

Divorce leads to career as conflict mediator

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By Rachael Brickman

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Anju Jessani knows how to turn lemons into lemonade, turning a difficult time into a new career. A former vice president at JP Morgan, Jessani was introduced to mediation when she had a mediated divorced in 1994. A few years after her marriage ended, JP Morgan sold her company division to a bank in Hong Kong. Ms. Jessani decided to enter the mediation business.

She trained for 40 hours at the Center for Family and Divorce Mediation in New York and was accredited by New Jersey Association of Professional Mediators after 100 hours of face-to-face mediation. While there are no licensing requirements for a mediator in New Jersey, NJAPM provides training, accreditation and networking opportunities.

In 1997 she started Divorce with Dignity Mediation Services. She now has offices in Hoboken and Clinton and was recently elected president of New Jersey Association of Professional Mediators. Mediation is a way of facilitating conflict-resolution, with the goal of finding a mutually beneficial solution and avoiding having a judge make the final decision. "People don't like being told what to do," says Jessani, who lives in Pohatcong, Warren County. In mediation, the parties design their own resolution agreement.

According to her, mediated divorces are much less expensive, quicker and help people rebuild their lives. Mediation is not only about divorce or corporate conflicts, says Jessani, rather the conflict-resolution tools she uses are universal. "All conflicts start in the same way," she says, people take "positions" (make demands) and then throw in the "kitchen sink" of unrelated and unresolved ancillary issues. She gets her clients to define what the problems are, explore what they really want when they make a demand, create potential solutions and then make thoughtful decisions.

For example, if an employee wanted to negotiate a raise and the boss said "no," the employee should think about other possibilities. He could suggest having the company pay for additional training in a subject or provide an extra week of vacation. The employee should understand his employer's financial limitations for giving a raise, and the employer can understand that a hard-working employee could leave without some additional compensation.

The career is very meaningful to Ms. Jessani, even if it does not provide the benefits of a corporate job. Her favorite thing is "watching people change is almost like a switch. People come in and they are vicious, scared, and make demands. Usually by the midway point... you can see it in their body language, in their demeanor, they know that there's a light at the end of the tunnel."

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