

# Rolling with the Pandemic and Beyond

**LIZ CARTER & GINA MILLER**  
**JAMS**

► **JAMS's client service goes virtual as Liz Carter and Gina Miller share their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**CCBJ:** To start off, can you share a bit with our readers about your respective roles with JAMS?

**Liz Carter:** Okay, I'll start. Gina and I are the heads of operations for the company. I'm based in New York and I oversee mostly the Midwest, from Chicago and Milwaukee down through Texas, as well as the East Coast. Our roles overlap and are very similar, so I'll let Gina fill in anything I forget. We oversee the day-to-day operations of all of our resolution centers; panel relations, as it were. We work with our talent development to make sure our associates (those are our employees) are trained and that any HR issues are dealt with. Then there's client service. We interact with our clients

to make sure we're giving them what they want and sometimes what they may not yet even know they want. We make sure we're ahead of the game. It's all in furtherance of helping our clients resolve disputes, either through mediation, arbitration or some other form of alternative dispute resolution.

**Gina Miller:** I cover California, Washington State, and Nevada. To add to what Liz said, we also serve as the company JAMS ambassadors, serving on legal boards for bar associations, including participating on webinars and podcasts. We oversee the national client experience and we co-chair the National Operations Committee where we work with several of our colleagues throughout the organization to keep a pulse of company policies and update them as necessary. We're part of the strategic initiatives for the company. And we're the ones responsible for monitoring adherence to JAMS service standards. Anything from day-to-day operations to our having a really strong hand in a practice development initiative for the organization.



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**JAMS operates 28 resolution centers across North America, and each of you oversees large portions of that. How do you work together to ensure that JAMS client service and offerings are national and cohesive?**

**Miller:** So for me, and I think I speak for Liz as well, it's easy because we respect each other and we contact each other almost daily. Most often we are in sync with everything that goes on in the organization within our realm of responsibility. And our JAMS "culture," which I was going to talk about a little bit further into the discussion, is that the mindset of all the associates in our organization is to do good and provide our clients with a quality experience.

As for ensuring cohesiveness, this is especially challenging as we entered the next new normal of hybrid work. We're continuing to hear cases virtually and we are noticing an uptick in in-person hearings. We've definitely had to change our mindset in regards to delivering client service. We recognized that we needed to have a specialist to oversee our client experience initiative; we now have a national client experience manager who provides us with an unbiased understanding of our strengths and helps us identify opportunity areas.



**Liz Carter, Esq.** is the Senior Vice President of the East/Central Region of JAMS. Carter oversees regional operations for Resolution Centers located in 11 states, as well as JAMS Canada in Toronto. Carter works to identify and create new business opportunities and is actively involved in marketing and practice development initiatives for her region. She works closely with JAMS Global to implement international business development initiatives in her North American markets. Reach her at [ecarter@jamsadr.com](mailto:ecarter@jamsadr.com).

**Carter:** We also, in addition to having somebody oversee the client experience, we also have a committee of managers on the ground that meets regularly to talk about some of the things that we're doing in the offices to make sure that there's consistency

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## How do we define client service? Understanding that a client's needs will change and making sure to change along with them.

and regular standards and that they're being followed. Our talent-development team also works closely with our associates to make sure that we're delivering the same service across the board. It's never a hundred percent because our Dallas clients may expect something different from our Los Angeles clients. So sometimes there's regional, or even local, differences with respect to small things, such as the food the clients eat or the drinks they want in the fridge or the way they interact with our case managers. But our goal is to make sure that whether you're walking in the door of a JAMS office, or getting on a Zoom call with a JAMS moderator and a JAMS neutral, that you're getting the JAMS experience no matter the location.

**Miller:** It's even before you walk in the door. Because we know there are differences, we endeavor to ensure that we're meeting our clients' expectations. The teams have come together and created what we call a "tech check" to ensure that the clients have what they need to connect with us. To reduce any kind of technical problems, we contact our clients before their actual hearing starts. Collaboration is customary at JAMS. Our teams, even though they're on different coasts, serve on committees together and work on initiatives together to ensure that these things happen.

**Carter:** At JAMS we have people who have been at the company for a long time in various roles and in various locations. We also have new people that bring their own experience from other companies. So the cohesiveness doesn't just kind of happen because we're lucky; it's the people we have in the organization and the experiences that they bring.

**You both began your careers at the manager level within regional resolution centers. Can you talk a little bit about what inspired you to stay with JAMS and how your career has evolved?**

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**Miller:** I started as what, at that time, was called a “client coordinator.” I was a junior in college at the time, so it was a very entry-level position. I continue to enjoy being part of a company that helps people to resolve the most complex disputes, whether it’s a business dispute or a personal dispute—is so interesting and JAMS is so encouraging that it quickly became more than just a job.

The work is fulfilling and I like working with people who generally care about doing the right thing. I also had a few senior managers who invested in me; encouraged me to go get an MBA; mentored me and has supported my growth and development. There’s no place that I would rather be. We care about our clients and helping them move on with their lives. Anytime anyone says to me, “Wow, you’ve been at JAMS a long time. Tell me more about that,” I say it’s because this is not just a job; it’s where I feel like I’m actually giving back and helping people resolve something that’s not going well in their lives. The JAMS culture is what keeps many of us dedicated to JAMS. I am fortunate to work with many wonderful talented, caring and intelligent people, including my counterpart, Elizabeth “Liz” Carter, the president, Kim Taylor and our general counsel, Sheri Eisner.

