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**As a trained mediator, attorney Susan J. Sacchetta offers couples who wish to part ways a more peaceful and autonomous alternative to traditional divorce.**

by **LEIGH STUART**  
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**JODY ROBINSON**

# Meeting in

**A**ttorney Susan J. Sacchetta is more than willing to represent clients in court, should they wish. But, as a trained mediator, she would sooner see them empowered by the autonomy to resolve their differences in a more peaceable manner.

“Mediation is a process that allows participants to have a discussion in front of a trained professional who can help them to facilitate that discussion so that what is important to each of them can be addressed and hopefully they can come to an agreement on the most sensitive issues in their lives,” Sacchetta explains. “I think it opens the door for people to acknowledge that reaching peace for their family might sometimes be better than being right and that it produces an opportunity for the parties to create their own ending to their family’s story.”

Sacchetta, already a well-respected, seasoned litigator, wanted to expand her ability to offer her clients additional options and provide services to others interested in a less adversarial approach and thus chose to complete a 40-hour course of mediation training in 2013 through the Montgomery Conflict Mediation Center in Norristown. The mediation side of her practice has been growing steadily ever since.

“Mediation, versus litigation, is a better way for clients to achieve some kind of justice and feel as if they’re able to participate in the process,” she says. “This is rather than having litigation or someone else decide a family’s fate.”

Mediation is not always the best solution, of course, especially when domestic matters turn contentious. Even so, the desire for individuals to have more control over their

marriage's dissolution—essentially, working together to decide the future for themselves and, if applicable, their children—may explain the growing interest in mediation.

### Actively Listening

An accomplished academic, Sacchetta began undergraduate studies at the University of Delaware at age 16 and subsequently earned her Juris Doctor from Delaware Law School of Widener University. She began her law career in Philadelphia handling civil rights and personal injury work but not long after moved to a position in Paoli and developed her practice there, where she has been helping clients now for more than 30 years.

While she remains well versed in workers' compensation, social security disability, and personal injury matters, she devotes much of her time now to family law.

"When I started practicing in Paoli, I began handling a lot of family law cases," Sacchetta recalls. "Once I got into it, I realized that family law clients often don't know what to expect, or what the answers are, or even at times how they should feel about something. Family law matters can be complicated and taxing experiences that can be a major distraction, even crippling, for some people. These are situations where people clearly need someone there to be patient and have a steady, guiding hand."

"A good mediator has to have the capacity to understand the perspective of each party's reality and the ability to reflect this understanding to all parties involved," she adds. "Mediation is a great tool to resolve any type of dispute but is especially helpful in the area of family law. Simply stated, families do not belong in court, if at all possible."

It may seem strange to hear an attorney say such a thing, but Sacchetta believes every word.

"My whole goal in being a lawyer has been to help people," she says. "Sometimes that means helping people fight a battle, but sometimes it means helping people understand that they don't have to fight to achieve resolution."

### 'Doing Something Good'

As a family law attorney, Sacchetta has to "wear many different hats." This is what makes her so enthralled and engaged in her work.

"I don't have training as a professional therapist, but I do have a family and have gone through things in my life that I can hopefully bring to the table," she says. "When people are going through troubling times, you must have compassion along with problem-solving skills in order to make suggestions for the best solutions."

Sacchetta admits that the road to resolution isn't always easy. Some cases linger in

# the Middle

In matters of divorce, she appreciates mediation as a tool when both parties are willing to communicate clearly and amicably. When done correctly, mediation can lead to a better end result, financially speaking, and it often helps the parties involved heal after the pain of divorce. Still, mediation requires a skilled hand.

"I think it is important for a mediator to get both parties to listen to one another," Sacchetta says. "A lot of times, people can miss things and not see the 'bigger picture' of how something can be achieved in a way that's best—least troubling or emotionally taxing—for a family."

To be an effective mediator, Sacchetta believes, one must possess exceptional listening skills. The mediator must also encourage parties to be active listeners themselves.

her mind long after office hours have ended.

"There are times when it's hard," she says. "I've come home at night and just can't get off my mind the things people are going through—especially cases involving children—but to know I've made a difference in the life of a child, parent, mother, even grandparent, that's where I want to be."

She recognizes that she is lucky to have a loving family support system at home. She wishes the same for each of her clients.

"My goal in becoming a lawyer has never been about how much money I made," she says. "I've always wanted to help people get through difficult times. It is something that has made me feel like I am doing something good for people. It's really satisfying to know that I've helped someone in the best way I can to get the best outcome possible." ■

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—SUSAN J. SACCHETTA



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