a need that we are not identifying, that we're not meeting and the question is: 'can we?' and, 'how can we?' and then 'should we?'

In that sense I think marketing is the issue, and that deeper sense of identifying the real need the public has and how we can best meet it, that kind of marketing is where the problem is.

But not marketing as, sort of, selling ourselves, which is how I think people usually think of that.

Aled: Yeah. You might as well just put a load of U.S. dollars in a plastic bag and toss it in the air.

Bernie: If I'm there to catch it, that would be okay.

Aled: Yeah, I'll be there next to you. I'll have one of those butterfly nets. Anyway, we've got a narrowly defined field, we've got an imbalance between supply and demand. What else is contributing to this crisis?

Bernie: Well, one other thing is I don't think we've taken the development of our intellectual infrastructure seriously enough.

Aled: Go on?

Bernie: We haven't done enough research into what really works, we haven't taken new development of deeper level of conceptual clarity and frameworks. We haven't pushed ourselves as reflective practitioners. I do think we've made some progress on that. I do think we are now . . . The thing that I criticised this, in one sense, earlier. I think that now we're saying, 'A master's degree increasingly is a pretty essential credential in this area, a deeper level of training.'

I think that's a step in the right direction as long as you don't take it too far by saying you must have my kind of master's degree in order to practise.' It's just becoming more of the norm. I think that's been a problem.

A sign of the crisis and perhaps more than the crisis itself is, we're not really used in a major way on major conflicts. One of the things that generated my interest in
this book was the response to 9/11. What happened after 9/11 is the media was full of consulting and bringing every single kind of person that you can think of. But not conflict specialists, not mediators. Now, I'm not saying we had the answer. In fact, I don't think we did. But I think we should have been part of the conversation and it showed that we weren't taken seriously that way.

I think that Bill Ury told me he was interviewed once by CNN, John Paul Lederach had a column in the 'Christian Science Monitor', there maybe have been a few other people. I was interviewed by couple of radio stations, one of which was mostly interested in me criticising our government’s response, rather than really trying to understand, 'Well how we can understand this conflict better?'

But to me that show, that peace-studies people, conflict-intervention people, weren't really seen as particularly valuable there because, we were seen as people who were trying to bring peace and negotiate. Nobody saw that as an issue. In fact, I think Bill told me that when he was asked a question it was something like, 'Let's see what a negotiator has to say about what we can do about these al-Qaeda folks.' you know? Rather than understanding maybe we have to understand the part of the role we can play is as allies to people in conflict, not just as third-party neutrals. That was something that got me thinking about that as well.

Another part of the crisis is the way in which the field has been increasingly dominated by the legal profession. I have no problem with the legal profession playing a very important role in what we do. They have a big contribution to make. But a multi-disciplinary foundation is one of our strengths. Increasingly, family mediation, certainly commercial mediation, work-place mediation, more and more is being dominated by the legal profession. Which inevitably means – not inevitably. But unfortunately has meant more and more of a rights based approach. Of a settlement-conference-oriented approach to how we deal with conflict, and I don't think that's helpful.

Aled: Are they just responding to what the market needs?

Bernie: Yes, in this sense. Do the people understand what lawyers do? People want settlement. That is part of what they want even though I often think that doesn't accomplish very much in terms of the role-, underlying nature of the conflict.

But it's also that the lawyers are the gatekeepers. The way our system works in conflict the lawyers are the gatekeepers of who gets tired in that circumstances. They are not people who they . . . They're not comfortable with, they're not familiar with.

Aled: Do we need to go further upstream then? I'm just thinking if the lawyers are the gatekeepers, by the time any dispute reaches that point it's much further down the stream towards the ocean, metaphorically speaking. Do we need to try and find . . . swim back upstream to all the tributaries, where these conflicts are brewing?
Bernie: Well, certainly we do. But we also need to go downstream too, after the suits, after the legal settlement. After a resolution has been handed out. For example, some of the most important work I’ve done in work-place issues has been after a brutal collective-bargaining agreement has been reached. Then there are some real work for healing, and there is some real work for figuring out: how do we connect people to each other in a new way, and create new structures. But we need to go upstream too.

