

Vol 13
No.1
March, 2006

Mediation 2005: The
Art and The Artist
by Robert A. Creo

Page 1-3

Toward a Litigator's
Philosophy
by James J. Vlasic

Page 4-5

Upcoming Mediation
Trainings

Caucuses in
Arbitration?

Page 6

REVIEW: "Reducing the
Power of Victimhood,"
Joshua Searle-White

by Robert Tremp

Michigan Business-To-
Business Mediation Program
Gains Momentum

Page 7

ANDRI Features Nina
Meierding on March
17, 2006

Page 8

TheADRNewsletter

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Mediation 2005: The Art and The Artist

by Robert A. Creo

These remarks were presented by Robert A. Creo [www.rcreo.com] at the Michigan Bar Association ADR Section Annual Meeting on September 7 & 8, 2005 in Mt. Pleasant Michigan. His remarks have been substantially edited for brevity. His remarks are reprinted here with his gracious permission but he has all rights reserved.—Ed.

Professor Randy Lowry of Pepperdine University noted that the mediator functions primarily as a manager of the mediation process. Conflicts start as human problems, but dispute resolution institutions make them into legal problems. Mediators intervene to take the legal dispute and help translate it back to a human problem. There are more possible solutions to human problems than to legal disputes. The mediator's job is to find the possible solutions. The process is intuitive and grounded in the flexibility of the mediator. Robert Benjamin, a prominent mediator and educator from Portland, Oregon, calls this Systemic Intuition.

Substantive knowledge is not as important to the skilled mediator as it is to the advocate. Randy Lowry acknowledges settling many cases where he really did not understand the underlying facts, issues, or conflict. Process skills trump substantive knowledge. I, too, confess that I have nodded knowingly during many a presentation of advocates when I was next to clueless about the science, facts, or legal platform of the dispute. I have mediated successfully dozens of medical malpractice claims where I am unable to even pronounce most of the medical terms and conditions. Nevertheless, we

mediators are better equipped than jurors or judges to address these complex disputes. Why is that so?

The Mediation Process

Mediation is a process and not an event. The legal system, and lawyers, tend to approach process in a linear manner with set structures, rules and consistencies. This is obviously based upon their legal education and the structure of the civil justice system as a rules-based paradigm. This concept transfers to the mediation process, which is often deemed to be akin to a hearing, which takes place at a set time and place. Thus, to courts, advocates and litigants, mediation is a discrete event, which happens on the day of the parties meet in a face-to-face negotiation session. However, just as litigation is viewed as a process, with its own discrete events, often culminating in a trial to verdict, so, too, mediation is a continuum with discrete activities and interactions between the parties and the mediator.

The mediation process begins with the first contact with the mediator and/or with the parties' negotiation of an agreement to mediate. Mediation is a fluid process, which unfolds in response to the interaction between the parties and the mediator. Mediation should not be formalistic or rule-bound. Core principles of the civil justice system based upon an adversarial paradigm contain core values of fairness, equality, predictability, consistency and symmetry. These translate into the parlance of impartiality and neutrality when applied to mediation and mediators. The

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mediator’s values can be shown in my own unified theory of mediation, which has evolved on three key touchstones. These are engagement, authenticity and transparency. These echo the 4 heuristics of the Basque people: (1) Show up, (2) Pay attention, (3) Speak the truth, and (4) Be open but not attached to the outcome.

Another event in the mediation process is a pre-session caucus with one party only. This can be on the day of the session or scheduled in advance. You go to the lawyer’s office and meet the lawyer with her client. It is akin to the orientation session often used in domestic relations mediation.

The Human Mediator

What is important in the mediation process for authenticity is not the content of what people say across the table but the sincerity of it.

Most ADR practitioners in the audience have heard the role of mediator often framed as being a channel, a catalyst or a vehicle for transformation of the disputants. The mediator removes strategic barriers or otherwise facilitates uncovering the existing common ground between the parties. The mediator is not only a facilitator, but also functions as an explorer, a devil’s advocate, a trickster, a chameleon, an active listener, an explainer and an all-round-good person! Sometimes mediators offer opinions and are evaluative or directive. Despite the controversy over evaluation in some quarters of the mediation community, it plays an invaluable role in moving parties forward to resolution. The reality is that all mediators start processing and evaluating from the moment they are retained until well after the case is at impasse or resolved. We differ in our practices about what, if anything, we do on a transparent level about our evaluations. This processing, this reflective thinking or interacting with our “intuition” guides our mediation moves.

