

Get to Know Hon. Holly Fujie (Ret.)



Conflict, Resolution and the People Behind the Lawsuits: A conversation with Judge Holly Fujie (Ret.)

By **Katy Jones**

For **Hon. Holly J. Fujie (Ret.)**, the heart of dispute resolution lies not only in legal analysis, but in understanding people.

Across more than four decades in litigation, judicial service and statewide legal leadership, Judge Fujie has built a reputation for navigating extraordinarily difficult disputes with intelligence, a calm demeanor and an acute understanding of interpersonal dynamics. Whether handling a high-volume calendar in the Personal Injury Hub of the Los Angeles Superior Court, presiding over emotionally charged family business disputes or leading the State Bar of California through moments of institutional crisis, she has consistently focused on the same core challenge: helping people move past conflict and toward resolution.

Now, as a mediator with ADR Services, Inc., Judge Fujie brings that experience to a broad range of matters, including complex business litigation, banking and finance, insurance coverage, fraud, employment, real estate, legal malpractice and family business disputes.

“I strongly believe that virtually all lawsuits would be better settled than tried.”

Q: Your career has spanned major law firms, the Los Angeles Superior Court, and statewide bar leadership. What connects all of those experiences?

Fujie: At the core, all of those roles involved helping people navigate conflict — often during very stressful and emotional circumstances.

I spent 34 years in complex civil litigation before serving more than a decade on the Los Angeles Superior Court, including in the Personal Injury Hub and an Unlimited Civil courtroom at the Stanley Mosk Courthouse. The PI Hub in particular involved a very high volume of personal injury disputes where the emphasis was on efficient case management and meaningful settlement discussions.

You learn very quickly in those environments that legal disputes are rarely just about the law. There are almost always emotional components, communication breakdowns or business pressures driving the conflict. That understanding has become central to my work as a mediator.

Q: You’ve handled an exceptionally broad range of disputes. Are there particular subject matters where your experience is especially valuable?

Fujie: My background is heavily rooted in complex civil litigation. That includes banking and finance, insurance coverage, contract and fraud disputes,

Areas of Expertise:

- Complex Business Litigation
- Banking & Finance
- Insurance Coverage
- Contract & Fraud Disputes
- Legal Malpractice
- Employment Matters
- Business Dissolutions & Partnership Disputes
- Real Estate Litigation
- Family Business Conflicts

employment matters, legal malpractice, business dissolutions and real estate litigation. I also have a strong background in business and economics, which helps me unravel complex corporate transactions and identify practical resolutions that make sense to all sides.

I also developed substantial experience with family business disputes while on the bench. Those cases can be particularly challenging because they involve not only financial and operational issues, but longstanding personal relationships and emotional history layered into the litigation. I think my combination of litigation experience, judicial experience and understanding of interpersonal dynamics allows me to work effectively in those environments.

“Legal disputes are rarely just about the law.”

Q: You often emphasize the emotional dynamics behind litigation. Why is that so important in mediation?

Fujie: Because unresolved emotions are often what prevent settlement.

As a judge, I saw many cases that should have resolved early instead proceed through years of litigation, enormous attorneys’ fees, trials and appeals — only for nobody to feel satisfied with the outcome. Frequently, the real obstacle was not legal exposure or finances. It was anger, mistrust, pride or the feeling of not being heard.

My approach is to acknowledge those emotions rather than ignore them. I want all parties to feel heard and respected, and then to help reign in the emotions that can drive litigation so the parties can focus on their actual interests.

In most situations, continued litigation is simply not the best economic or practical solution. Only in the case of a truly novel legal issue that requires appellate resolution do I believe a matter necessarily needs to be tried rather than negotiated.

Q: Your leadership experience extends far beyond the courtroom. How did serving as President of the unified State Bar of California shape your approach to negotiations and dispute resolution?

Fujie: That was one of the most significant leadership experiences of my career.

During my term as President, the State Bar faced several major institutional challenges, including legislative criticism of the disciplinary system and a threatened boycott of the Annual Meeting. Those situations required extremely complex negotiations involving government entities, attorneys, stakeholders and competing interests within the profession.

What I learned is that successful negotiation requires credibility, patience and the ability to understand what truly motivates different participants.

It also reinforced in me the importance of listening carefully, building trust and maintaining professionalism even when tensions are high. Those skills translate directly into my mediation work today.

“Successful negotiation requires credibility, patience, and the ability to understand what truly motivates people.”

Q: Attorneys who have appeared before you frequently describe you as empathetic and calm under pressure. How intentional is that aspect of your approach?

Fujie: Very intentional.

I handled many emotionally difficult proceedings on the bench, including large-money jury trials involving self-represented litigants whose conduct created enormous challenges for the proceedings. In those situations, maintaining calm and treating people respectfully becomes incredibly important.

People generally respond better when they feel heard and respected, even when they strongly

disagree with one another.

I think my role as a mediator is partly to create an environment where productive communication can happen again.

Q: What motivates you most about dispute resolution today?

Fujie: I genuinely enjoy helping people resolve difficult situations and move forward.

Litigation creates uncertainty, stress, distraction and expense. When parties are finally able to resolve a matter and put those pressures behind them, there is a real sense of relief and closure.

Helping facilitate that process is extremely rewarding to me.

Throughout her career, Judge Fujie has operated at the intersection of sophisticated legal disputes and deeply human conflict. Her experience managing high-stakes litigation, institutional negotiations, emotionally-charged trials and complex business relationships gives her a distinctive ability to navigate both the substantive and interpersonal dimensions of dispute resolution. As a mediator, she combines strategic insight with empathy, practicality with patience and an unwavering focus on helping parties find resolution where resolution is possible.

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