

VERDICTS & SETTLEMENTS

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Confidence & Trust

Attorneys value the opinion of retired Los Angeles County Presiding Judge Daniel Buckley.

By Shane Nelson

Special to the Daily Journal

Daniel J. Buckley spent 20 years on the Los Angeles County Superior Court and held a number of leadership roles, including presiding judge in 2017 and 2018.

"I'm probably the only presiding judge that loved being presiding judge," Buckley said with a chuckle, mentioning the position oversaw more than 570 Los Angeles judicial officers.

A 1980 University of Notre Dame Law School graduate, Buckley focused largely on civil defense work for 22 years at Breidenbach, Buckley, Huchting, Halm & Hamblet before his 2002 appointment to the bench. There he handled all sorts of complex and high-profile matters, including the Johnson & Johnson talc cases and the Porter Ranch gas leak litigation, which featured more than 35,000 plaintiffs.

Buckley retired from the bench in May 2022 and has since been a full-time mediator and arbitrator at Signature Resolution, working on catastrophic injury, sex abuse, employment and breach of contract cases, among others.

"I try to be lawyer friendly and try to have a recognition of the challenges lawyers face in the business of lawyering – dealing with clients, dealing with the stress of multiple cases," Buckley said. "And what I try to bring to the role of an arbitrator is what I brought to my role as a judge – making my courtroom a place where lawyers can try their cases and know I'm there to help them succeed. That's a goal of mine as an arbitrator."



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Before a mediation, meanwhile, Buckley said he prefers to receive briefs about a week out, and while he said he doesn't necessarily see a need to speak to attorneys over the phone for each dispute, he will make himself available if the parties would like to talk beforehand. Buckley did note, however, that he works hard to not apply a cookie-cutter approach to his mediations.

"I've been getting more and more sex abuse cases, and you really need to think through what is the right approach with this plaintiff or this plaintiff's lawyer or on the defense side," Buckley explained,

noting he often begins mediations by asking questions about strengths and weaknesses.

"I try to avoid giving any comments myself in that first session with each side," he continued. "But my experience is that almost everyone – if not everyone – hires me because I was a judge. Therefore, I've yet to have a mediation in which the lawyers do not want me to be evaluative at some point. They may not agree with me, and they may push back quite a bit. But I'm certainly not aggressive. ... If I feel that it's just not the right time or the right case, I don't nec-

Daniel J. Buckley
Signature Resolution
Los Angeles

Areas of Specialty:

Employment
Catastrophic Injury
Business
Real Estate
Mass Tort

essarily push it. But usually, the lawyers are asking me what my thoughts are.”

El Segundo defense attorney James J. Kjar appeared a number of times before Buckley on the bench and has since used him to settle several professional malpractice disputes.

“He’s very good at letting the doctors vent, and because he has the gravitas of being a presiding judge of LA county, they tend to listen to him. He’s not some municipal court judge from out in the boondocks,” Kjar said with a laugh. “And he’s also very quickly gained the respect of lawyers I’ve represented, who will repose a great deal of confidence and trust in what he’s telling them.”

Buckley said some of the skills he honed during his time as presiding judge have also been helpful in the work he’s doing as a mediator.

“One quality that a good leader

often has is the ability to get everyone to do what the leader thinks is necessary with everyone thinking it was their idea,” Buckley said, chuckling again. “Having a lawyer agree that a certain amount of money, or a certain strategy, is the right way to approach the settlement – while thinking they came up with the idea – I’ve often done my job if that happens.”

Riverside plaintiffs’ attorney Gregory G. Rizio also appeared before Buckley when he was on the bench and used his services recently to resolve a complex personal injury case, featuring a pregnant woman who was involved in a car accident with an on-duty police officer.

“No one in LA has the gravitas for mediations that Judge Buckley does,” Rizio said. “He’s got a very calming demeanor, but he also knows the right pressure points for both sides. ... He’s very skilled

in conveying the risks to both sides, and literally, that’s what settles cases.”

Catherine A. Conway of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP also appeared before Buckley while he was on the bench.

“All I want when I go to court is a smart judge, and that’s certainly what you got with Judge Buckley,” Conway recalled. “He’s very, very smart, and I think he’s very fair. Did he always rule in our favor? No. But did I respect his decision? Yes.”

Conway has since used Buckley to successfully mediate some emotional sexual discrimination and harassment cases.

“Sometimes the emotions can prevent a case from resolving,” Conway said. “But I think Judge Buckley is very good at working with those emotions and getting people to figure out a way to put their emotions aside in order to get a resolution.”

Kjar agreed that Buckley connects well with clients.

“Just as he was on the bench as a trial judge – he is unfailingly polite to all litigants,” Kjar said. “He doesn’t get in anybody’s face – no high pressure at all. He’s very even keeled and more effective that way. He doesn’t react to emotion. ... And in a mediation that’s everything. Letting people vent, letting them emote, listening to their side, but then very calmly but very confidently explaining to them where they may be wrong, where they have exposure, and why they should settle this case.”

Here are some attorneys who have used Buckley’s services: Catherine A. Conway, Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP; Gregory G. Rizio, Rizio Lipinsky; James J. Kjar, Kjar, McKenna and Stockalper LLP; Brian J. Panish, Panish, Shea, Boyle, Ravipudi LLP; Gary A. Dordick, Dordick Law Corporation.