

VERDICTS & SETTLEMENTS

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2026

Old-school principles guide neutral Gary Stern's approach to mediation

After 44 years as a civil litigator, ARC neutral Gary N. Stern brings extensive trial experience, rigorous preparation and a direct, plainspoken style to mediations and arbitrations.

By Shane Nelson

Special to the Daily Journal

Neutral Gary N. Stern spent more than four decades resolving disputes as a civil litigator, and many of the lessons he learned early in his career remain central to his work today.

"I am an old school guy," Stern said. "The days where you made agreements with a handshake still matter to me. Voluntary discovery has always mattered to me."

Stern joined Alternative Resolution Centers (ARC) in June 2025, shifting his practice full time to private neutral work. Some of those "old school" principles now shape his approach to mediation.

"One of the things I really ask for and encourage is the exchange of briefs," Stern said, noting that parties can provide genuinely confidential information to him separately.

"I think it's counterproductive to brief a case and not send the other side a copy," he said. "A lot of the hide the ball you see commonly nowadays — especially among younger lawyers — I don't think is the best way to litigate a case."

If lawyers believe in their case, Stern said, they should be willing to show why.

"If it's a strong case, promote that strength," he said. "Promote that strength throughout the process."

A 1980 Southwestern Law School graduate, Stern spent 44 years as a litigator, often representing plaintiffs in medical malpractice cases. In addition to mediating, he now handles disputes as an approved arbitrator for the Office of the Independent Administrator for Kaiser Permanente.



Justin L. Stewart / Special to the Daily Journal

Stern said his years representing malpractice plaintiffs do not influence his decisions as an arbitrator.

"The fact that I did plaintiff medical malpractice will have no bearing on my decisions," he said. "If Kaiser has defended the case, the result will be reflective of that. If they have not — if the plaintiff has met their burden, if the experts have been compelling and have convinced me that the standard of care was breached and that breach led to a damage that is being claimed, the verdict will be reflective of that."

As a mediator, Stern operates from the belief that settlement is "ultimately in the best interest for the vast majority of people."

"I just believe that on balance the civil jury trial is the best system we have — as opposed to fighting it out on the streets," he said. "But it is preferable if the parties can ultimately control their destinies. I always say in mediation, 'We are here at a time when we — you and I and your lawyers — can control the outcome.'"

Preparation is central to Stern's approach. He encourages pre-mediation calls with counsel, conducts his own research and sends the parties a letter in advance outlining the types of questions he expects to ask in caucus.

"I try to give great respect to both sides in both rooms, so they know

Gary N. Stern

Alternative Resolution
Centers (ARC)
Los Angeles

Areas of Specialty:

Employment
Healthcare Negligence
Personal Injury
Medical Malpractice
Product Liability

that with me they are going to get commitment. They're going to get interest, and they're going to get preparation," Stern said. "You have to evaluate — in each case — who are the people, who are the personalities involved and then promote a session that brings out the strengths in everybody."

Long Beach defense attorney Linda G. Krieger recently used Stern to resolve two employment cases involving racial harassment allegations. She described him as smart, fair and thoroughly prepared.

"He was very dedicated to getting the case settled, and he worked tirelessly for the multiple sessions we had in these cases," Krieger said. "And he wasn't afraid to give his opinions about some of the issues in order to help resolve the case."

Krieger said Stern's evaluations were balanced, even when his conclusions did not favor her side.

"They were just what seemed to be his true feelings about the issues and some of his past experiences," she said. "They were not all one-sided. That's why I would use him again because he did seem to look at both sides of the case and not just one perspective. He brought a lot to the table."

Los Alamitos defense attorney Elisha E. Cronin, who recently used Stern to mediate three consumer warranty cases, similarly emphasized his preparation.

"He is very prepared, so as a litigator, you should also be prepared. Know your facts, know your law," Cronin said. "If he's unfamiliar with the area, he will educate himself on it."

Cronin also described Stern as "absolutely fair" and praised his plain-spoken manner.

"I think he prides himself on not using too much legalese and being able to talk to people like people,"

she said. "I really appreciated his willingness to talk to the parties — not just the attorneys — and make them feel heard."

Calabasas plaintiffs' attorney Martin I. Aarons, who recently used Stern to resolve two employment cases, said Stern's background representing plaintiffs gives him credibility with clients.

"He's in tune with knowing how to relate to people who have been wronged in one way or another — whether that's in a personal injury case or an employment case," Aarons said. "When you're dealing with those clients, it's different than when you're dealing with an adjuster or maybe a C-suite type person on an employer side. And I think he's got the ability to wear both hats."

Aarons also praised Stern's direct, evaluative approach.

"He's a seasoned trial lawyer with lots of experience," Aarons said. "And

he brings that to the table, where he's able to assess the value and the merits of the case and really give it to you straight on where your strengths and your weaknesses are."

Most importantly, Aarons said, Stern got the job done.

"I think that's the highest compliment anybody can give," he said. "He got the case settled, and I'd definitely recommend him."

Here are some attorneys who have used Stern's services: Linda G. Krieger, Ellenoff Grossman & Schole LLP; Martin I. Aarons, Aarons Ward; Elisha E. Cronin, EC Cronin APC; Jennifer B. Zargarof, Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP; Nadine Lewis, Nadine Lewis Attorney at Law

shane.nelson@dailyjournal.com