



## Spotlight- Letitia Rosenthal

Letitia Rosenthal can't seem to make up her mind what kind of ADR to specialize in; and that's after quite a run in the field. The current Director of Livingston County Programs for the [Center for Dispute Settlement](#), she finds all areas of the field fascinating: "This field is so exciting and energizing it's hard to focus on one area only." Twenty-three years ago, she applied for a position with CDS. "I was interested in collective bargaining and arbitration," she explains. "I didn't know anything about mediation, but once I took my first training and apprenticed, I was hooked."

Rosenthal is still hooked on the field, and recognizes its value, even after two decades. "After doing a small pilot with one of our local schools, I can see the need for and benefit of truancy prevention mediation. The process provides a bridge between the school and the family and usually leaves each with a better understanding of the other," she notes, "resulting in a child-centered focus that reengages each in finding solutions to make sure the youth has the best educational experience possible."

At the other end of the life spectrum, and like many practitioners, Rosenthal is seeing the effects of the graying of our population. "I am seeing an increased need for eldercare mediation and the need to address a multitude of issues that occur as our population ages. This area, like truancy prevention, can be a very proactive tool and head off potential areas of conflict," she states.

But for Rosenthal, other areas of ADR are equally interesting. "Workplace mediation has always held special interest for me", she says. "Last year, a few months after working with a group of six individuals, their department head stopped in to thank me. 'You should be the first person called when there is workplace conflict; that mediation worked so well, I didn't have to do another thing,' he told me. Employers need to know about mediation because it is so expensive to lose, hire and train employees. Like custody and visitation mediation, workplace mediation affords us a longer relationship with the parties and often an opportunity to witness change and growth; what could be better than that?"

Considering her geographic location, her final area of interest isn't surprising. "My last, current area of interest - and I apologize for not being able to select just one! - is agricultural mediation and the many ways we can provide service to farmers and producers in the county. Over the last two years I have learned a lot and continue to try and understand how to better provide our services to this population. When I started work at CDS my predecessor told me I would probably be bored in 6 weeks; no one could have ever been more wrong. I have never had a boring day and usually there is so much going on that I have to plan time for reflection," she says.

Rosenthal's career is a testament to the evolving value of mediation. "It has been a journey that once begun offered many opportunities for diversion, but none so enticing as what was happening around me. A community theater director in Chicago once told me that I was a real trooper. When I asked him what that meant he said a trooper is someone who keeps banging their head against the wall because it hurts too much to stop; I guess he was pretty insightful."

In the course of that journey, Rosenthal learned from many, and credits several mentors with influencing her career. "Three men affected my growth in the field. Two of my early mediators were major influences; both are no longer with us...but will always be part of the mediator and person I am. Ray Hatfield was a psychologist at Keshequa Central School. Ray was passionate about mediation and the possibilities

clear communication affords us. He encouraged Keshequa to begin the first peer mediation program in the county, and would often bring one of his peer mediators with him when he came to mediate parent/child cases. Having the young person at the table was very effective," said Rosenthal.

"Don DeMott became a mediator the year after I did a presentation for his Peacebuilding class at SUNY Geneseo. He was an amazing mediator and the more I learned about him the more he became my hero. He lived the non-violent life he professed. After mediating for about a year, Don showed up in my office one day with a large box of materials. He said he had brought me all his materials and wanted me to teach his class at the college. He said he had already told them I was the person that they needed to do it and hoped I would say yes. I was frightened and humbled by his request but I couldn't say no. That request turned out to be a great gift to me; I taught Psychology 121: Conflict Resolution for fifteen years and learned more about the field than I ever would have otherwise."

"Andrew Thomas, of course, who hired me and for whom I worked for seventeen years, was especially helpful in the encouragement he gave all of his staff. His approach to conflict resolution is a certainty that there are few issues that can't be resolved if people are willing to come to the table. He was an amazing model to have so close at hand and his optimism was infectious!" she said.

Finally, Rosenthal notes that another positive influence has been her involvement with NYSDRA. "NYSDRA has been instrumental in bringing so many training opportunities to mediators and the CDRC's; it has really helped shape ADR in New York."

Like many in the field, Rosenthal is showing no signs of slowing down even after two-plus decades. "How fortunate I have been to find work that is new every day, continues to excite me and is of itself rewarding", she notes. And fate may have played a part as well: 'I was the fifth of eight children....I think I was born to the job!", she exclaims. Since she's not stopping anytime soon, she hopes to continue her work in multiple areas, though she wasn't specific: "There are several programs that I hope to help bloom."

Over her time in ADR, Rosenthal has seen a number of changes. "When you consider that my first mediation class was in Med-Arb you will realize that things have changed a great deal. Mediation has found greater acceptance and understanding by the general population as we continue to find new applications." She also sees a lot of change in the future. "I think there will be an increase in on-line mediation, using sites that allow a visual connection between the parties. More people will use personal conflict coaches and fields like parent coordination will expand rapidly," she added.

A quote from Thomas Wentworth Higginson in 1862 is one Rosenthal says is a major guide for her. "There may be years of crowded passion in a word, and half a life in a sentence."

"There are many (quotes), but this one reminds me how very attentive I must be in my role as an ADR practitioner," said Rosenthal.