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PLANTATION

Mending fences in the workplace

A Plantation mediator aims to nip business problems in the bud

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Cindy Hannah's business is all about avoiding problems in the workplace before they start.

As president of **ATD Mediation** — ATD stands for "Agree to Disagree" — Hannah acts as a neutral third party who allows employees to air their opinions and grievances in a confidential setting. It's all about applying a proactive approach to the resolution process.

"Many times employees have a problem at work and the employer does not even know about it," Hannah said. "Unhappy employees are not productive employees. The goal is to avoid or remove conflict in the workplace and retain employees."

That's important to business owners because, according to Hannah, it costs approximately 30 percent of an employee's salary to replace them. Reducing employee turnover is cost effective.

"Employees may quit due to a better job offer, but many leave because of a problem in the workplace," said Hannah, a Plantation resident since 1991. "That gets expensive."

Problems range from the minor — employees wanting to quit because their co-workers continuously leave their dirty coffee cups in the sink — to the more serious, such as when an older male employee sees a pat on the shoulder as nothing more than a grandfatherly gesture but makes young female co-workers uncomfortable.

"Every workplace is *Peyton Place*," Hannah said, referring to the popular 1960s soap opera.

Part psychologist, part confidante, part referee, Hannah has created an innovative program that no other mediation company currently offers, she said.

'INSURANCE POLICY'

Employers who purchase her Workplace Internal Dispute Resolution Program pay for family mediation for their employees to help them resolve personal conflicts. It is a provision that many South Florida companies are adding to their employee handbook and benefits package.

"It's sort of like an insurance policy to help prevent problems," Hannah said. "The program educates employees and helps make the workplace better. Mediation can often reduce litigation and the costs associated with going to court. We call it our 'nip it in the bud' program."