

The Left Brain, Right Brain Compromise

Mediator Lynne Bassis balances emotions with the realities of the law

By Henry Meier / Daily Journal Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES — For Lynne S. Bassis, mediation is a delicate balancing act between the often sterile prescriptions of the legal system and easily inflamed human nature.

“Mediation puts you at the intersection of the law and human emotion,” Bassis said. “I find both components in every case in which I’m involved.”

In recognition of this duality, Bassis does a lot of legwork upfront to establish both her knowledge of the legal issues in play and to build an intimate relationship with the parties.

Attorneys seem to think the ADR Services Inc. neutral is doing something right.

“She has a very comforting nature to her while also having the expertise to convey the weaknesses in both sides’ arguments,” said attorney Toni Jaramilla, who has used Bassis for several disability accommodation cases.

In another case, involving a business dispute between a local distributor and a manufacturer in China, Bassis said she was forced to throw out her normal playbook when the foreign company didn’t send a real decision-maker to the mediation.

Instead of calling off the mediation or just going through the motions, Bassis scheduled a night session to accommodate the time difference in China and had the real decision-maker participate via a Skype conference call.

The decision wasn’t just a matter of logistics. According to Young Lim of Park & Lim, who represented the local distributor and plaintiff in the case, Bassis also had to negotiate some significant cultural hurdles in order to settle the case — which she ultimately did.

“Setting up the second day of mediation at night to accommodate a Skype session with the decision-maker in China was important,” Lim said. “But being able to pick up a lot of the cultural subtleties was key.”

Lim, who has turned to Bassis both for that dispute and on one other occasion, said she also did a good job communicating to lawyers on both sides what issues she saw as problematic in the case, both with clients present and, sometimes more importantly, with just the lawyers. Those smaller huddles, Lim said, enabled attorneys to massage expectations and ultimately led to more successful mediations.

“She likes to get involved with clients directly,” he said. “But at the same time she has, on both cases I’ve had with her, brought the lawyers aside and told us what she’s looking at.”

Other attorneys who have used Bassis as a mediator say she’s egalitarian and does not play favorites.

“She’s equally tough on plaintiffs and defendants,” said Alfred Landegger, who has used her in



Juliane Backmann / Special to the Daily Journal

Lynne Bassis

ADR Services Inc.

Location: Los Angeles

Areas of specialty: disability law, labor and employment, business and cross-cultural disputes

employment-related cases. “She’ll give everyone a fair shake and work very hard to achieve a positive result at the end of the day.”

Bassis got into mediation in the late 1980s after taking a mediation training class offered by the LACBA. She was almost instantly hooked and jumped into being a full-time mediator in 2001 just after running Loyola Law School’s Disability Rights Legal Center.

In 2001 she got a contract with what then was the state’s Department of Fair Employment and Housing conducting disability access mediations. That allowed her to strike out on her own, and she worked as an independent neutral until January 2012, when she joined ADR Services, Inc.

Bassis also spent time working on implementing workplace conflict resolution at places such as the U.S. Postal Service and the U.S. Air Force. She said the experience of working with government entities was a definite change of pace. Dealing with fighter pilots — who may have felt conflict resolution training was beneath them — was a special challenge, Bassis said.

“There was some resistance from certain people who came in,” she said, laughing. “But they usually left with some appreciation for conflict resolution tactics.”

Bassis said she is huge on prepping for cases and

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—Young Lim

often does a first read of the briefs “on the Stairmaster” in order to take everything in before sitting down and going over the issues with a fine-tooth comb.

And while doing her homework and coming to mediations knowing the cases could go a long way for Bassis, she said there are many instances in which it pays dividends to be in the moment.

“You prepare and prepare and anticipate,” she said. “But in the moment you just have to react. I’m always trying to find moments when I can connect with somebody to move the case forward.”

Here are some attorneys who have used Bassis in mediation:

Eric Schneider, Anderson, McPharlin & Connors LLP, Los Angeles; Toni Jaramilla, The Law Offices of Toni Jaramilla, Los Angeles; Keith Gregory, Snell & Wilmer, Los Angeles; James Elliott, Elliott & Associates, Santa Monica; Steve Kroll, Bent Caryl & Kroll, LLP, Los Angeles; Sandra Munoz, Law Offices of Sandra C. Muñoz, Los Angeles; Bernard Alexander, Alexander Krakow & Glick LLP, Santa Monica; Donna Koch, county counsel’s office, Los Angeles; Young Lim, Park & Lim, Los Angeles; Brian Chase, Found Animals Foundation, Los Angeles; Alfred Landegger, Landegger, Baron, Lavenant & Ingber, Encino