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Dear Steve,

I write to thank you for the excellent experience I enjoyed at the recent 40-hour mediation training I completed with you. And I emphasize "enjoyed." At once entertaining and informative, the training never dragged, was continually stimulating, and practical.

First, you are a gifted "teacher" in the best sense of the word. Your sense of humor, your energy, intelligence, obvious commitment to the concepts of mediation, and your respect for the students, all combined for a remarkable educational experience. I especially appreciated your knack for encouraging participation from all of the students and your ability to turn even "dumb" questions into valuable learning points for all in the class.

As a recently retired trial court judge who has handled innumerable civil settlement conferences, I came to the training with some skepticism. How quickly, and gently, I was disabused of any feeling that I had any special insight into this process. The insights I gained from the training, coupled with what I learned had value from my judicial experience, will, I hope, make me more effective in the next phase of my career.

The lessons in "listening" (not a strong suit with many judges), the demonstration of the need for patience (a particular problem for me), and the importance of respecting the role of the parties, in addition to their lawyers, were all invaluable to me.

The transition away from a judicial mindset is difficult. After twenty years of dealing with calendar pressures and working with lawyers under the stress of impending trial, it is not easy to switch to a role where one shares power with the parties, let alone the lawyers. To actively encourage discussion, to take the time to listen to what is being said, and resist the temptation to be judgmental and evaluative is no mean feat. It is, however, an important transition, that you have made much easier. I only hope I can remember the lessons and apply them appropriately.

Thanks for a great experience.

Very truly yours,


Michael E. Ballachey
Judge of the Superior Court (ret.)