Positions are by their nature insincere. Interests are authentic. Positions are distributive and ultimately every negotiation has distributive elements, a dollar in my pocket is one from your pocket. Expanding the pie is great, but it still has to be distributed. Large pies may mean larger slices, but there is still a finite number of slices in any pie.

Thinking back to all the roles I’ve taken as mediator, at times I am all of the above and none of them. Most of all I am human. Successful mediators may use their own humanity to assist the translation of a legal problem into a human one. We engage the parties. We are sympathetic and empathetic. My basic thesis is that the most successful mediators possess a persona emanating humanity to the participants in the process.

The process gives permission not only for the mediator, but also for the participants to humanize the conflict. The process gives permission for a host of dynamics absent from adjudication. Creativity, acknowledgment, recognition, apology, forgiveness and choice work in the context of the interplay between uncertainty, risk, emotion, personal and community values. People make important choices in a holistic manner during an asymmetrical mediation process.

Mediation recognizes the tension between the rigors of reason and insight and perception and in practice rejects classical notions of the dualism of emotion and logic, which underpin legal analysis. Emotion and logic are not binary or incompatible. The myth that they are incompatible drives the public persona of the courts. Jurors are instructed not to let sympathy or emotions dictate the result, but everyone hopes for the opposite’s happening in their particular case. Jurors act in a communal and holistic manner. Indeed, the foundation of the jury system is the concept that jurors are peers of those they judge and jurors impose societal values. They vote on their insights, personal and communal values, and experiences cloaked in the rhetoric of analysis as compartmentalized by jury verdict forms. Often the question for a juror boils down to: Does plaintiff deserve compensation and/or does defendant need to pay something as punishment? The Persian poet of the 13th Century, Rumi recognizes the limitations of dualism in his oft-quoted statement adopted by many mediators as a mantra: Beyond ideas of right-doing and wrong-doing, there is a field. I shall meet you there.

We, as mediators are responsible for at least maintaining, if not creating these fields. I am certain we are not responsible for creating a symmetrical field or a series of uniform or fungible fields. We are often fighting for control with the lawyers on ownership of the fields.

Mediator as Arbitrator

Arbitrating involves the process of a person taking an advantage of a difference in market prices to broker an immediate deal between a buyer and seller. It involves almost simultaneous purchase and sale of a commodity or stock so that the arbitrator holds title a minimum amount of time.

“Arbitrating involves the process of a person taking an advantage of a difference in market prices to broker an immediate deal between a buyer and seller.... The arbitrator takes advantage of asymmetrical information to serve as an honest broker to complete a transaction.”

Continued from Page 2

The arbitrator takes advantage of asymmetrical information to serve as an honest broker to complete a transaction. Webster defines the process of arbitrating as:

The practice of taking advantage of a state of imbalance between two (or possibly more) markets; a combination of matching deals are struck that exploit the imbalance, the profit being the difference between the market prices.

My thesis is that a skilled mediator is a kinfolk of a skilled arbitrator. Arbitrators conduct symmetrical processes based upon the same information being known to everyone and conveyed in a transparent manner. Mediators do not, and should not, be confused with adjudicators.

Remember, mediation is a process and not an event. Unfortunately, we lawyers in our mediator training have modeled the process after adjudicatory hearing models. In the civil litigation paradigm, a series of discrete events occur during the course of litigation.

Robert Axelrod, in his classic book, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, states that frequency of interaction builds cooperation. In lay-mediators terms, this translates to the action of my having many interactions of shorter duration rather than a few longer ones. I have incorporated this into my own practice by scheduling meetings with lawyers and their lay-clients a few weeks in advance of the mediation session date. I do this in serious personal injury and death cases whenever possible. I go to the office of plaintiff counsel for a 30-90 minute orientation where I introduce myself and explain the process. We dialogue on the form and content of any presentation at the joint session. I do insist on a joint session in each case but do not expect it to always be the launching pad of the mediation.

F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote in "The Crack-Up" (1936) that the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function. Likewise, effective mediators are able to act on two irreconcilable thoughts at the same time, i.e., an offer to settle is firm and final and at the same time it is malleable. Additionally, mediators alternate between optimism the dispute will resolve and the reality that impasse is near.