We need to look at whether our latent conflicts that have not yet become manifest or where there are issues that people need to talk about, but they haven’t yet generated themselves into a . . . . The process is sometimes called 'Naming, blaming and claiming'.

What I also suggest in 'Beyond Neutrality' is a more fundamental thing, is we really re-think our role. That our role isn't simply about resolving conflict. It's about helping people engage in conflict constructively. No matter where they are in the process. That is upstream. That is in the present. That is downstream. The right time that involves solving conflict, and settling things. But that’s not all.

We're not just about resolving conflict. We are about helping people engage in it as productively as possible, and sometimes that means upping the ante, in fact. Sometimes that means escalating the conflict. As an aside, I've been very interested in, and I’m sure many of the people who listen in on this, if they follow events in the States at all, are aware of what's happened in Baltimore and Ferguson with the police/community relationships and 'Black lives matter' etc.

There is an awful lot of people out there saying: 'Calm down, settle down, be nonviolent, understand the police role'. But there is not a lot of people out there that are saying, 'Be more powerful, more effectively.'

I think that's part of what people need in conflict, is to help be more powerful, more effectively. People like to quote Martin Luther King and Gandhi and non-violence. They don't realise how much those folks were about upping and escalating conflict often.

We really need to be able to be part of that whole . . . We need to feel this part as helping people engage constructively sometimes, meaning in escalating conflict, using power effectively, not just settling things down, which is how people see us. People see us as . . . and actually people very often just don't want none of that.

The other major thing I suggest from here is we think of our role in conflict way beyond a third party neutral role. I suggest three roles. They can overlap, but are also very different. Three broad roles which are third party, ally, and system roles. The most valuable work I’ve done, and many of my other colleagues have said the same thing: is to be on one side of a conflict and help those people on that side achieve their interests...
Aled: Okay. I think I have lost you. I have lost you, Bernie.

Bernie: Can you hear me now?

Aled: I can hear you now.

Bernie: Oh dear. I was on a rant and made you losing me.

Aled: No, no. It was a good rant. The rant was . . .

Bernie: Baltimore, Ferguson . . .

Aled: Yeah. You said, 'another major' and then it went.

Bernie: Can you tell me again the last line.

Aled: Martin Luther, Gandhi.

Bernie: Okay, let me go back to Martin Luther King and Gandhi. Maybe Martin Luther but we'll stay with Martin Luther King, okay?

Aled: These guys upped the ante.

Bernie: Yeah, they upped the ante. They were not just about non-violence. They were about empowering people. They often escalated. The reason they were effective is because they were willing to escalate in very strong ways.

But people see us as people who say, 'Be nice, calm down, get along, cooperate.' I think we also have to be able to say, 'Compete, escalate when it's necessary, be uppity if you need to be that.' We need to help people be powerful, not just resolve issues. That's part of our responsibility.

Aled: The point you make there connects with some of the assumptions or beliefs that we hold about–,

Bernie: The ten beliefs?

Aled: Yeah, the ten beliefs that get in the way. Brilliant stuff, really brilliant stuff. One of those assumptions that we hold that we take for granted to be true, not just for us but for other people.

If we act on the basis of those assumptions and they're flawed, then we've got a problem.

Okay, and one of those assumptions is the best most effective way to address conflict is cooperate, calm down, peace, to collaborate, to . . .
Bernie: Be nice.

Aled: Be nice.

Bernie: Be rational.

Aled: Yeah, which goes against everything that's sort of . . . It's counter-intuitive, isn't it?

Bernie: Right, well, that's the conflict paradox model is what addresses a lot of those things. But we can talk about that in a moment, but for example, I think competition and cooperation are intrinsically related, intertwined. You can't have one without the other.

