

Get to Know Hon. John Kralik (Ret.)



With more than four decades of civil litigation experience—spanning Big Law, in-house corporate counsel, private practice, and the bench—Hon. John Kralik (Ret.) brings an unusually broad perspective to dispute resolution. Over the course of a career that has taken him from a Wall Street law firm to senior litigation oversight at a Fortune 500 company, and later to 16 years on the Los Angeles Superior Court, Judge Kralik has seen disputes from nearly every vantage point imaginable.

Today, as a neutral with ADR Services, Inc., he draws on those experiences to guide parties toward practical, fair resolutions. His approach reflects not only deep legal experience but also a personal commitment to the idea that resolving conflict is both a professional and human responsibility.

Q: You’ve had a remarkably varied legal career. Can you describe your background in civil litigation?

Kralik: I have over 46 years of civil litigation experience. I began as an associate at a Wall Street law firm in 1979 working on the firm’s major litigation matters and became a partner there at age 31.

In 1993, I left private practice to join ARCO, then a Fortune 500 oil company based in Los Angeles. As in-house counsel, I supervised major litigation, litigation support, and insurance coverage

negotiations and disputes until the company was acquired by British Petroleum in 2000. After that, I started my own law firm, which eventually grew to five lawyers. Later, I was appointed to the bench, where I served for 16 years —14 of them in civil litigation departments. Because I’ve practiced as a big-firm partner, small-firm partner, sole practitioner, in-house counsel, and judge, I’ve observed settlement negotiations from virtually every perspective in litigation.

“Having seen litigation from the perspectives of big-firm lawyers, small firms, corporate clients, and the bench, I understand how the same dispute can look very different to each participant.”

Q: What types of disputes are you particularly well suited to handle?

Kralik: My strongest areas are complicated commercial disputes, insurance disputes, and business ownership disputes.

That said, over the years I’ve worked with a wide range of civil matters, including employment, toxic torts, construction defects, class actions, real estate disputes, professional liability, and First Amendment matters.

As a judge, I often tried to bring together the different moving pieces of complex litigation in order to achieve global solutions that actually

Areas of Expertise:

- Business & Contract
- Complex Litigation
- Lender Liability
- First Amendment
- Accounting Disputes
- Insurance Coverage
- Real Estate
- Religious Disputes

resolved the dispute rather than simply addressing one piece of it.

Q: Were there pivotal moments that influenced your approach to resolving disputes?

Kralik: One important turning point came when I left ARCO and started my own firm. From the outset, I positioned myself not as a “take-no-prisoners” litigator but as someone focused on resolving disputes.

We made that philosophy explicit in our firm’s Statement of Ideals. Our goal was to work with opposing counsel to find a fair and satisfactory resolution whenever possible. Trial remained an option when necessary, but it was always a last resort.

Later, as a judge, I felt a responsibility to explore every reasonable opportunity for resolution, particularly in complex cases where entrenched positions made settlement difficult.

“Settlement is usually preferable to continuing a dispute. My goal has always been to help parties pursue a just resolution rather than prolong conflict.”

Q: What motivates you to work as a mediator today?

Kralik: I believe that working as a peacemaker is one of my most important roles at this stage of my life.

All of the experiences I’ve had in the legal profession have given me tools to help people resolve disputes. I believe it’s my duty to use those tools where they can be helpful.

Q: How would you describe your mediation philosophy?

Kralik: My goal is to provide a forum for fair negotiation. I will work hard with parties who are negotiating in good faith, but I will not allow the process to be used for unfair tactics.

Parties may disagree about their bottom line or their legal positions—that’s natural. But no one should make false representations about the law or the facts. My role is to ensure the process remains fair and ethical.

Q: What techniques do you use when parties reach an impasse?

Kralik: If negotiations become entrenched, I may shift from a facilitative approach to a more evaluative one. That can include focusing on the realistic alternatives to settlement, testing assumptions through “what-if” scenarios, or exploring new terms that aren’t purely financial.

I’ve also used techniques such as mini-trials, caucusing separately with clients or lawyers, and—when appropriate—a mediator’s proposal. Even when a matter doesn’t settle on the day of mediation, I often continue working with counsel to narrow the dispute, reduce costs, or create conditions where settlement becomes possible later.

Q: How do you prepare for a mediation?

Kralik: I take advantage of every opportunity available to prepare. Briefs are helpful, but when time allows I may also conduct my own research or review evidence personally.

In cases involving real property or construction disputes, I’ve always found it useful to actually see the property involved. And whenever possible, I like to connect with counsel beforehand to understand the dynamics of the case.

I will ask hard questions early on, including in a pre-mediation phone call, because I want both sides to be prepared to make the most persuasive case for settlement to the other side.

Q: What about follow-up after mediation?

Kralik: Follow-up can be extremely valuable. If a case does not settle, positions often evolve after the mediation session, and a mediator’s light touch afterward can sometimes reopen productive discussions.

Even when a matter settles, follow-up can help prevent agreements from unraveling over minor drafting issues.

Q: What do you enjoy most about dispute resolution?

Kralik: I’m genuinely interested in people. I enjoy meeting them and understanding the situations that bring them into conflict.

What is most satisfying is when resolution allows people to move forward—whether by restoring relationships or simply allowing them to begin the process of healing and moving on with their lives.

Of course, when things do settle, it is a positive good for the parties themselves, and for the community in general, so that gives us all the opportunity for satisfaction.

“What is most satisfying is helping people move forward with peace and productivity.”

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