Creating the Culture of Candor (CCC) in the Community

What I used to call "building rapport" or "credibility" and "trust" can perhaps be best framed as Engagement, Authenticity and Transparency. I humanize the conflict by engaging the other participants on multiple levels. One level is abstract:

I am "The Mediator" which carries with it certain frames and connotations. It is an image that may contain elements of prestige, power or wisdom. It creates an expectation of being aloof and above the fray. Reputation precedes your persona and is part of it. At the same time, my engagement with the participants attempts to be a one-on-one dialogue via oral or body language communications. I reach out to touch them on a personal and human level. For example, I always shake hands or touch every participant in the process as soon as possible.

I try to be open about what moves I am making during the process. (Transparency.) I tell people things I am doing procedurally and substantively. I do this by preamble or facilitative techniques or a simple narrative statement. I believe transparency enhances engagement and reduces risk. It creates the safer environment based upon interconnectedness. I explain the "why" of lots of things which happen during a mediation. We make "Blink" decisions on what to do next. We should say so. Transparency is good. Michael Moffitt, a professor at University of Oregon Law School, has written some excellent pieces on transparency.

“[M]y engagement with the participants attempts to be one-on-one dialogue via oral or body language communications. I reach out to touch them on a personal and human level.”

I was taught as a lawyer and mediator to suppress my own emotion. From day one of law school we are trained how we "feel" is irrelevant to the determination of the law. I remember a case I did years ago in Colorado where a 17 year old girl was driving down the road and smacked into the back of a farm tractor on the road and was decapitated. Her parents left the room when the lawyers gave me the photo of her decapitated head lying on her shoulder. She had almost a smile or beatific expression on her face. I wanted to burst out in tears. This I did not do since I was a "professional" and "impartial." Everything about it has stuck with me and has contributed to my change of thinking and actions. Now I cry if it is authentic and natural. At first, this used to disturb the advocates but now they accept this as an integral part of the process.

Mediators have the ability to translate compassion into action; to identify and manipulate and navigate risk and uncertainty. Compassion translates into our passion for what we do. As long as there are doors open, the mediation process can work. ❄️



Toward a Litigator's Philosophy of ADR

by James J. Vlasic

This article was first printed in our December 2005 edition; however, part of the article was inadvertently omitted. Here, it is published in its entirety.—Ed.

James J. Vlasic is a shareholder in Sommers Schwartz, P.C., located in Southfield, Michigan. Mr. Vlasic received his BA at Yale University in 1973. He earned his J.D., Cum Laude from Thomas M. Cooley Law School in 1978, and his L.L.M. in Taxation from Wayne State University in 1986. Mr. Vlasic is a member of the bars of Michigan, Florida, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, and United States Tax Court. Mr. Vlasic specializes in business litigation including intellectual property and environmental cases, and also practices in the area of business law. Vlasic has authored articles on debtor/creditor law, personal property leasing and statistical sampling in commercial litigation. He is a member of the Litigation Section of the American Bar Association and the Council of the ADR Section of the Michigan Bar.

If you view the civil litigation system in the United States, in both state and federal courts, from 50,000 ft., you may come to the conclusion that its core purpose is to resolve disputes without force or violence. In the simplest sense, instead of “Annie Get Your Gun” or “the Mafia approach” the courts provide a series of procedures that result in an adjudication, and then a series of appellate procedures which render that adjudication final, socially acceptable, and enforceable in American society.

Philosophy

The desired result of engaging the civil litigation process is the resolution of a dispute. The litigation process provides an exchange of information about historic facts, which information is then argued to be consistent or inconsistent with existing law. One or more adjudicators then determine whether the information produced is credible, and if so, whether the application of the law to that information requires remedial action. It is hoped that the litigation process is of sufficient quality that the resolution will be a fair one. It is likewise hoped that the efficiency of the litigation process will

be such that the result will be obtained within an acceptable amount of time and at an acceptable cost. These three parameters, fairness, time, and cost are the parameters that a litigant engaging the process, or being subjected to the process, will use to gauge its effectiveness.