Let me just say one other thing. The reason this is called 'Beyond Neutrality' is I'm not necessarily saying mediators shouldn't be neutral. I think the concept of neutrality is a very illusive concept. But if we say we're not going to be on one party's side or the other, we're going to try to help both parties. Then we should follow that.

I think in terms of the broad set of roles we play as conflict intervenors, we have to look beyond the third-party neutral role. We have to look into ally roles, into system roles, into advocacy roles as part of what we do, as in a range of conflict intervention roles our field offers.

Aled: So what were the green shoots?

Bernie: I've mentioned two already. One is that I think we are beginning to see our roles broader than that. We will see a lot more people utilise the term 'conflict-engagement' as opposed to 'conflict resolution' as what we are all about.

I hear that all the time and people often have no idea where that concept even originated, and it didn't just originate with me but I was one of the people it originated with. I think that's very encouraging.

It means that people are beginning to think more broadly about what their purpose is in intervening in conflict and we are seeing the growth of other roles and third-party roles as very close to what we do. Conflict coaching roles, system design roles, advocacy roles, consulting where we really see our role as within one side of a conflict as consultants. That's happening.

Another shoot I alluded to a moment ago, is that I think we're taking the unilateral foundation somewhat more seriously. We have a proliferation of increasingly well done graduate programmes in the field, with a more solid intellectual foundation and I think that's good. I don't think we do enough
empirical research. We're sadly short of empirical research, especially qualitative but also quantitative too.

Aled: What's interesting, is I did an interview with Orna Rabinovich from Tel Aviv University and she was talking about the tension between the value of confidentiality and the need for transparency. Part of the problem, I think, which is again, it's not a belief that gets in the way. It's a structural thing I think. Is that because of the confidentiality issue, it's stopping us – gets that sort of qualitative perspective. Are you still there?

Bernie: Yeah, I'm still here.

Aled: Okay, sorry, that quality perspective. Also, because there isn't a volume in terms of demand, we can't really get that quantitative perspective either. We're not getting the right data than we make informed choices about what we do, as a field, moving forward.

A point you make there about broadening our perspective. You talked about having an integrative approach. For us to be able to go upstream, to work in the present, to do post conflict work, we've really got a deepen our thinking, to really develop our knowledge and thinking around conflict.

Bernie: Oh, yeah. There is no question about it. If we don't start with understanding, what we are about is conflict and therefore we better understand the dynamics of conflict, there's a whole literature out there on it, there's a growing literature, learning research. It comes from sociology, political science, anthropology, history, and about culture, about the cultural components to it, about power. A big part of what we have to understand is we are always operating in the world of power. If we don't understand that, then we're inevitably going to be helping those who are more powerful.

Aled: Okay. One more thing then, Bernie, just to round this off, you talked about increasingly used term 'conflict engagement specialist'. No one is talking about that over in the U.K. I haven't heard that mentioned once. So that's really interesting.

Bernie: It may be more of a North American phenomenon.

Aled: It may be. You guys are way ahead of the game if this is anything to go by, right? Help me out here. What's my value proposition? What is it I can offer?

Bernie: Okay, that is a really important question. What is it we offer? If it's not resolving conflict unless that is part of what we offer at the right time, and if it's not being a third-party neutral only, although that is what we offer at the right time, what is it?
I've suggested several things in here that I think we offer. One is that we are people who understand the dynamics of conflict, and can help people therefore, figure out what their own choices are in conflict, and what their own circumstances is. We better understand the cultural dynamics. I think that is something we can do and offer. We need to understand power and we need to understand communication.

We can help people communicate strategically, but also in a principled and effective way. We better understand the different approaches to that. We understand process. We understand different procedures and we can help bring people to the right process for them, at the right time. And under the right circumstances we'd might be people who conduct those processes as well.

