

Get to Know Debra Bogaards, Esq.

*A Mediator Who Listens,
Connects, and Resolves*



With a settlement rate exceeding 98%, Debra Bogaards, Esq., has earned a reputation as one of the most effective and empathetic mediators working today. Known for her thorough preparation, tenacity, and deep legal acumen spanning over four decades, Debra mediates disputes across a wide range of practice areas—including high-stakes personal injury, complex employment matters, emotionally-charged sexual abuse cases, and intricate business conflicts.

We spoke with Debra about her path to mediation and how she approaches some of the most difficult cases in civil law.

Q: You've had a lengthy and impressive legal career. What led you to mediation?

Bogaards: I spent decades trying cases—initially in insurance defense, and later as a plaintiff's personal injury attorney. Over time, I realized that mediation allows for something trials rarely offer: resolution with dignity. I love the challenge of taking a tangled, emotional, high-stakes case and helping people find common ground. I bring all of my courtroom experience to mediation, but I also bring empathy—and a real commitment to helping parties feel heard and respected.

Q: What's your approach going into a mediation?

Bogaards: Preparation is key. I study the briefs, review exhibits, analyze medical records, and schedule individual pre-mediation calls with each counsel. I want to understand the dynamics and historical background before we enter the room.

By the time we begin, I've already started thinking about how I can help the parties connect the dots, break impasse, and reach a result they can live with. And if we don't settle the same day, I keep working the file until we do. Attorneys routinely describe me as incredibly tenacious.

You possess a wealth of deep experience. I'd like to discuss some specific types of cases that you handle.

Q: Let's begin with employment disputes. What makes a successful resolution possible in those cases?

Bogaards: In employment disputes, emotions run high—people feel betrayed or discarded, and reputations are on the line. I work hard to build rapport with the plaintiff while also giving the defense space to manage risk. One recent case involved a high-profile plaintiff, a major social media company, and multiple lawyers. We spent 12 hours in mediation and didn't settle. But I didn't give up. I kept following up—texts, Zooms, phone calls—and by the end of the week, we had a deal. Persistence and trust-building are critical. I also ask counsel to bring draft settlement terms in advance, so we're ready when agreement is within reach.

Areas of Expertise Include:

- Elder Abuse
- Employment
- Landlord/Tenant & Habitability
- Personal Injury & Catastrophic Injury
- Sexual Assault/Sexual Abuse

Q: You mediate a lot of catastrophic personal injury cases. These are life-altering disputes. What's your role as a mediator in that setting?

Bogaards: These are some of the most emotional mediations I do. The plaintiff may be dealing with permanent injuries—brain trauma, amputations, spinal damage, the loss of a loved one. I bring decades of trial and medical experience to help the parties assess risk, but just as important is my ability to listen. When a plaintiff feels truly heard—when they can tell their story and know it mattered—settlement becomes possible. I've resolved cases involving crushed limbs, wrongful death, and disputed liability in multi-vehicle accidents. What makes the difference is preparation, compassion, and honest dialogue.

Q: You specialize in mediating sexual abuse and assault cases. How do you approach these highly sensitive matters?

Bogaards: These are some of the hardest cases. There's trauma, shame, and sometimes decades of silence. My role is to create a safe, respectful space where the parties can speak honestly—sometimes for the first time. In one case, a stepfather paid a six-figure settlement from his personal savings and gave a heartfelt apology on Zoom. In another, a plaintiff confronted the daughter of her deceased abuser—an emotionally charged meeting that ended in resolution. These cases demand creativity, patience, and sensitivity. And above all, they require trust.

Q: You've mediated elder abuse cases involving neglect and wrongful death. What's your approach to those?

Bogaards: Elder abuse cases are often heartbreaking. Whether it's untreated bedsores or lack of proper medication, the damage can be devastating. Plaintiffs want accountability. Facilities want to defend their reputation and manage cost. I come prepared—with knowledge of skilled nursing standards, medical charts, and protocols—but also with compassion. In many of

these cases, I've been able to create space for the families to feel heard and to find closure. These cases require deep empathy and firm, honest dialogue with all sides.

Q: You bring business and finance experience to your practice. How does that inform your work in business disputes?

Bogaards: Before law school, I earned a degree in accounting and finance from UC Berkeley and worked at Peat Marwick. I later managed two insurance defense firms and served on corporate boards. So when I mediate business disputes—partnership breakups, shareholder claims, financial mismanagement—I bring not only legal insight but real-world business understanding. In one memorable case involving an accounting firm and a departing partner accused of poaching clients, I helped the parties understand how changes in their business model impacted valuation. Business clients respect candor and clarity, and I bring both.

Q: You've handled some very large habitability and landlord/tenant matters. What's your philosophy when mediating those cases?

Bogaards: Habitability disputes are often about more than repairs—they're about dignity, health, and people's homes. I've handled multi-party disputes involving entire developments with hundreds of units, as well as individual cases with serious allegations like mold, gas leaks, and sewage backups. Habitability cases often involve mold and non-mold claims as well as mold and non-mold insurance coverage. In large-scale matters, I take on a coordinating role—almost like a discovery referee. I set up regular Zooms, guide document exchange, and facilitate testimonial recordings.

I also focus on building rapport among counsel, and am adept at managing a defense zoom breakout room filled with a variety of defense lawyers and coverage counsel. In one case, I even took the lead lawyers to dinner during a multi-day session to reset the tone. In smaller cases, I've had plaintiffs use their phone to film their unit in real

time, which helped resolve disputes about conditions. These cases require creativity, flexibility, and the ability to manage both legal and emotional complexity.

Q: What's your style in the room?

Bogaards: I'm warm, straightforward, and persistent. I don't give up. I don't sugarcoat, but I always listen. My goal is for both sides to feel respected—even if they don't get everything they wanted. I believe strongly in pre-mediation preparation, but I also believe in the human element: rapport, trust, and authenticity. And when a case doesn't settle right away, I keep going. Because that's when some of my best work happens.

Q: What keeps you motivated after all these years?

Bogaards: The people. Every case is different, and every person brings their own story. Helping them find a way forward—that's deeply meaningful to me. Mediation isn't just about compromise. It's about closure. It's about dignity. And if I can help people achieve that, I know I'm doing work that matters.

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