**Carter:** My journey is a bit different. I came to JAMS 15 years ago as the manager of the Chicago office. I had practiced law before that so I understood ADR, but didn’t know the first thing about case management. But I succeeded because of my team. They taught me everything that I needed to know. The people who worked with me taught me everything I needed to know. Our panel of mediators, arbitrators and other ADR professionals also helped me learn the business. I shadowed the cases; we’d sit and debrief. They’d come into my office at night and tell me about their cases and even ask, “What do you think?” So it was really rewarding that way. It was intellectually satisfying. And if you’re curious, you’ve got just some of the smartest people in the legal profession working with you.

And then I stayed because number one, our mission, like Gina said, is helping people, resolving disputes, doing good. But even if the mission is great, if the co-workers aren’t, it doesn’t matter. The people at JAMS make the company; there’s just a feeling of mutual respect, deep friendships, caring, learning.

People like Gina; the president of our company, Kim Taylor; the operations professionals on my team; the other people on our senior management team. That’s why I’m still here. Everybody cares so deeply about what we do and we care deeply about each other. So it makes the tough days worth it, but the tough days are fewer than the good days.

**Miller:** I think it’s true that people are most fulfilled at jobs where they work with people who are supportive and that work well together. Anybody who stays at a job that long, that’s one of the priorities. And the tenure of the associates at JAMS, the last time I checked, was over 10 years. People who come to JAMS usually stay at JAMS. Then there are those who leave because we’ve inspired them to go to law school, so now they’re clients.

**Talk about what you’ve learned about client service since joining JAMS and how your personal or organizational approach has shifted over the years. There’s a lot of stuff that’s packed into client service for an organization like yours.**

**Carter:** I guess what I’ve learned over the years about client service is that you really have to step out yourself when thinking about what client service is. You always have to be thinking from the perspective of the client. So what we’re doing more of now—and the pandemic probably forced us to make 15 years of advances in a matter of months because we had to figure out how to operate a business that was in person 100% of the time to one



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that was virtual 100% of the time to one that is functioning in a hybrid capacity and with respect to each, how to make that worthwhile and effective for our clients. As mentioned, we hired somebody whose whole job is to figure out what the client experience is and make sure that we're delivering. We're always asking ourselves what do our clients want, what do they need and how do we deliver the service.

We're also cognizant of things like technology. While we pride ourselves on being a very personal business—our case managers are very, very skilled at their jobs; know a lot about the services we offer, the neutrals, our geographic locations, our international capacity, our rules, etc.—we also recognize that clients don't always want to talk to us. In fact some want to do everything electronically. So we have to know when that is and how to deliver that service at the same level as when they would call us. We've had to be really agile and adept at figuring out, "Oh, this client only emails so they never want me to call them." Or how do we make a Zoom mediation or a hybrid Zoom mediation effective when the mediator and one party is there in person but the other party isn't. How do we make sure the person on the screen feels invested in the process? That's all part of the client experience. And those are things that three years ago we didn't have to necessarily think about but then things changed literally overnight, and the clients didn't even necessarily know what they wanted.

**Miller:** We've always been very thoughtful in our approach to client service. We frequently discuss client feedback. My mindset is, "Think about if you were in the client's shoes. How would you want to be treated?" How do we best communicate with them? I'm very proud of our shift from in-person to virtual. Our learning curve was almost immediate. The way we were able to adapt, pivot, adjust to a new way of serving our clients, I never could have imagined how quickly the entire organization was able to do that. Not only for us to equip ourselves to do that and do it well but also to handhold our clients to make sure that they could still do business with us. It's not the same client experience, obviously, because we don't see them as often as we did before, but we want them to feel like JAMS is still there, still cares, is still available, and is still responsive to all their needs.

**Carter:** And it's not just the associates who've made this shift. It is our panel, which is comprised largely of retired judges and lawyers who throughout their careers had extensive technological support. They had to literally learn overnight how to conduct a proceeding that had been up close and personal over a computer monitor. Of course now we're seeing hybrids and back to in-person but when you think about it, it is crazy that in an organization with 400-plus neutrals and 300-plus employees, everybody figured out how to go from completely in-person to completely remote; how to resolve some of people's biggest legal disputes, including weeks-long arbitration hearings, without leaving one's home.

**Miller:** We've also considered what our associates may be missing by not having that in-person face time with their colleagues, supervisors and clients. One thing we do encourage associates to take advantage of Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc., to have that face time with their manager, a colleague or the neutral that they're supporting. We're thinking about different ways to engage so you don't lose some of that in-person experience. It's not a hundred percent the same, but it's the next best thing and people have adjusted to that.

### **Can you speak to the principles or values that drive your client services ambitions at JAMS?**

**Miller:** One of our core values is to adapt quickly to the customer's demands and the customer's needs. That's how I would define good client service: understanding that a client's needs may change and making sure to change along with them. Another is being available to our clients.

**Carter:** Mediation sessions or arbitrations are clients' only opportunities to have their stories heard, whether it's a business dispute, a personal injury problem, a family law issue or an employment matter. And every time we do an associate survey, they talk about how important providing excellent service it is to their job satisfaction. Because they know what a big deal it is.

When everything they do is geared to making sure to give clients the best experience during an extraordinarily stressful period in their life—a period made worse by the pandemic—it became even more important to our associates to do it well. ■