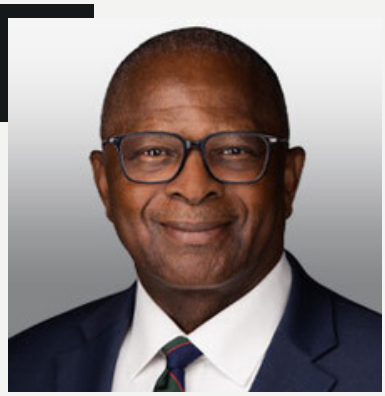
Get to Know

Hon. Tony Richardson (Ret.)



A Lifetime of Perspective. A Commitment to Resolution.

By Katy Jones

From complex commercial litigation at some of the nation's leading law firms to more than a decade on the Los Angeles Superior Court, Judge Tony Richardson brings a wealth of experience, a deep understanding of people, and a pragmatic approach to dispute resolution.

Hon. Tony L. Richardson (Ret.) brings more than four decades of legal experience to his work as a mediator, arbitrator, and referee. His distinguished career includes nearly three decades in private practice as a commercial litigation attorney, followed by more than thirteen years on the Los Angeles Superior Court, where he presided over a wide range of civil, criminal, juvenile dependency, and appellate matters.

But what truly distinguishes Judge Richardson is the breadth of perspective he brings to the table. Raised in a large family of limited financial means, he went on to attend Harvard College and Stanford Law School, build a successful career at nationally prominent law firms, and ultimately earn an appointment to the bench. These experiences have shaped his ability to connect with litigants from all walks of life, understand the interests driving their disputes, and approach even the most complex cases with fairness, preparation, and persistence. We spoke with Judge Richardson about his legal career, his philosophy concerning dispute resolution, and the experiences which inform his approach as a neutral.

Q: Your career has taken you from complex commercial litigation to the trial and appellate bench. How has that experience shaped your approach to dispute resolution?

Richardson:Before my appointment to the bench, I spent nearly three decades in private practice, primarily as a commercial litigation attorney. My formative years were at Kirkland & Ellis, where I became a partner and tried insurance coverage actions representing insureds, contract disputes, and product liability cases. I also litigated mass tort, antitrust, unfair business practices, intellectual property, and other complex business matters in state and federal courts.

My judicial career gave me an equally valuable, but very different, perspective. I served in juvenile dependency, criminal, small claims, appellate, and independent calendar assignments. Each required me to develop a strong understanding of different areas of the law, address significant procedural issues, and work with litigants facing vastly different circumstances.

Having experienced litigation from both sides of the bench, I understand the legal complexities, practical challenges, and personal considerations which influence how disputes unfold. That perspective is invaluable in helping parties evaluate their positions and identify opportunities for resolution.

Areas of Expertise:

- **Business**
- **Civil rights disputes**
- **Construction defect**
- **Employment**
- **Insurance coverage**
- **Landlord-tenant, habitability**
- **Personal injury**
- **Product liability**
- **Professional malpractice**

Q: You have handled an exceptionally broad range of civil disputes. Are there particular areas in which you bring especially significant experience?

Richardson: Complex commercial litigation and contract disputes are particular strengths, given my extensive background representing clients in sophisticated business matters.

My experience also encompasses insurance coverage, employment discrimination and wrongful termination, Labor Code and PAGA claims, consumer litigation, intellectual property, unfair business practices, partnership disputes, restrictive covenants, and non-competition matters.

Throughout my career, I have also handled personal injury, product liability, mass tort, construction defect, real property, landlord-tenant, habitability, lemon law, professional malpractice, and civil rights disputes, among others.

Q: Your personal journey is particularly compelling. How has your background influenced the kind of neutral you hope to be?

Richardson: My path to this point has given me a perspective I naturally apply to every matter.

I came from a poor background and very large family. Thanks to the strong emphasis my grandparents and parents placed on education, I seized on opportunities to attend extraordinary academic institutions, become a seasoned trial attorney at preeminent law firms, and ultimately serve as a judge.

Along the way, I have encountered people from an extraordinary range of backgrounds and circumstances. Whether a dispute involves representatives of Fortune 500 companies, small-business owners, or individual litigants, I believe I can relate to and understand the different interests, motivations, and personalities involved. That ability to connect with people and appreciate what is driving their positions is an essential part of effective dispute resolution.

"I can relate to and understand what often drives a diverse set of interests and personalities."

Q: What inspired you to pursue mediation after such a distinguished litigation and judicial career?

