

Why Wait?

Starting early as a neutral brought long-term stamina, Abraham Melamed says.

By Shane Nelson

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Signature Resolution's Abraham Z. Melamed knew early that he wanted to be a neutral. "I always joke that I'm not a retirement gig mediator," Melamed said with a chuckle.

A 2014 graduate of Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law in New York City, Melamed spent the first seven years of his legal career as a litigator, representing plaintiffs in employment, consumer class actions and data privacy cases. Then he moved in-house, providing advice and counsel on employment matters to a large health care provider and half a dozen other businesses.

First intrigued by mediation while he was in law school, Melamed said the stress of litigation during his time as a practicing attorney motivated his decision to pursue full-time private neutral work early in his career rather than later.

"Recognizing that if that's how I felt as the lawyer, imagine how my client must feel," Melamed explained. "It definitely was a catalyst to say, 'I would rather be, as a person, in the role of conciliating, of helping people resolve disputes.'"

Melamed started mediating cases in 2021, and he officially joined Signature Resolution in September of last year. Roughly 95% of his caseload consists of mediations - typically involving employment, consumer class actions, data privacy, personal injury and medical malpractice disputes. But Melamed said he does occasionally handle arbitrations for commercial and consumer privacy matters.



Photo courtesy of Abraham Z. Melamed

"I work very hard to fight back against any internal biases or internal conflict around making a decision," Melamed said of his approach to arbitration. "I try to really just be careful and cautious in checking myself against any of that."

Before his mediations Melamed said he likes to receive briefs about a week out and will make himself available to speak over the phone beforehand if counsel are interested.

"I'll take thousands of pages on a case in advance - if you have it and are willing to give it to me. I consume information really quickly and retain it," Melamed said. "I like

to see every deposition transcript. ... I like to see every exhibit, every document exchange."

Los Angeles defense attorney Debra E. Meppen has used Melamed to resolve several employment disputes and said he has always been very well-prepared.

"He definitely does his homework," Meppen said. "He reads everything and will have follow-up questions even before the mediation starts, so we begin to make progress on the actual day of mediation early on because he's done so much work beforehand."

Melamed said he usually prefers

Abraham Z. Melamed

Signature Resolution
Los Angeles

Areas of Specialty:

Employment
Data Privacy
Class Actions
Personal Injury
Medical Malpractice

to begin his mediations with the plaintiff, noting that he wants to give them a chance to be heard.

“Often catharsis is an important element,” he said.

Melamed noted, however, that’s typically true in both rooms.

“As much as they may be very business-minded and logical, many times there are also emotional components for those in the defense room,” he added.

Los Angeles defense attorney Kristel B. Haddad used Melamed recently to resolve what she described as a complicated and difficult employment dispute and said he developed an excellent rapport with her clients.

“He’s got an approachable nature that put everyone at ease,” Haddad said. “He really makes the client feel comfortable and respected.”

Melamed said he typically begins moving into the negotiation phase roughly halfway through the mediation day but said he’s careful not to shift gears until the parties have “completed a big part of that infor-

mational exchange.”

“I don’t want either side getting anchored to an evaluation they walked in the door with,” Melamed explained. “And often that’s going to have to shift based on what we do in that first half of the day.”

Meppen also noted that Melamed is not afraid to be evaluative.

“What is great about Abe is he is willing to have those tough discussions with counsel and with the parties to let them know, as a neutral, what he’s thinking in terms of the value of their case,” she said. “It’s very helpful because people go to mediation feeling very emotionally tied to their position. Yet, to get a neutral third person’s view of their case before you get to trial or arbitration - where they may see all of the warts and blemishes in the case possibly even more clearly than you - is very helpful to resolve the case.”

Pasadena plaintiffs’ attorney Alan J. Romero has used Melamed to resolve a handful of cases involving employment claims against public

entities, and he said the mediator’s litigation experience was instrumental in settling all of them.

“Every case that I see him on of mine, I know that it’s probably going to get settled, and he’s going to do a good job,” Romero said. “He correctly identifies the stakeholders, and he’s very good about effectively becoming an integrated team member to make sure the deal comes to fruition.”

Like Haddad and Meppen, Romero also said the Melamed connects well with clients.

“He almost takes more of a therapist or a psychologist approach, ... and I think he’s less forceful than you see with some other very experienced mediators,” Romero explained. “I’ve never had a client that didn’t like him, and I’ve never had him act anything but compassionately and thoughtfully towards every single one of my clients.”

Melamed described moving into fulltime private neutral work so early in his career as “the greatest decision I’ve ever made.”

“I had the recognition that you need to earn your stripes, try some cases and have some real experience before you can really be effective,” he explained. “But at the same time, I didn’t want it to be after a 40-year career path in the law.”

Melamed said he believes his early start in the profession provides at least one advantage.

“I definitely have more stamina than I know I would have if I were summing up, retiring after a 40-year career with money in the bank and the kids’ college already paid for,” he said. “And with every client I meet I say, ‘I could have a 40-year relationship with this person.’”

Here are some attorneys who have used Melamed’s services: Kristel B. Haddad, Jackson Lewis PC; Debra E. Meppen, Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani LLP; Alan J. Romero, Romero Law APC; Kaveh S. Elihu, Employee Justice Legal Group PC; Stephen M. Harber, McCune & Harber LLP.

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