

Tenacious

Mediator Stacie Hausner is persistent in getting parties to settle conflicts.

By Steven Crighton
Daily Journal Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES — Stacie Hausner has enjoyed being a mediator for as long as she can remember. Scattered throughout her childhood were arguments between friends, disputes among teammates, and, as her family's middle child, there was no shortage of sibling conflicts to resolve.

"All of us have been mediating for our entire lives without knowing it. Think how many times you have helped your friends, parents, teammates and siblings resolve a conflict," Hausner said.

As her mother was a therapist and her father a lawyer, Hausner said it probably should have been no surprise that life as a litigator would never seem quite the same after getting her first taste of mediation.

"I enjoyed being a litigator because I love the law, but I didn't love the advocacy component of the practice," Hausner said. "I remember, while sitting in a mediation one day, as I watched a mediator work from room to room trying to resolve my case, that mediation was a better career path for me. It allowed me to combine my love of law with my natural capacity for conflict resolution."

After taking some time off to raise her young children, Hausner decided she wasn't interested in returning to litigation. She said she wanted to pursue mediation in order to play to her strengths while doing something she's truly passionate about — conflict resolution.

"I looked into the Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution at Pepperdine University School of Law. It was the No. 1-rated dispute resolution school in the U.S., and it was only 30 minutes from my house," Hausner said.

She took as many classes, clinics and internships as she could to get a well-rounded mediation skill set.

"My Straus training was fantastic, because it not only taught me the practical skills and tools to move people toward resolution, it taught me about things like culture and conflict, negotiation, communication, and psychology of conflict, so that I could more fully understand how people think and behave



Juliane Backmann / Special to the Daily Journal

in conflict and I could use this understanding in my mediation practice," Hausner said.

Shortly before graduating from Straus with a master of laws degree in dispute resolution, Hausner was offered an externship at the Los Angeles County Superior Court. She quickly learned that the disputes were very personal in the court-ordered settlement conferences, and that the best way to find a resolution was to address both the personal interests of the parties, as well as, their financial and legal positions.

Fortunately, hearing people out and helping them pinpoint what they think the real problem is happens to be one of her favorite parts of the job.

"I feel so lucky that I was able to stumble upon a career where I actually looked forward to going to work every day. I learn so much about people — the different issues, the different industries — and the rewards of bringing people past their conflicts," Hausner said.

Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Craig Karlan estimates that Hausner mediated hundreds of cases on his behalf during her time with the court. The nature of the disputes were as varied as they were complex, but Karlan said Hausner could adapt as needed.

"These were hard cases, they were not easy. There were a lot of self-represented litigants, who are harder to work with, because they don't know the system as well. You've really got to

take the time, to be patient and explain to them how the system works," Karlan said.

Karlan said Hausner's amiable personality lets litigants feel like she's guiding them with a soft touch. But in truth, Karlan said, Hausner's persistence is unwavering when it comes to getting hesitant parties to agree to a viable settlement.

"She understands what it's like, she understands the pros, the cons, the costs, the uncertainty. But she's also tenacious," Karlan said. "And when I say tenacious, I mean you can underline it 10 times. She's sweet and charming, but she's tenacious."

About a year ago — a little under 10 years after rededicating her career to mediation — Hausner made the jump to private mediation by way of ADR Services Inc.

At least one case, involving an acrimonious and long-running neighborly dispute over the height of hedges, followed her from court to private mediation. Steven Morris, an attorney at Turner Aubert & Freeman LLP who is involved in the dispute, said that Hausner was able to convince his client about the realities of the case that even he struggled to convey.

"My client needed some pressure, and she applied the pressure with remarkable tenacity. My view was her view. She wasn't pressuring her to do something I wasn't already recommending to my client. But she was relentless,"

Stacie Hausner

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Morris said. "Even when my client was starting to become belligerent, she would not back down."

Hausner said she generally prefers caucuses to joint sessions, as it allows the parties to tell their side of the story without reservations. It also gives Hausner a chance to understand the underlying interests of the case: What are the business interests involved? What ongoing relationships are relevant to discussions? Is someone's reputation on the line, and what communities do the parties belong to?

"You really have to dig down deep to understand the interests that underlie their positions in the mediation," Hausner said. "For example, you need to understand why something is so upsetting to the person in conflict, or why they are asking for a particular amount of money. When you understand people's underlying interests, you can often guide them in a way to help break an impasse."

In addition to her mediation practice, Hausner has returned to Straus Institute as an adjunct professor. She said it's invigorating to work with the next generation of mediators, and every so often, her students' questions get her to think about the process in a way she hadn't before.

"It is so rewarding to teach something that I love so much, and to watch my students gain a similar enthusiasm for the wonderful field of mediation," Hausner said.

Here are some attorneys who have used Hausner's mediation services: David Youssefeyeh and Liza Youssefeyeh, ADY Law Group PC; Larry R. Jackson, Boesch Law Group; Alan J. Carnegie, Daniels Fine Israel Schonbuch & Lebovits LLP; Jeffrey B. Valle, Valle Makoff LLP; Kevin Dicker, Leonard, Dicker & Schreiber LLP; Steven B. Adelman, Los Angeles; Robert W. Finnerty, Girardi Keese; Ani A. Avetisyan, Los Angeles; Michael J. Sexton, Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak & Stewart PC.