

The Future is Calling. Don't Hang It Up Yet!
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Appreciating our Legacy and Engaging the Future Conference

I will never forget my first experience in my mediation course. It all clicked for me. I found a class that allowed me to stretch my communication muscles in a legal context that wasn't moot court or journal. My tendencies to hear what people are really saying under their phrasings came alive. My ability to read between the lines and amplify the interests of parties who can't find the words was under the spotlight. I found the lane I was created for. And one class turned into two. Then, two classes turned into becoming a certified mediator in the Illinois court system. And certification afforded me the opportunity to help real people with real issues all before I cross the graduation stage. What an honor! What a privilege to serve. I do not take these experiences lightly.

On my quest to figure out how I can continue to use my ADR skills in my future legal career, my train of thought led me to think about maybe teaching, or developing technology to help disadvantaged non-represented parties, or figuring out more ways to teach students about implicit bias in negotiation and mediation contexts. The ADR world opened up to me — and led me to Malibu. I was in rooms with the people who wrote my textbooks and produced the numerous studies I referenced in class. I was sitting next to people who crafted the surveys I took during the school year. I drank coffee with people who defined what I stand on now. And although I heard some positive buzz in the air about the future of the field, it was a little disheartening to hear that some were afraid the field was plateauing. Despair and apprehension were the words that were used.

I immediately felt a responsibility to sound the alarm. I wanted to scream at the top of the lungs in that very moment and say — HEY, I'M OVER HERE! THE FUTURE IS IN YOUR MIDST! The future was in the room. And not just me, a law student who loves ADR and all it has to offer. The future as it relates to technology was in the room. The future as it relates to innovative programming and outreach was in the room. The future as it relates to impacting the justice system was in the room. I heard so much of the future in two days that it left my mind swirling with ideas, projects, and a long I-Need-To-Look-This-Up list.

I say all of this to say to you: First, thank you for all for welcoming me in your world. And two, have hope. I firmly believe ADR is the future. As long as there are people, there will always be a need for an arbitrator, a negotiator or a mediator. The work you all have done and are doing is building the groundwork for even my own successors to run the race. So, pass the baton. The marathon isn't over. I see no finish line in sight. ADR is here to stay in whatever and whichever manner it takes.