Richardson: Even during my years in private practice, I focused on resolving conflicts rather than unnecessarily expending my clients' time and resources on prolonged litigation. Of course, I was never reluctant to try cases which could not be resolved. But I recognized the value of finding solutions whenever possible.

As a judicial officer, some of my most gratifying experiences were conducting mandatory settlement conferences and helping parties bring difficult disputes to a close.

There is tremendous satisfaction in resolving a matter which might otherwise lead to expensive, emotionally charged, and prolonged litigation. That satisfaction is shared by the litigants, their attorneys, and the neutral who help them get there.

I believe relatively few cases truly need to be tried. The vast majority can be resolved through meaningful intervention, particularly before costs escalate and positions become entrenched.

Q: How would you describe your mediation style, particularly when parties reach an impasse?

Richardson: Preparation, perseverance, and persistence are central to my approach.

Before mediation, I take the time to become thoroughly familiar with the facts, the applicable law, and the legal issues involved. Equally important, I try to understand the individual parties' concerns, objectives, and motivations.

When parties reach an impasse, I begin by searching for common ground. From there, I carefully dissect the facts and circumstances to determine whether that common ground can provide a realistic framework for resolution.

I believe it is essential everyone feels genuinely heard and their positions have been carefully considered. Once such a foundation is established, it becomes easier to have candid, productive conversations about potential outcomes.

And, if a matter does not resolve during the initial mediation, I do not believe the effort necessarily ends there. I remain engaged, available, and persistent when additional work may lead to a resolution.

"Preparation, willingness to do deep dive into all issues, perseverance, dogged persistence."

Q: How does your extensive appellate experience benefit attorneys and their clients during mediation?

Richardson: My appellate experience has given me an opportunity to examine disputes from a different vantage point.

In addition to my years in the Superior Court's Appellate Division, I served temporarily on the California Court of Appeal and have taught appellate practice and procedure to judges and research attorneys throughout California.

That background is particularly valuable in matters involving difficult legal questions, complex procedural issues, or potential appellate exposure.

During mediation, it is important to consider not only the strengths and weaknesses of the parties' current positions but also the risks and uncertainties they may face as litigation progresses. My experience as a trial attorney, trial judge, and appellate judicial officer allows me to bring those different perspectives into the discussion.

Q: Looking back on your career, is there a particular matter that stands out as especially meaningful?

Richardson: One of the accomplishments of which I am most proud involved representing patients at Rancho Los Amigos Rehabilitation Center.

While at Kirkland & Ellis, I was one of the lead attorneys working with a coalition of public-interest organizations to challenge the planned closure of the facility, which provided essential rehabilitative care to patients with significant disabilities, many of whom had limited financial resources and would have died if the hospital were to close with no alternative care being in place.

We succeeded in obtaining injunctive relief preventing the closure. It was an extraordinarily meaningful result for the patients who depended upon the facility's services.

That work was recognized with significant pro bono honors, including the State Bar President's Large Law Firm Pro Bono Service Award.

Experiences like that reinforce something I have believed throughout my career: the law is ultimately about people, and the consequences of legal disputes can extend far beyond the courtroom.

Q: What can attorneys and their clients expect when working with you as a neutral?

Richardson: I hope attorneys who have worked with me, or appeared before me while I was on the bench, would describe me as fair, unfailingly impartial, level-headed, pragmatic, and grounded.

I invest the time and energy necessary to understand the issues and to ensure that every party has a meaningful opportunity to be heard. I approach each matter without preconceived notions and work diligently toward what I believe is the best achievable result under the circumstances.

My goal is to combine careful legal analysis with a genuine understanding of the parties and interests involved. I believe preparation, impartiality, and persistence can make a meaningful difference, particularly in challenging disputes.

"I will always work diligently to reach what I earnestly believe to be the correct result."

A Perspective Shaped by Experience

Judge Richardson's approach to dispute resolution reflects a career defined by intellectual rigor, adaptability, and a commitment to fairness. His decades of sophisticated commercial litigation experience, extensive trial and appellate judicial service, and ability to connect with individuals across a broad range of backgrounds make him a valuable resource for attorneys navigating complex civil disputes.

Whether the matter involves intricate contractual questions, significant business interests, difficult legal issues, or deeply personal concerns, Judge Richardson brings a thoughtful, grounded perspective and a determination to help parties find a path forward.

Contact:

Haward Cho

hawardlateam@adrservices.com

(310) 201-0010

www.judgerichardson.com