Too often, participants in the litigation process rate its success to be low in one or more of the vital parameters of fairness, time or cost. Often this disappointment with the process results from the participants in the process losing their focus on the goal; which is to say, the resolution of the dispute. Instead, they devote inefficient amounts of time and resources to the process, as an end in itself, without continuously re-evaluating whether, by doing so, they are approaching the resolution of the dispute in the most efficient manner possible. The result of this loss of focus (intentional or unintentional) can be excessive, but unnecessary, discovery and motion practice, prolonged trials, and unproductive appeals.

Forced delay or increased cost in a conflict resolution procedure may be wielded as a weapon by the party with more resources against the party with fewer resources. Nonetheless, delay and transactional costs represent a real economic burden to both parties.

The civil court process is necessarily procedurally rigid, because it is both adversarial and coercive. In the end, an adjudication is binding, not because it is consensual, but because it is enforced by the state or federal government upon completion of the process. Because of the procedural rigidity of the process, during most stages any party to it can require a greater or lesser degree of diligence to be applied, no matter how unproductive that diligence may be of a final resolution. As a result, it is often the case that deficiencies in fairness, time, or cost of the litigation process can only be avoided by disengaging from established litigation procedures, in favor of pursuing alternative methods of dispute resolution. These alternative methods can be as simple as opposing litigation counsel negotiating the scope of discovery, or negotiating the resolution of a discovery dispute during a pending lawsuit, rather than submitting those disputes for adjudication by the court. They can be removed from the litigation process by a prior contract for binding arbitration, or a contract for mediation, to be followed by binding arbitration if necessary.

The reason these alternative procedures for the resolution of disputes present a more efficient alternative to the coercive litigation process is that they provide greater flexibility. With increased flexibility, the parties can more efficiently redirect themselves toward prompt resolution of the substantive dispute. They can take shortcuts, if you will, toward that resolution, each determining and protecting their own personal interest at every turn in the road. This flexibility is born of the voluntary nature of the process. Each party can agree to, or oppose, each negotiated issue depending upon whether they judge it to bring them closer to an acceptable resolution of the substantive dispute within an acceptable period of time and at an acceptable cost. In order to gain this flexibility, achieved through cooperation, the parties relinquish, in the same measure, the coercive factor in the process. If the litigators cannot negotiate a resolution of a discovery dispute, they may re-engage the deliberative process of the pending case itself, allowing a judge or magistrate to decide the dispute for them. If the parties to a pre-lawsuit mediation agreement cannot reach an acceptable mediated resolution, they can jointly agree to

engage the coercive process of arbitration or can individually engage the coercive process of a lawsuit by filing a complaint. With the coercive process comes, however, the rigid procedure, potentially accompanied by a loss of cooperation even as it relates to the procedure. This loss of flexibility through loss of cooperation brings with it the risk of a longer time frame and higher transactional cost attendant to the eventual resolution of the dispute.

The juxtaposition of the time consuming and expensive process resulting in a coercive adjudication, with a voluntary, more timely and inexpensive process of a negotiated resolution is well recognized and can be seen daily in the criminal courts when prosecutors and defense counsel negotiate guilty pleas. The defendant has the right to a trial, resulting in a coercive adjudication of the indictment, perhaps very much in his/her favor, but at significant cost in risk, time and money. Alternatively, the risk, duration and cost of the process can be reduced by negotiating a resolution which is undoubtedly imperfect in the eyes of the defendant, but nonetheless has the benefits of a higher degree of certainty and a quicker and less expensive end result.

The Practice

The decision during civil litigation to move from the coercive process toward negotiation can be productive under many circumstances. Time and cost savings can sometimes be further enhanced by engaging in mediated negotiation in advance of litigation or arbitration. The important question is how much process can the parties effectively forego?

The specter of litigation assumes that simple direct negotiation of an end result is either unattractive or impossible. That does not portend that the parties cannot negotiate methods of dispute resolution. This leaves the advocate with several initial procedural choices:

- litigation (state, or federal)
- arbitration (by agreement or enforcement of pre-existing agreement)
- mediation

How to begin? What will lead to the quickest resolution of the dispute within a reasonably predictable range of results, at the lowest possible transactional cost? Many factors bear upon optimizing the order of these procedures.

