

The Miami Herald

BUSINESS MONDAY

September 17, 2007

Mediator likes being put in the middle

- With degrees in psychology and law, she helps parties to lawsuits settle issues without clogging the court system

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For Cindy Niad Hannah, being shoved into the middle of a fight is a good thing.

Hannah, a lawyer, certified mediator and CEO of ATD Mediation, willingly goes into the middle, likes to be the voice of reason and takes great satisfaction in settling a dispute. Since becoming certified in 1993, Hannah, 48, estimates she has mediated more than 5,000 lawsuits, cutting costs for everyone and allowing disputes to be settled rather than congesting a crowded legal system.

Mediation, first used by insurance companies in the late 1980s and 1990s, occurs when parties to a lawsuit agree to meet without a judge before an agreed-upon mediator to work out their differences, Hannah explained. It is not binding, unless the parties all agree, and even then, judges retain jurisdiction.

Judges began using it in state and federal trials and found it so successful that it eventually became mandatory in Florida.

Hannah, who earned an undergraduate degree in psychology from Emory University and a law degree from the State University of New York, started out with Ruden, McClosky, Smith, Schuster & Russell in its commercial litigation department. She later took a job as in-house counsel at Southeast Bank, but when the industry stumbled, decided to pursue what she liked best: settling cases.

Mediations typically begin with all parties meeting in neutral territory. After a brief opening in which she explains the rules – all negotiations are confidential, nothing is binding unless both parties agree – hears out attorneys.



NEGOTIATOR: Cindy Niad Hannah is CEO of ATD Mediation

MEDIATOR

Requirements: Practicing lawyer in Florida for five years, completion of Florida Bar mediation courses and observation time.

Salary: From \$200 to \$350 an hour, depending on the type of case and number of parties

Perks: Setting your own schedule, no deadline pressure and the satisfaction of helping people.

Challenges: Navigating strong personalities, balancing information from opposing sides, persuading people to compromise and establishing a practice large enough to be profitable.

Hannah says the key to her job is making compromise a happy undertaking.

"You're dealing with a lot of very different personalities and there are a lot of different things going on and you don't necessarily know everything. You've got to keep everybody happy and everybody trusting," she said.