

## *Diversifying* the World of ADR

► **Kimberly Taylor, president of JAMS, discusses the importance of inclusion in the alternative dispute resolution community, including the vital role that women play at JAMS and areas of improvement for the future.**

**CCBJ: You've been an executive with JAMS for more than 20 years, and you're also one of the few women in such a high-level position in the global alternative dispute resolution (ADR) community. What can you tell us about the culture at JAMS and why you've spent most of your career there?**

**Kimberly Taylor:** One of the things that I've appreciated about JAMS from the very beginning is its incredibly strong culture across all levels – meaning associates, managers and neutrals – and that the organization actively strives to live out its values of neutrality, integrity, collegiality, collaboration and diversity. I've seen it in action throughout the 20-plus years that I've been with the company.

JAMS also continually invests in its talent, both associates and neutrals, by providing ongoing training. One of the reasons I've stayed here for more than two decades is that I love the people I work with, and I've been able to learn and grow so much as a leader. Also, I love that JAMS doesn't just talk the talk about diversity and inclusion. Those are core values of the organization. 70 percent of our employees are women, and almost 50 percent are diverse – and that's at every level, including senior management. It makes me proud of the organization.

**As president, what is your leadership style, and how do you view your role within the organization and in the larger ADR community?**

I work with such an incredibly talented group of individuals. Our strength, especially during the last 18 months or so, has come from listening and being responsive to each other's needs.

I don't believe in top-down leadership. From the beginning of the pandemic, for example, our senior leadership team has been consistently seeking feedback from the field about what's happening in our 29 offices globally – what's happening locally, where the pain points are, what's needed to transition to remote work, and so on. All along, our senior management team met frequently and regularly to ensure that we were aligned with what was needed. We were able to make quick decisions and push resources out to the field, which allowed us to remain very client-focused during such a turbulent time. And that's consistent with my overall approach to leadership, which is to facilitate good communication between our team members, to play to the strengths of each individual and give people what they need to do their jobs. Especially because I work with such a great group, everyone is committed to excellence and to really trying to enable people to excel in whatever they do, and to focus on ensuring that our core mission, which is to help people prevent and resolve conflicts, remains our North Star.

**JAMS has a popular blog post entitled "Women at the Helm." What is that post about, first and foremost? What is its role? And how does it help with recruiting and retention?**

We are leaders in the ADR field, so we have curated a content hub on our website to share the insights that come from being in that position – about legal developments, trends and news related to ADR. And that kind of thought leadership is one of the reasons that I

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believe that so many neutrals choose JAMS as their home and why they stay.

That particular blog entry, “Women at the Helm,” was really enjoyable to participate in. I’m proud of our entire organization, and I’m particularly proud of the representation of my female colleagues on the senior management team. They are truly a reflection of our entire workforce. They’re smart, professional, passionate about dispute resolution, and really just a lot of fun to work with. When we wrote that particular blog post, in early 2021, there had recently been a series of promotions in our senior management team, which we wanted to acknowledge, of course – and we also published it in recognition of International Women’s Day.

I love the fact that we’re highlighting our female leaders. But at the same time, I have some really phenomenal male colleagues who have also promoted their female colleagues and we work very hard together to ensure that everybody is excelling. All of those promotions of women in the senior management team, including the progression of my own career at JAMS, that has been under the direction of our CEO, Chris Poole. So, while it’s wonderful to celebrate women, I don’t want to neglect the role that the men in the organization have played as well.

**How, specifically, would you say JAMS supports women in the legal profession, and what more do you hope to do to elevate the role of women within the organization?**



*Kimberly Taylor*

In her role as President, Kimberly Taylor oversees JAMS operations in the United States and abroad. Working directly with the CEO, and leading a team that spans more than 28 Resolution Centers across North America, Taylor is responsible for the company’s day-to-day operating activities. She also provides operational and strategic leadership for international expansion efforts. Reach her at [ktaylor@jamsadr.com](mailto:ktaylor@jamsadr.com)

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Our internal numbers speak for themselves, with 70 percent of our associate population being women, as I mentioned. But we're also mindful of the need to recruit a more diverse panel, including more women neutrals, and to actively promote their practices. Many of our experienced neutrals, both men and women, mentor newer neutrals and really try to ensure that everyone is successful.

Actively trying to make sure that women are represented in a fair way on our panel is one of our main priorities. We support affinity bar associations, such as the National Association of Women Lawyers and National Association of Women Judges. We have been involved for years in the dispute resolution section of the American Bar Association and its Women in Dispute Resolution Committee.

As we come out of the pandemic and look toward the future, we're also being very deliberate about identifying future leaders and providing training and career development opportunities for everyone, including women, so that we continue to build a strong leadership bench for the future.

**You took over the role of president during the pandemic, as the ADR community was having to rapidly transition and expand its existing virtual ADR capabilities to best serve its clients. How have your clients at JAMS and your neutrals benefitted from the organization's ability to adapt to the new climate? What are some key elements that ensured your success?**



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JAMS had already been investing in technology to support virtual ADR for quite a while preceding the pandemic. We had a platform to support online mediation, for example, and we had begun to develop an online document management system. We were able to roll out that system in mid-2020, on schedule. It was perfect timing. We call the new system JAMS Access, and it provides document management for all of our ADR processes, 24/7, on a secure platform. It's been very popular. That said, online mediation wasn't widely embraced before the pandemic, even though we and other companies had the technology to support it. So, when the pandemic started, as we moved into late February and early March of 2020, we weren't entirely sure how people would react when in-person ADR was no longer an option, even if it was just going to be for a short period of time.

I was happily surprised by how quickly our clients and our neutrals switched to that virtual platform. The most widely used option was Zoom. It's quite easy to use, and people were using it for other things too, obviously, so they were familiar with it. But we are technology agnostic. In other words, we can operate on any platform that the parties want, such as Microsoft Teams or BlueJeans or any of the others.

I'm very proud of how everyone in our organization came together and made it happen. Our IT department secured additional laptops that we could deploy to our workers in their home offices, and we had already been investing in technology in our offices throughout the

country, equipping them with Zoom technology and other audio-visual equipment. As things evolved, the entire organization went remote for several months, and then later we began to do hybrid cases as well, when that was permitted by local regulations. Still close to 70 percent of our hearings remain remote or hybrid as we continue to navigate the pandemic.

We were well equipped from a technology standpoint, but really the credit goes to our people. I just love the flexibility that everyone demonstrated, in terms of trying something new, learning as we went, looking for creative ways to solve problems – the teamwork was palpable across every facet of the organization.

### **What are your hopes for the future of ADR?**

The future is incredibly bright. Prior to the pandemic, corporate counsel and outside counsel both recognized the benefits of alternative dispute resolution. Mediation and arbitration are proven, cost-effective methodologies that can be used to solve a wide variety of conflicts. In the future, I would like to see those tools deployed to help organizations, companies and individuals prevent conflicts before they arise, or at least earlier in the dispute timeline. Conflict disrupts relationships and normal business operations, and the sooner people can get out of conflict, the sooner they can get back to doing what they love.

My other strong hope is that all of our efforts to increase diversity among mediators and arbitrators will continue to bear results and that ultimately the cadre of dispute resolution professionals worldwide will reflect the communities that we serve. That goes for all dimensions of diversity, including race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religious beliefs, etc. I want this to be a more inclusive field, and I hope that we will all continue to work on that and see demonstrable results. ■