Early mediation has at least two advantages: (1) as the least coercive process, it can be readily followed by a more coercive procedure, with or without an agreement as to that latter procedure,

and (2) mediation incorporates an element of informal discovery that can be more efficient and rewarding than formal discovery in litigation. The decision to engage in pre-suit mediation may depend on whether the parties both have sufficient information about the factual basis for the dispute, short of engaging formal discovery. If each can reasonably evaluate their risk/reward profile based on information already on hand, the parties are able to productively proceed directly to mediated negotiation. The added bonus then is the ability to learn more about the adversary's true position through the mediation process. At the time of pre-suit mediation, all of the foreseeable cost and delay inherent in full scale arbitration or litigation is an inducement to resolving the case in mediation. In the context of litigation or arbitration, more time usually increases transactional cost. If the parties agree upon the need for discovery to precede mediation, documents and other information can be exchanged by agreement. If agreement to pre-suit discovery is not feasible, mediated negotiations are unlikely to be productive before suit. Mediation can instead be engaged after formal discovery has been completed.

Assuming that adequate information is available to all parties, mediation can be a vehicle to consolidate parties and forums. Given a situation where some disputes and parties are subject to an existing arbitration agreement while others are not, all parties can agree to mediated negotiation of all disputes without any loss of the procedural advantage that each might seek should the mediated negotiation fail to achieve resolution.

Conclusion

By continuing to use the efficient resolution of the dispute as a point of reference, parties who focus on negotiating or mediating those aspects of the dispute that do not require coercive adjudication can reduce transactional costs and delay. They will simultaneously increase the likelihood of arriving at an acceptable joint resolution of the underlying substantive dispute. Failing that, traditional litigation remains an available alternative. ❁❁

Upcoming Mediation Trainings

General Civil

The following 40-hour mediation trainings have been approved by SCAO to fulfill the requirements of MCR 2.411(F)(2)(a):

Lansing: **March 9-11, March 31-April 1**

Training sponsored by Dispute Resolution Center of Central Michigan

Contact: Karen Beaugard, 517-485-2274,
drccm.beaugard@tds.net

Ann Arbor: **March 17-19, March 31-April 1**

Training sponsored by Dispute Resolution Center of Washtenaw County

Contact: Kaye Lang, 734-222-3745,
www.mimmediation.org

Bloomfield Hills: **March 28, 30, April 1, 4, 6, 8**

Training sponsored by Oakland Mediation Center

Contact: Gina Buckley, 248-338-4280,
www.mediation-omc.org

Plymouth: **April 20-22, May 12-13**

Plymouth: **Fall 2006, dates to be announced**

Plymouth: **Winter 2007, dates to be announced**

Training sponsored by Institute for Continuing Legal Education

Register online at www.icle.org/mediation, or call 1-877-229-4350.

Domestic Relations

The following 40-hour mediation trainings have been approved by SCAO to fulfill the requirements of MCR 3.216(G)(1)(b):

Bloomfield Hills: **April 10-11, 24-25, 27**

Training sponsored by Oakland Mediation Center
Contact: Gina Buckley, 248-338-4280,
www.mediation-omc.org

Ann Arbor: **August 7-11**

Ann Arbor: **December 6-8, 13-14**

Training sponsored by Mediation Training & Consultation Institute

Register online at www.learn2mediate.com or call 1-734-663-1155

Advanced Mediation Training

Mediators on court rosters are required to obtain 8 hours of advanced mediation training every two years. MCR 2.411(F)(4); MCR 3.216(G)(3).

Lansing: **May 19, 2006, 8:30 am – 12:30 pm**

“10 Ways Mediators Could Get Sued,” Anne Bachle Fifer

Training sponsored by Dispute Resolution Center
Contact: Karen Beaugard, 517-485-2274,
drccm.beaugard@tds.net

Bloomfield Hills: **June 8, 2006, 8:30 am – 6 pm**

“Re-visiting the Facilitative Model,” Harvey Burdick & Jean Goddard

Training sponsored by Oakland Mediation Center
Contact: Gina Buckley, 248-338-4280,
www.mediation-omc.org ❄️

Caucuses in Arbitration?

The Michigan Supreme Court ruled recently that an arbitration where the “arbitrator” puts the parties in separate rooms and shuttles between them does not violate the Domestic Relations Arbitration Act (DRAA). In *Miller v Miller*, decided Dec. 28, 2005 (Docket No. 127767), the parties reportedly agreed to the “shuttle diplomacy” procedure, but after the award was issued, plaintiff wife moved to set it

aside on the basis that the arbitrator had failed to conduct a “hearing” as required by the DRAA. The Supreme Court in reversing the Court of Appeals noted that the Legislature chose not to establish procedural requirements for arbitration in the DRAA, freeing parties to decide how their hearing should be conducted.

