

VERDICTS & SETTLEMENTS

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Sonya D. Goodwin brings dual-sided insight to employment mediations

Mediator Sonya D. Goodwin transitioned from employment litigator to full-time neutral, using her experience representing both plaintiffs and defendants to help parties resolve disputes and move forward.

By Shane Nelson
Special to the Daily Journal

Mediator Sonya D. Goodwin knew early in her career that she wanted to focus on resolving disputes.

“I was probably a first-year or early second-year attorney, working on the plaintiff side at an employment firm,” Goodwin said, describing the opening moments of a mediation in which she was representing a client.

“The mediator was giving his spiel, ... talking about how hopefully this would help my client move on with her life and put an end to the stress,” Goodwin recalled. “And something clicked in me. It was like a lightbulb went off, and I thought, ‘I want to do that. I want to help people move on with their lives and help businesses move on with running their business. I don’t want to be part of the fight.’”

A 2011 UCLA School of Law graduate, Goodwin spent her first few years as an attorney representing plaintiffs in employment disputes. She later shifted her focus, however, to defending employers in part because she believed the move would eventually benefit her as a private neutral.

“Always with being a mediator in the back of my mind, I thought that it would probably be best if I was in both rooms at some point in my career,” Goodwin explained.

An aspiring human rights attorney when she enrolled at UCLA, Goodwin said her interest in em-



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ployment law was sparked during her third year while helping an uncle who owned a business with questions about a lawsuit filed by one of his employees.

“It still had that human component, which was the reason I went to law school,” Goodwin said of employment law. “Maybe it was the half therapist in me, but it seemed like a good way for me to help people.”

After working for 13 years as an employment litigator, Goodwin struck out on her own as a private neutral in the summer of 2024 and later joined

Signature Resolution that fall. She has since been working to resolve employment cases as both a mediator and arbitrator but noted she is no longer taking new arbitration assignments.

“Once my arbitrations are all completed, I’ll just be mediating,” she said.

As a mediator, Goodwin said she puts a great deal of effort into making sure that both sides not only feel heard but also feel understood. She believes her experience representing both employees and employers distinguishes her.

Sonya D. Goodwin

Signature Resolution
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"I think that gives me a good perspective not only on the legal issues but also a really good perspective on what each room is going through emotionally," Goodwin explained. "I'm able to tell parties on both sides, I understand what you're going through because I've had clients in your shoes."

Beverly Hills plaintiffs' attorney Matthew W. Dietz has used Goodwin to resolve 10 employment disputes and agreed that her background as a litigator sets her apart.

"Sonya's biggest strength really is that she has experience representing both plaintiffs and defendants," Dietz said. "So, she's got the emotional intelligence to connect with both sides."

Dietz added that he has watched Goodwin connect with a diverse array of clients.

"From all different walks of life—hourly workers all the way up to directors of companies," Dietz said, "she's able to really connect with them on an emotional level about the trauma that they've been through. ... And she's very good at explaining in real world terms what they can anticipate in terms of the risk for continuing with a case that doesn't settle at mediation."

Los Angeles defense attorney Todd

B. Scherwin has used Goodwin to settle half a dozen employment disputes and said he appreciates her experience litigating on both sides. He added that Goodwin is not afraid to discuss a case's strengths and weaknesses.

"She dives into the facts of the case really deeply," Scherwin said. "And she knows how to communicate well with my client representative in the room - not always soft pedaling it but pushing hard when she needs to. Sonya really strikes the right balance between making sure my client rep knows she's there as a neutral, but she will push and pull when she needs to."

Goodwin said she can at times find it frustrating when attorneys in her mediations withhold important information.

"I would never ask an attorney to share information I don't think would be helpful," Goodwin said, citing witness statements as an example.

"The defense may change their valuation if they know the plaintiff is going to have support with a signed declaration under oath," she added. "And it goes both ways, right? If the defendant has declarations from witnesses, it may have a similar impact."

Woodland Hills plaintiffs' attorney

Simon E. Moshkovich has also used Goodwin to resolve several employment cases and praised her emotional intelligence.

"It's very important for mediators, in my opinion, to have a great mix of EQ and IQ," Moshkovich said. "Sonya really has high levels of both, and the reason I keep coming back is because every time I finish a mediation, whether we settle or we don't, my clients do feel like they had a positive experience. Because in addition to me—their advocate—they at least have a mediator who speaks to them, understands them, and makes sure they feel safe and heard and understood."

Dietz said he has been especially impressed by Goodwin's effectiveness in the defense room.

"Sonya is probably one of the younger mediators you'll find across the state—especially doing employment cases," Dietz said. "And I think some people would worry that wouldn't resonate in some defense rooms, that they're looking for somebody older or wiser to browbeat them. But Sonya really does have a way of getting through to them I think by talking very practically with the defense room about the risks that are present in a given case. And she's effective at moving the needle."

Dietz said Goodwin's settlements in several of his cases have been especially noteworthy.

"I've used her against some defendants that just see a lot of lawsuits and therefore don't necessarily put a lot of money on each individual case," he explained. "And frankly, she's been able to get results that I think are far better than average."

Goodwin said she feels fortunate to be focusing her career on mediation and described the hugs she occasionally receives from litigants after resolving in-person disputes as especially gratifying.

"That is the best feeling ever because hugging someone is a very personal, private thing for many people," she said. "And the fact that they've entrusted me with their case and feel that good about the decision to resolve their case instead of continuing to litigate - I love that about my job."

Here are some attorneys who have used Goodwin's services: Matthew W. Dietz, Blackstone Law PC; Simon E. Moshkovich, Mercer Legal Group PC; Todd B. Scherwin, Fisher & Phillips LLP; Rachel L. McClintock, Dinsmore & Shohl LLP; Patricia A. Matias, Jackson Lewis PC.

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