

Get to Know Hon. Vedica Puri (Ret.)



A seasoned trial attorney and respected former trial judge, **Hon. Vedica Puri (Ret.)** brings decades of courtroom experience, strategic insight, and unwavering fairness to her role as a mediator with ADR Services, Inc. Known for her tireless preparation and ability to connect with both sides of a case, Judge Puri offers parties a grounded, empathetic, and fiercely honest approach to dispute resolution. We spoke with her about her path from jury trials to mediation, her approach to settlement, and why, in her words, there is **always** a way forward.

Q: How would you describe your background in civil litigation?

Judge Puri: I was a trial lawyer from day one—that's all I ever wanted to be. I started law school when I was 20 and spent my career in the courtroom. I've handled dozens of jury trials and bench trials, first for the defense—primarily legal malpractice and insurance—and then as a plaintiff's lawyer. There is nothing so humbling and powerful as our jury trial system. I dedicated my career to understanding the art of defending or presenting a case to a jury.

Q: What are your areas of subject matter expertise?

Judge Puri: I specialized in insurance coverage, bad faith, and legal malpractice. I've also handled a range of civil cases on the bench—personal injury, premises liability, employment, complex real estate and business disputes, and probate litigation.

Insurance coverage requires an understanding of the underlying dispute. These disputes ranged across many disciplines, from complicated construction defect cases to catastrophic personal injury.

Q: What are your core strengths as a neutral?

Judge Puri: I bring the full depth of my personal civil trial experience to every mediation. It was extraordinarily beneficial to have tried cases as first and second chair when I took the bench. Having worked as an insurance defense lawyer, plaintiff's lawyer and trial judge -- I understand what's at stake, how trials actually unfold, and how insurance dynamics can be the key to resolution. I am fortunate to speak the language of both the plaintiff and defense sides. I know what it takes to be an effective advocate, and I know what it takes to persuade a judge and a jury. This 360-degree perspective helps me connect and guide people toward resolution.

Areas of Expertise:

- Business/Breach of Contract
- Employment
- Insurance Coverage & Bad Faith
- Legal Malpractice
- Personal Injury
- Probate, Estates & Trusts
- Real Property

Q: Was there a defining moment that led you to focus on dispute resolution?

Judge Puri: Yes -- when, as a civil trial judge, I was appointed to the Court's Mandatory Settlement Conference (MSC) panel. At first, I couldn't believe it. How could judges effectively settle cases over lunch hours while we were also conducting jury trials? But we did. I took as much after-hours time as necessary to prepare and talk with the parties. Years later, after handling nearly every judicial assignment possible, MSCs stand out as my favorite one. Handling settlements full time made all the sense in the world given my background.

Q: How do your personal values shape your approach?

Judge Puri: My personal values and professional work ethics are completely aligned: honesty, accountability, and clarity. I'm direct—but fair. If something needs to be said, I say it. What I would tell my own client, I'll say to the parties. There's no sugarcoating how uncertain trial outcomes can be. And it's never a waste of time to try to settle.

Q: What do you do when parties hit an impasse?

Judge Puri: I keep at it. The fact that they're at mediation tells me there's hope. There's generally a throughline in each case. It's my job to find it. That one shared goal, that one untapped value that appeals to both sides. There's **always** a way to move forward when you put the client's interests first.

Q: What motivates you in this work?

Judge Puri: The hundreds of mediations I attended as a trial lawyer over 24 years. I try to do what I hoped and prayed a mediator could do for my former clients: truly understand the client's point of view and get to the heart of the matter without wasting time. I never saw the value in opening joint sessions in hard fought cases and usually refuse to do them as a mediator.

There is no time for grandstanding. The satisfaction of closing a case in a way that both sides can live with—that never gets old. I've seen plaintiffs feel validated and defense counsel walk away knowing they've protected their client's interests. That balance is powerful. It's also about service: helping reduce the backlog in the courts, helping the system work better for everyone.

Q: How do you prepare for a mediation?

Judge Puri: Preparation is everything. I spend far more hours than allotted reviewing everything I can to understand the facts and legal issues. I get into the evidence—because that's where the heart of the case lies. I schedule confidential calls with the attorneys ahead of time to understand the dynamics, the personalities, and the pressure points. This allows me to hit the ground running when the session begins.

Q: And what happens after the session if there's no resolution?

Judge Puri: I persist. Some people just need time to reflect. I don't put a clock on it. I follow up with the lawyers and keep the conversation open. Sometimes all it takes is a beat—a moment of space—and we're able to close the deal. That post-session effort is often just as important as the mediation day itself.

Q: Do you have any notable cases you'd highlight from the bench?

Judge Puri: I presided over the first trial to go out in San Francisco Superior Court post lockdown during Covid in August 2020. No vaccines were in place and all we had was social distancing. Suddenly words like "droplets" and "quarantine" were part of our day-to-day vocabulary. I came in the weekend before trial and wiped down almost every surface in the courtroom myself. I had to make rulings of first impression about masking and whether it violated the right to confront witnesses. Reporters were all over the case. Luckily, I had

tremendous help from court leadership, my colleagues and staff. We came together to keep everyone involved as safe as possible. It is a point of pride that not a single juror or staff member was excused from that case because of illness.

It was high-pressure, high-stakes and very meaningful—a testament to how resilient our community and the trial system is.

Q: How would attorneys describe your style?

Judge Puri: Hopefully they would say I'm patient, but I don't suffer fools. That I care deeply about the people involved and understand the issues in play. I keep things calm and level-headed no matter what. More than that, you'd have to check my testimonials.

A Mediator With the Mind of a Trial Judge.

From her early start in law school at age 20 to her service on the bench and in dozens of jury trials, Judge Vedica Puri has built a career grounded in advocacy, accountability, and empathy. Now, as a mediator, she brings that same clarity and care to helping parties find resolution—with intelligence, insight, and a respect for the human side of the law.

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