I think increasingly we have to understand something about the substance of the areas we work in. When I first started this was such a new thing but then most people, and I had a background on psychotherapy, so in family work and divorce and child welfare where I did a lot of work, I had a substantive expertise, and that helped. We often have to move in areas where none of us have substantive expertise.

Increasingly, I think, we can also bring in, not because we are the substantive consultants, but we can help people connect the right process to the right substantive elements to it.

Now, I think we do bring a set of values as part of our value, and those values are important. We believe that, I think a fundamental belief is that people ought to be able, to the greatest extent possible, to solve their own problems, as opposed to solutions imposed upon them.

I think that value in itself means, we are always looking for whether people can do that and how they can do it, and ways in which we move beyond a top-down division making. That value becomes important, for example, as one thing.

Another thing I think we believe in is the fundamental dignity of all people. Which means in a conflict, we do not start out figuring out who is right and who is wrong. But what's going on?

I often say to my students, for example, the three explanatory crutches that people use in conflict are: they blame it on somebody being stupid, somebody being crazy, or somebody being evil. And not saying it is not stupid, crazy and evil in the world, but we go beyond that and say, 'That doesn't explain anything. That's a way of not explaining things. Instead, we figure out, let's understand what's happening because we believe that everybody, from their own point of view, is acting in a way that makes sense to them and is right by them. Mostly, or almost always. Those are some of the values that we believe.
Aled: Brilliant. You know what? I can imagine myself sitting down with a potential client or somebody and saying, 'Look, I don't help you figure out who is right and wrong. I really understand what's going on. What's going on?' That speaks to the kind of systemic approach that you might bring into a situation or a difficulty.

Bernie: That's right. That's something I sometimes say to people and I also sometimes say, 'Well, if you want to figure out who is right and who is wrong let's start out with you. Start with you. What are you on about?' I try to use that with myself too.

Aled: It's a good place to start, right?

Bernie: Yeah.

Aled: Look, if you're watching this interview, I don't often do this, but go and get yourself a copy of this. Because, I tell you what, you won't be able to put it down. If you really want to really develop your thinking and really make a difference with your skills, your attitude, your passion, tuck into this. It's brilliant, Bernie. It really is. I really enjoyed it and I'm not on any commission.

Bernie: Can I say one more thing about the book or is it bad to do that now?

Aled: What's that?

Bernie: Can I say one more thing about the book or is it bad to do that?

Aled: No, go on.

Bernie: One of the things people say is, 'Boy, this is really depressing. Talks about all the problems.' And I've often said 'Well, get past the first 75 pages without committing . . . Being suicidally depressed and it's actually quite up lifting.' Because I think what the fundamental message is, look, we have to be our own worst critics, we have to face problems, but we actually have an awful lot to offer beyond what we're doing, and we can do it, and that's going to make a difference.

Aled: Yeah. It's a choice between burying one's head in the sand and living in a world of denial, or, getting real and taking the bull by the horns and I'm mixing my metaphors all over the place now. Just being a bit more proactive and a bit more informed about what's going on.

Bernie: Burying our bulls' horns in the sand. I appreciate that very much, Aled. I really appreciate that and I really appreciate what you said about the book. Thank you very much.

Aled: Well, thank you for writing it and a huge thank you for doing the interview. Bernie, if people want to find out more about your work, reach out, say hello, say thank you, where can they do that?
Bernie: Well, I'll give you my email.

Aled: You can . . . Is there a place on the web?

Bernie: Yes, there is a place. The easiest way to do it is Google: The Werner Institute, W-E-R-N-E-R, Creighton University, C-R-E-I-G-H-T-O-N, and then you'll find my web page as a faculty page.

Aled: I'll put the link underneath the interview anyway so people can click on it and they can go to . . . I just don't want you to get thousands of emails from everyone wanting . . .

Bernie: That's fine. There's also stayingwithconflict.com is another place, but there's more on the other one.

Aled: Super stuff. Well, let me be the first to say thank you. Bernie Mayer, thank you very much.

Bernie: Thank you.