

VERDICTS & SETTLEMENTS

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Breaking Up Conflict

Robert Wrede, a former Army paratrooper, college boxer and hard-nosed litigator went from being 'Secretary of War' to 'Secretary of State' when it found mediation, his friends say.

By Catherine Ho
Daily Journal Staff Writer

For Robert Wrede, conflict resolution used to mean punching someone in the nose.

"In my early adulthood, conflict resolution meant shoot it, break it up," said the former Army paratrooper and collegiate boxer. "Now, I've learned to use active listening. Someone can say something extremely aggressive and, little by little, you can tease out what drives the conflict. One of the fascinating things about ADR is developing those skills."

ADR Profile

Wrede has been a commercial trial lawyer for four decades. He ventured into alternative dispute resolution 10 years ago, after a course at Pepperdine University's Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution pushed him to an "epiphany" about the value of collaborative problem solving. Since then, he has mediated, arbitrated or evaluated more than 250 civil cases for the Los Angeles County Superior Court and the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California. He estimates he settles 80 percent of the cases he works on.

Wrede's military experience — in the 1960s, he was stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C., and sent to the Dominican Republic after dictator Rafael Trujillo was assassinated — helped him develop the skills to navigate a law career.

"Being able to operate in a stressful situation and come up with a game plan through adjustments was excellent training," he said.

Growing up in Jackson Heights, N.Y., Wrede thought he would flourish as a military man, not

a lawyer. He graduated as valedictorian at Valley Forge Military Academy in 1957 before earning a B.A. from Cornell in 1961.

In fact, he went to law school because his first wife thought he was "having too much fun jumping out of planes and being shot at."

He found Cornell Law School, from which he graduated in 1969, to be a worthy adversary.

"There's no blood, but litigation is adversarial and frequently abrasive," he said. Though he has represented big-name entertainers like Marlon Brando and Gene Hackman, Wrede said he has the most fun with antitrust and environmental litigation, including work on an oil spill in Santa Barbara in 1969.

Wrede spent the first 15 years of his career at McCutchen, Black, Verleger & Shea, handling antitrust, products liability, entertainment law and environmental litigation. He has been with Russ August & Kabat since 1999.

For Wrede, an active scuba diver, surfer and skier, conflict management is a way of life. He believes that if both parties in any complex human relationship agree on a course of action once a problem begins to surface, they can resolve it before it becomes a problem. That includes romance, he said.

His approach to mediation is not so different. He tries to balance facilitative, evaluative and persuasive skills to help all parties maximize the likelihood of finding a resolution.

"Alternative dispute resolution provides an opportunity for collaborative crafting of mutually-desirable solutions," he said.

Today, Wrede objectives are two-fold: to help

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people avoid and manage their conflicts, and to raise his 3-month-old son Kendrick to be as successful as his brother, Christian, 40, who has an MBA from Stanford and a J.D. from UC Berkeley School of Law. Wrede's office walls are covered with photos of his sons and daughter Suzanne, 41, and even a shot of himself in high school, wearing a tux — part of a photo spread in Seventeen magazine on military balls.

Former colleagues say Wrede's sharp lawyering skills, experience and balanced demeanor set him apart as an arbitrator and mediator.

"I have known Bob Wrede for almost 20 years, having personally litigated and mediated matters with him," said Layn Phillips, a former federal judge and now a litigation partner at Irell & Manella. "Bob is a highly skilled trial lawyer; now he has superbly transitioned from his Secretary of War role as trial counsel to his Secretary of State role as a mediator. I would trust him with



Robert Wrede

Age: 69

Affiliation: ADR Services, Inc.

Location: Los Angeles

Areas of Specialty: Commercial litigation, contracts, unfair competition, trade secret theft, antitrust, securities, sexual harassment, discrimination, entertainment, environmental torts, intellectual property, international trade, professional liability, insurance coverage.

Rate: \$3,000 per day,
\$350 per hour

any complex case."

Justice William A. Masterson, Wrede's colleague at Lewis, D'Amato, Brisbois & Bisgaard in the 1990s, has known Wrede for 25 years.

"He's an exceptionally strong

lawyer," Masterson said. "He's very skilled and if he continues to use the talent he had as a skilled practicing lawyer, he'll be exceptionally good as an arbitrator and mediator. As an arbitrator, a person has to make decisions, and I watched him

make a number of decisions when he was a lawyer and he was always right on the money in what he did."

Here are some of the lawyers who have used Wrede's mediation and arbitration services:

Judge David S. Cunningham III, formerly of Meyers Nave; Timothy J. Harris, Charleston Revich & Chamberlin; Thomas F. McAndrews, Reback McAndrews & Kjar; Steven R. Vartazarian, Cheong, Denove, Rowell & Bennett; William E. VonBehren, Meserve, Mumper & Hughes; Omid Nosrati, Law Offices of Omid Nosrati; Cheryl P. Nessel, Randolph M. Even & Associates; Scott J. Nord, Law Offices of Scott J. Nord; Jane A. Hamber, Hollins-Schechter; Michael Krival, Krival & Associates; Abigail A. Jones, Leopold, Petrich & Smith; Eric Meller, Meller & Floyd.

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