

VERDICTS & SETTLEMENTS

FRIDAY, MARCH 28, 2025

Resolution Whisperer

With real-world insight, neutral Paul Garrison guides litigants without drama or delay.

By Shane Nelson

Special to the Daily Journal

JAMS neutral Paul E. Garrison isn't one to dominate a room or grandstand. Instead, he prefers quiet effectiveness—blending decades of in-house corporate counsel experience with a temperament that litigants on both sides say fosters trust, clarity and settlement.

"I'm really looking at ways to help people save themselves from themselves," he said.

A 1991 Vanderbilt School of Law graduate, Garrison started his legal career as an employment and labor litigator before he moved in house, working for nearly two decades in the legal departments of large companies such as Wells Fargo and California State Automobile Association (AAA).

Intrigued early by private neutral work, Garrison started tackling disputes part time as a mediator and arbitrator in 2008, but decided to strike out on his own and focus full-time in those areas in 2018, regularly working to resolve employment and labor disputes.

Garrison joined the JAMS roster of neutrals in the spring of 2024.

"Quite frankly, I think I can mediate just about any dispute if I'm properly prepared and briefed by the parties," Garrison said, noting that he's resolved commercial, probate, trusts and estates and personal injury cases. "So, I don't shy away from things outside of the labor and employment space."

Garrison was also quick to describe himself as a fair arbitrator and



Jana Ašenbrennerová / Special to the Daily Journal

said he wants to address challenges early to facilitate smooth hearings.

"If that's documents or witnesses - if there are issues of discovery - I want to make sure those are hammered out before we start our proceeding," Garrison explained. "So, both parties put on their best possible case - within reason - and make sure they get a fair opportunity to be heard. And then I can make a fair decision. Everybody can't be pleased. You've got to rule in one party's favor and not the other. ... But I think if they feel good about the process, you're in good shape."

On the day of his mediations, Garrison said he tries to customize his approach to best fit what the parties want - often beginning with introductions, ground rules and listening. Garrison did note, however, that he's not afraid to move into a more evaluative strategy.

"If during the time we're together, I can see that something is missing - or they haven't really thought about something or I have an experience through either mediation or as a litigator that I think might be helpful - I will share that," Garrison said. "I'm thinking about the case, what I'm hearing and

**Paul E. Garrison,
Esq.**

JAMS
San Francisco

whether I can add some valuable input based on my expertise and experience to try to get us to a settlement."

Sacramento defense attorney Lindsay A. Goulding used Garrison recently to resolve an employment dispute featuring race discrimination allegations, and she described him as very efficient and effective.

"I found Mr. Garrison to be extremely calm and mellow, which was very useful and helpful in the context of the mediation, where the plaintiff was somewhat excitable," Goulding said. "That was useful in the mediation context and really helped to keep everybody even keeled."

Garrison also believes his extensive in-house expertise is particularly useful during mediations.

"I feel like it's real-world experience," he said. "I think it does give me the tactical advantage of being able to share with people, 'Hey look, I've been in house. I know how they think. I know what they might pay and what they may not pay. I can tell you what's more likely to happen than not.'"

Garrison noted that can be helpful in both the plaintiffs' and defense' rooms.

"The defense side loves it because they know I know what they think and how they operate," he explained. "And I can help [plain-

tiffs] see what's likely to be possible and what's not. So, you can use that to your advantage. ... So, we don't spend our time with some kind of ridiculous proposal that might sound good, but not in effect be a practical proposal."

San Francisco plaintiffs' attorney Dylan T. Hackett has used Garrison to resolve three employment and personal injury cases, and said he was very fair.

"He will definitely give you two sides of the coin," Hackett said. "You also need to have your case law on point because he does do his research in regard to the case law in mediation briefs. He's a very, very, very thorough mediator."

Hackett added that Garrison is terrific with clients.

"He really is able to speak to clients and explain to them in plain English and not legalese the strengths of their case and the weaknesses of their case," Hackett said. "And be prepared to hear the good, bad and

the ugly because he'll give it to you straight."

Oakland litigator Clinton O. Killian said he's used Garrison as a mediator on a dozen business, real estate and probate cases.

"Virtually all of them were fairly contentious," Killian said. "But Paul has a very good personality to be a mediator. ... He has a way of putting people at ease, making people understand in a calm way, so they can move towards resolution rather than fighting."

Killian said all but a couple of the cases he's taken to Garrison have settled through mediation, but one real estate dispute that didn't still stands out.

"Paul got the other side to understand and agree that our demand was probably what we were going to get if we went to trial," Killian said, explaining that initially the opposition agreed, but after lunch they changed their minds. "We ultimately ended up at trial, and the jury came

back with virtually the same number that we had offered to settle for. ... So, Paul's evaluation of the case was just spot on."

Killian added that Garrison has a way of making all the litigants feel good about resolution.

"A lot of times after mediation, the parties are still grumbling, saying, 'I shouldn't have,' or 'We shouldn't have,'" Killian explained. "But I can pretty much say in every mediation I've had with Paul, my clients - and even the other side - felt like, 'OK, I got a fair shake here. I'm OK with this settlement.'"

Here are some attorneys who have used Garrison's services: Dylan T. Hackett, The Hackett Law Firm; Lindsay A. Goulding, Porter Scott APC; Clinton O. Killian, Attorney at Law APC; Eduardo G. Roy, Prometheus Partners; A. Cabral Bonner, Bonner & Bonner

shane.nelson@dailyjournal.com