

# VERDICTS & SETTLEMENTS

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## Prepared and Persistent

*Suzanne Segal digs into disputes and won't easily give up on finding a resolution, lawyers say*

By Don DeBenedictis  
Special to the Daily Journal

Over her 18 years as a federal magistrate judge, Suzanne H. Segal handled many criminal matters, discovery disputes, habeas corpus petitions, civil trials and, especially, settlement conferences. Through those, she said, she learned a great deal about what works and what doesn't when mediating civil litigation.

She determined that the most important thing she can do to bring about a resolution is to prepare thoroughly for the mediation hearing because "every case is different."

Segal joined Signature Resolutions as a neutral about a year ago. Although mediations have taken much of her time, nearly a third of her work has been as an arbitrator. She also serves as a discovery referee or special master.

Before lawyers and parties meet with her, Segal learns as much about the case as she can. She reads the briefs the attorneys have filed, of course, but she also reads all the cases cited to her, looks through the court docket and examines any exhibits.

Then, she independently researches the case law.

Thomas F. Hanley, a partner at Glaser Weil Fink Howard Avchen & Shapiro LLP,

mediated a difficult commercial lease dispute with Segal.

"She dug into the law and was not hesitant to tell the parties whether she felt positive or not about their positions," he said.

"That speaks to her work ethic and enhances her credibility," said Mark Erickson of Haynes and Boone LLP.

All her preparation allows her to develop an understanding of the problems in the case, she said. Yet, when she can, she takes one more step before the mediation session.

"I think it's critically important that I speak to the lawyers in advance and start trying to understand the unique concerns and problems of each case," Segal said. Then, she can work with the lawyers "to help them see where some of the points of resolution may lie."

The approach works, said Alan Salpeter senior counsel in the Chicago office of Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP; Bert H. Deixler, Kendell Brill & Kelly LLP. He spent two two-day sessions with her mediating a dispute between his client, DeVry University, and the Federal Trade Commission. The sessions lasted until 10 p.m.

"I thought she was truly spectacular. She was incredibly well prepared." Salpeter said. "She gained the trust of both sides. She listened extremely carefully, understood the case



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and identified the strengths and weaknesses in each case."

Abbas Kazerounian of the Kazerouni Law Group APC in Costa Mesa echoed those sentiments. He said Segal worked "well into the evening" to settle the class action his clients brought.

In Hanley's hard-fought lease dispute, Segal called the attorneys for two months after the mediation session before the case settled.

"When she got hold of the matter, she didn't let it go," he said. "I probably got 15 to 20 different calls from her directly to discuss the matter."

In addition to preparation and persistence, Segal has another quality that attorneys praised.

"She is very well equipped at dealing with the emotions that can arise" in litigation, according to Todd A. Boock of Brown Neri Smith Khan LLP

### Suzanne H. Segal

Signature Resolution  
Los Angeles

**Areas of specialty:**  
class actions, intellectual  
property, employment,  
business litigation

in Los Angeles, who represented an employer in a potential wrongful termination matter. "She was a very good listener to my client, so he felt like he was being heard."

Segal's talent for coping with high emotions also impressed attorneys Bert H. Deixler and Christina M. Coleman, who represented clients on either side of a sexual assault lawsuit. Coleman said Segal took a very appropriate approach to her client, the alleged victim, and did not make the woman feel

under attack in any way. “She never once made my client feel like she was disbelieved.”

Deixler, of Kendell Brill & Kelly LLP, said Segal seemed to believe his client, a business executive who was the accused assailant. “She was able to read my client and figure out a way to express, in a way the client could hear, the risks and rewards of settling versus trying the case.”

“It really was quite a thing to behold,” Deixler said. “Even to this day my client is quite grateful.”

Segal said emotions can run high even in complex cases involving sophisticated parties. “That’s one of the things I try to figure out in those pre-mediation calls: How do the clients feel about the case?”

If the parties do have strong feelings, she talks with them about those feelings early on.

“I try to help them see the benefits of trying to find solutions to this difficult situation,” she said.

Segal grew up in Southern California and attended Claremont McKenna College. After graduating in 1982, she was a volunteer aide in Congress and then landed a spot with Rep. Clarence Long (D-Md.), who chaired the international operations subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee.

“It was a tremendous experience, the best possible job one could have out of college,” she said.

After two years there, she enrolled in Cornell Law School. She had intended to return to the Capitol, but she discovered she enjoyed being a lawyer instead.

She came home to Los Angeles and joined Adams, Duque & Hazeltine, where she had been a summer associate. She later moved with a business litigation group to Dewey Ballantine LLP.

Hoping to get more trial experience, Segal joined the Los Angeles U.S. attorney’s office in its civil division. Over the

next dozen years, she handled a wide variety of cases until she eventually came to focus on appeals. In 1999, she was named the office’s first chief of civil appeals.

“I handled individually more than 30 appeals” in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, she said “and I supervised every argument.”

She was selected to be a magistrate judge with the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California in 2002. In that role, besides criminal and habeas corpus matters, discovery disputes and “many, many, many mediations,” she also heard civil litigation and jury trials when parties consented. She also served as the chief magistrate judge in the district from 2012 to 2016.

One significant jury trial she handled involved a food distributor’s claims of more than \$20 million in losses from E. coli contamination of meat. She also presided over a two-week jury trial in a hard-fought patent

case about cell phone location-monitoring technology. As she does in mediations, Segal reaches out early to counsel before arbitrations. “I invite them to talk to me about: How can this arbitration be an efficient, cost-effective method for resolving this dispute,” she said.

Her husband, John L. Segal, also has had a distinguished career in law. He is a justice on the 2nd District Court of Appeal. But the law did not bring them together.

“We met in preschool, Little Village Nursery School on Pico Boulevard in 1963. We’ve been friends our whole lives,” she said.

*Here are some attorneys who have used Segal’s services:* Bert H. Deixler, Kendell Brill & Kelly LLP; Christina M. Coleman, Los Angeles; Alan Schoenfeld, Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP; Valerie M. Goo, Crowell & Moring LLP; Mark Erickson, Haynes and Boone LLP