

## Speedy Synthesizer

*Deborah Saxe draws on 35 years of experience*

By Meghann M. Cuniff  
Daily Journal Staff Writer

### Deborah C. Saxe

JAMS  
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**Area of specialty:** employment law

**L**OS ANGELES — After nearly 35 years in employment law defense, Deborah C. Saxe might seem like the last option for a plaintiffs' lawyer looking for a mediator. Particularly when mediating a case involving her former firm, Jones Day.

But having been on the opposing side of Saxe many times, Gina Browne, a partner with Feldman Browne Olivares APC, knew the opposite was true: "She ended up being the perfect person for it.

"I knew how smart she is and how much she knows about employment law," Browne said. "She had enough experience with people on both sides that I think everybody trusted what she was saying."

Browne described the matter as a medical leave case in which her client's "life really was devastated."

"There were clear liabilities and clear policy violations," Browne said. "And I knew Debby knew how I litigated."

Saxe thought she was retiring when she left Jones Day in 2012, but said she's been reinvigorated through her new work as a mediator and arbitrator at JAMS. She draws on decades of experience, she said, including having chaired the Los Angeles County Bar Association's Labor and Employment Section from 2002 to 2003.

She says her many years with the bar helped prepare her for her role as a neutral.

"We've always been, in that section, very careful to present both sides of the issues," Saxe said. "You get known for being that neutral kind of person. You're associated with this organization that really requires that."

Attorneys who've worked with her praise her keen intellect, calm demeanor and tenacious attention to facts, details and, ultimately, an outcome that satisfies everyone.

"She's on my list for certain plaintiffs' lawyers who are not always that easy to settle with, and she has been very effective," said defense attorney Kenneth D. Sulzer, head of Constangy,

Brooks, Smith & Prophete, LLP's office in Century City.

She isn't an in-your-face, demanding personality, nor does she badger, patronize or harp on meritless arguments, attorneys said. Instead, Saxe is a quick-thinking fact-finder.

"She's a conciliatory and analytical mediator," said Gregory D. Helmer of Helmer & Friedman LLP, a plaintiff's firm in Culver City. "She seems very determined, and you get the sense that she doesn't like to give up."

Saxe initially planned to be a college professor when she became interested in law school because her boyfriend at the time was attending the University of Chicago Law School. She has a master's degree in comparative literature and bachelor's degrees in language and literature.

"I thought, 'Well, if he can go to law school, I can go to law school.' It was as sophisticated as that," Saxe said. "It turned out to be a really good career choice for me."

She put her literature background to use while studying at UCLA School of Law, preparing abstracts of unpublished literature about junior and community colleges for the ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges on the UCLA campus. During her second year she ex-terned with a judge while living with her parents in Pittsburgh.

Then the next summer, she seized an opportunity that helped define her career: a summer associateship with Andrew M. Kramer, a leading labor lawyer who died in 2011 while with Jones Day in Washington, D.C.

"What they did there was labor and employment law, and that's all I've ever done," Saxe said.

She moved to Jones Day with Kramer in 1983, and became a partner in 1988. She was a shareholder at Heller Ehrman LLP from 1997 to 2005, then returned to Jones Day as a partner.

Saxe gained mediation experience along the way. She mediated cases in the Central District and Los Angeles Superior Court as part of her pro bono work at Jones Day. "Her credentials



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are absolutely impeccable," said Michael S. Turner, a defendant's lawyer and partner with Hill, Farrer & Burrill LLP in Los Angeles. "You look at her credentials and know she's really smart, and that definitely proves to be the case in person."

Saxe worked with Turner as a mediator on an employment case that he said was perfect for her temperament as a mediator.

She showed sensitivity and empathy, "and because of the great respect that I have for her intellectual and analytical abilities, I knew if she spotted an issue and identified it as an area of concern or weakness, that I had to respect her opinion," Turner said.

Helmer said he has five or six mediators with whom he usually works. But being on the plaintiffs' side doesn't deter him from mediators with a defense background, and he said he found himself quickly trusting Saxe.

"When there are legitimate points to a plaintiff's case, they get it, and they understand the potential vulnerabilities in the defense," Helmer said.

He ranks his single experience with Saxe as one of the best.

"I hit the point of trust with Debby very quickly, and primarily it was how she was able to synthesize the facts and law and just sort of see the relevant points in the case very quickly," Helmer said. "Some mediators aren't able to do that."

Saxe says her approaches to arbitration and mediation require "two totally different skill sets." She'll discuss personal matters during mediations that would never come up during arbitrations. She's married with two daughters and enjoys reading, gardening and movies.

"As a mediator, I'm more accessible, more friendly, more talkative. I can talk about everything in a mediation. In arbitration, it's just 'let's talk about the case,'" Saxe said. "You have to be likeable in mediation. I try to be likeable in arbitration, too, but it's not as important."

Turner described some mediators as very brash.

"They attack you and try to make you feel vulnerable or weak, and motivate you to settle it that way," Turner said. "She was the antithesis of that."

Saxe said she uses a facilitative style and an evaluative style.

"Sometimes people will say, 'Well, what's this worth to you?' Sometimes I have to come up with that answer, and sometimes I don't."

Saxe said she usually was able to see the opposing side while defending employers, and she long wondered if she might be able to use that ability outside of defense work.

"I'm more comfortable, really, seeing both sides," Saxe said. "It's turned into another job — another career — which is very interesting."

*Here are some attorneys who have used Saxe's alternative dispute resolution services:*

Gregory D. Helmer, Helmer & Friedman LLP; Gina Browne, Feldman Browne Olivares APC; Nathan Goldberg, Allred, Maroko & Goldberg; Heather K. McMillan, Stevens & McMillan; Michael S. Turner, Hill, Farrer & Burrill LLP; Kenneth D. Sulzer, Constangy, Brooks, Smith & Prophete LLP; Robert S. Blumberg, Littler Mendelson PC; Max Fischer, Sidley Austin LLP