

The Psychology of Compromise

Neutral Steve W. Paul uses his psychology background to turn parties' minds toward settling

By Amy Yarbrough

Daily Journal Staff Writer

At UC Berkeley in the early 1980s, Steven W. Paul was drawn to counseling and earned a degree in psychology. Now a mediator, he still puts those skills to use, helping people embroiled in disputes pick up the pieces and move on with their lives.

Paul cites as an example a recent case involving an employee who was on the verge of filing a harassment suit against his longtime employer. Both sides were ultimately able to come to an agreement on the employee's retirement and compensation. To get there, Paul said he helped the employee look past what was angering him to imagine his days as a retiree.

"We shifted from how things had been for him at work," Paul said. "You could feel it in the room — what life would be like looking forward. Once that shift occurred, the rest fell right into place."

Paul, a former labor and employment lawyer who now works with Alternative Resolution Centers, in addition to having his own mediation business in Los Angeles, said he prepares extensively for mediations. That doesn't mean just reviewing the briefs and exhibits but also talking with lawyers to understand the dynamics of the case, their clients, settlement barriers and anything else that can help him negotiate a resolution, he said.

"I want to quickly establish trust and credibility. Each party needs to know they are being listened to and understood."

Blank Rome LLP partner Howard M. Knee said Paul is organized, effective and above all, realistic. During a recent mediation, Knee said, Paul was candid with the plaintiff's attorney about the weakness of his client's case. But he was also up front with Knee about what it would take for his side to resolve it.

"I wasn't going to walk out paying nothing," Knee said.

"He's certainly smart and low-key and confident," Knee added. "He didn't rub anyone the wrong way. We got along well."

Paul, who mediates employment, entertainment, commercial, real estate and personal injury disputes, credits his varied legal experience with making him an effective mediator.

In addition to working as an employment lawyer



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Steve W. Paul

Affiliation: Alternative Resolution Services/Mediation Offices of Steven W. Paul

Location: Los Angeles

Age: 50

Areas of specialty: employment, entertainment, commercial, real estate, personal injury disputes

for plaintiffs and defense, he was senior counsel and director of legal and business affairs for Warner Bros., Studio Facilities.

Paul likens the studio job to running a small city, dealing with labor and employment issues and the day-to-day operations. Though he didn't deal with the talent, on any given day, the job involved negotiating studio leases or agreements with the city of Burbank, where Warner Bros., is located, or dealing with security and real estate matters.

Jeff Nagler, executive vice president of the studio facility group who hired Paul at Warner Bros., in 1996, said he has a balanced nature and the ability to step into another person's shoes.

"Being in a position like this, you really get a broad look at a lot of different areas," Nagler said of Paul's former job. "That probably bodes well for him being a mediator."

Wanda R. Dorgan of Sinnott, Puebla, Campagne & Curet, APLC said she also appreciates that Paul has experience on both sides of labor disputes.

"Thoughtful is the word that for me best describes him," Dorgan said. "I think he's been able to see the issues from both sides. He's one of those people that cares about people."

Michael M. Maddigan of O'Melveny & Myers LLP, who used Paul for an insurance bad-faith case, had similarly high marks for the mediator.

"I thought he was a very good listener, good at making the parties feel like they are being heard," Maddigan said. "I thought he was persistent."

Raised in West Los Angeles, Paul has two kids, Jared, 15, and Samantha, 13. His wife, Gisele, is a social worker.

Outside of his mediation practice, Paul works as an adjunct professor at the Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution at Pepperdine Law School.

Although he studied psychology in college, Paul said he knew he was on a path to law school. He said he chose to focus on employment law for the impact it has, "not only on a person's income but their feelings of self-worth."

"That's where we spend most of our waking hours," he explained. "If I can get in there and roll up my sleeves and resolve employment or other disputes, then it's been a good day."

Here are some attorneys who have used Paul's services:

Michael M. Maddigan, O'Melveny & Myers LLP, Los Angeles; James R. Kristy, The Kristy Law Firm, Seal Beach; Andrew M. Gilford, Alston Bird LLP, Los Angeles; Wanda R. Dorgan, Sinnott, Puebla, Campagne & Curet, APLC, Los Angeles; Scott C. Glovsky, The Law Offices of Scott Glovsky, Pasadena; Alan R. Zuckerman, Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith LLP, Los Angeles; Howard M. Knee, Blank Rome LLP, Los Angeles; Michael F. Baltaxe, Law Office of Michael F. Baltaxe, Westlake Village; Michele M. Goldsmith, Bergman & Dacey Inc., Los Angeles; Robert W. Feinstein, Gordon & Rees LLP, Los Angeles; Joseph M. Lovretovich, Law Offices of Joseph Lovretovich, Woodland Hills.