

Straight Shooter

Steve Pearl applies frank, honest approach to dispute resolution, lawyers say

By Shane Nelson

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Mediator Steven G. Pearl got his first look at an LSAT question as a 14-year-old while studying along with his mother in the late 1970s.

"They were fun, little logic problems," Pearl said. "My mom always encouraged me, and I thought it was fun. She thought I would do very well on the test, and she thought I'd do very well as a lawyer."

Pearl's mother, who was in her 40s by that time, was later accepted to UCLA School of Law, where she graduated in 1983, then passed the bar and practiced immigration law.

"She actually passed away in 1984 – that was after my freshman year of college," Pearl recalled. "I always really wanted to make my mom proud, and that's something that remains important to me. That's something that's always been important to me."

Pearl went on to complete his own legal degree in 1992 at UC Hastings College of Law and then spent two years at Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP, where he handled employment, business, insurance and entertainment litigation on the defense side. In 1994, he formed The Pearl Law Firm, where he tackled employment litigation from the plaintiffs' side, including individual, class action wage-and-hour, unfair competition and consumer protection matters.

Pearl said practicing law with integrity was always extremely important to him, in part, because that approach would have made his mother proud. So in 2011, when Pearl decided to shift his career to



Photo courtesy of Steve Pearl

full time work as a private neutral, mediating with integrity became a key focus.

"That means just being straightforward with folks," Pearl said. "I don't bull shit around. I don't play devil's advocate. That's not helpful. If somebody makes a good point, I'm not afraid to tell them I think they've made a good point. If somebody's got a tough case, I'm not afraid to tell them I think they've got a tough case or a tough defense to a case. I'm not afraid to

be real about what I see. And that, to me, is acting with integrity."

Pearl launched Steve Pearl Mediation in January 2020 and focuses on settling employment and consumer disputes, working to resolve everything from individual discrimination, harassment, retaliation and wrongful termination matters to PAGA and Fair Labor Standards Act disputes.

Before a mediation, Pearl noted, he likes to receive briefs from all the parties and speak with attorneys.

Steven G. Pearl

Steve Pearl Mediation P.C.
Los Angeles

Areas Of Specialty:

Employment
Wage and Hour Class Actions
Consumer Class Actions

"I like to go into mediation very, very well prepared," Pearl explained. "I like to know what happened and when – particularly in an individual case. Who spoke to whom? When? When were decisions made? When were things communicated? If there's contemporaneous documentary evidence, I like to have it."

On the day of mediation, Pearl said he doesn't make use of joint sessions, but he does typically begin by providing the parties with a chance "to get stuff off their chest."

"Not everybody wants to do that, and not every attorney wants their client to do that," Pearl explained. "But often they do. So I'm happy to listen to folks."

Later in the day, Pearl said he frequently will transition into a more evaluative approach.

"I don't mince words," he said. "I just let people know what I see in a case. I've been practicing for 30-plus years now, so I have plenty of experience, and I'm happy to tell people what I see."

Los Angeles plaintiffs' attorney Nicol E. Hajjar has used Pearl to settle a number of individual Fair Employment and Housing Act cases

as well as wage and hour class actions, and she described him as "a straight shooter."

"But he also does a great job reading the room," Hajjar said. "I could have a case that's highly sensitive with a client who's been sexually abused or sexually harassed, and his approach with that client is going to be sensitive. ... He really knows how to be effective with the plaintiff and be sensitive and understanding in certain situations, based on experiences they've had."

Irvine defense attorney Michael D. Thomas has used Pearl to resolve several single-plaintiff and class action employment disputes, and he agreed that the mediator is terrific with clients.

"Steve is a mediator who is empathetic, respectful. He's genuine," Thomas said. "He encourages the parties to be honest with him, and in return, he's very honest with you."

Thomas added that Pearl applied that frank approach to his discussions about the strengths and weaknesses in each case.

"I think that demonstrates a genuine concern for the client's well-being and the client's busi-

ness by encouraging that honest conversation," Thomas explained. "And when you get that on both sides, you walk away feeling like you've taken part in a process that's empathetic and respectful but also fair. ... Now, that doesn't mean we're always going to get a result we want, but we get a result that allows us to move forward, feeling like we've been heard."

Costa Mesa plaintiffs' attorney Abbas Kazerounian used Pearl recently to resolve a difficult employment dispute that didn't settle on the day of mediation.

"My client's expectations were very, very high and to a certain degree unreasonable," Kazerounian said. "But Steve is like a dog with a bone. He's very, very tenacious, and he doesn't understand no, and he will do anything to get the settlement done. I believe that if both parties have even the slightest good faith intent to settle the case, he's one of those people that will make sure that it actually happens."

Like Hajjar and Thomas, Kazerounian also appreciated Pearl's direct approach.

"I like his honesty because I

don't want to be told what I want to hear rather than the truth," Kazerounian said. "The whole point of going to an experienced mediator is you want to feel like they're [metaphorically] going to get in your face a little bit on the issues you're puffing your chest out about when you should know you're wrong. And then to also have the confidence that he's doing the same in the other room."

Pearl insisted, meanwhile, that he feels incredibly fortunate to be helping people resolve their disputes, work that shares a fair bit in common with those LSAT logic questions that first captured his attention more than four decades ago.

"I get to work through problems and get to work creatively to come up with ideas for how things can be resolved," Pearl explained. "It's constantly working with other people to solve problems – big puzzles. Every case is a big puzzle you need to work out. It's terrific work, and I love doing it."

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STEVE PEARL
MEDIATION