REVIEW

by Robert Tremp

"Reducing the Power of Victimhood," Joshua Searle-White, ACRResolution

Association for Conflict Resolution magazine (Winter 2006)
See www.publications@ACRnet.org.

In recent mediations that I have been engaged in, particularly domestic relations matters, I wish I had the benefit of this article.

Joshua Searle-White (Professor of Psychology, Allegheny College) points out at the beginning of the article that often a mediator has worked hard to uncover the party's interest and to find a solution only to find that one or both of the parties "just won't let go." Everything "is rejected." They "make new demands" and keep "bringing up the history between them to demonstrate how they cannot trust one another." It seems they "want to keep the conflict going" no matter who it hurts.

The author, in answer to why this happens, states "often the answer is clear; one or both parties are embracing victimhood. Victimhood is the insistence that people see us through the lens of our perceived hurts, unfairness, and traumas." The object is apparently to portray themselves as powerless, but "at a deeper level victimhood is actually a powerful attempt to control others and get what we want. Victimhood is very attractive; it brings a range of psychological and practical benefits that make it difficult to give up." The author states that it frustrates the work of even the most experienced mediator to end the conflict.

The article continues by asking the question, "How do we know victimhood when we see it?" One example he gives is when a person says, "I have every right to be angry." According to the author, what the person really is saying is that his or her feelings are really your responsibility and, therefore,

you cannot criticize or comment on my statements and actions.

The next part asks the question, "So, what can we do?" A number of things are suggested. One is to keep the parties from going into the past. Another, is to point out that the way the person feels is through the choices they make and not necessarily what happened in the past. And, finally, the mediator needs a lot of patience. Victimhood is hard to give up.

The article suggests some ways that mediators can use to help the process:

- Help the parties clarify their experiences separate from others;
- Explore alternative interpretations of the issues;
- Help the person become more conscious of their victimhood and what it has cost them;
- Clarify what the person wants out of the process;
- Ask the parties what each of them can do to get what they want.

The article concludes by saying that this approach doesn't replace fairness, compensation, or apologies, etc. and is not a panacea. But, if successful, the person may feel a new freedom by taking responsibility for his or her future. Finally, the process can work for mediators, and we "Each might do well to try it on ourselves." ❄️

Michigan Business-To-Business Mediation Program Gains Momentum

The ADR Section and the Dispute Resolution Association of Michigan (DRAM), a non-profit entity, are collaborating to build a Michigan Business-to-Business Mediation Program. The idea is to provide Michigan businesses throughout the State with a mechanism for early mediation in business disputes. We are currently broadcasting to the business community through (a) articles describing the program and (b) presentations to business

organizations. Specialized training for mediators to handle these cases at their normal published rates will be provided by MSU College of Law on June 9 and 10, 2006. Look for a more complete article in the May ADR Section Newsletter, and be sure to reserve the dates if you are interested in attending the training. Questions or comments? E-mail or call Tony Braun at rbraun@dickinsonwright.com, (313) 223-3575. ❄️

The ADR Newsletter is published by the ADR Section of the State Bar of Michigan. The views expressed by contributing authors do not necessarily reflect the views of the ADR Section Council. This newsletter seeks to explore various viewpoints in the developing field of dispute resolution.

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www.michbar.org/adrs/home.html



ANDRI Features Nina Meierding on March 16, 2006

Keynote speaker at this year's Advanced Negotiation and Dispute Resolution Institute (ANDRI) is Nina Meierding, a former trial attorney who is now director of the Mediation Center in Ventura, California. Meierding, who is a frequent ADR speaker nationally, will address the future of our profession, and offer insights on the use of apology in mediation, cross-cultural and gender issues, and strategies for breaking impasse.

The ANDRI, which is the premiere ADR event in Michigan, is co-sponsored by the ADR Section and the Institute for Continuing Legal Education. The day-long event will again be held at the newly-expanded St. John's Inn and Conference Center in Plymouth on Thurs., March 16.

The ANDRI features four tracks to appeal to a variety of interests: Negotiation, Mediation, Arbitration, and Judicial. Last year's event sold out, so if you want to attend, contact ICLE right away, by visiting the ICLE web-site, www.icle.org/andr, or calling 877-229-4350.***