



ROBERT LEVINS / Daily Journal

## Stress Detector

**Daniel Ben-Zvi** focuses on relieving litigations' anxieties brought by their long-running disputes

**By Rebecca U. Cho**  
Daily Journal Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES — As an attorney for 14 years focusing on bankruptcy and litigation, Daniel Ben-Zvi saw firsthand the long-suffering effects of unfinished disputes.

“The consequence of a case not resolving when it could be resolved was devastating,” said Ben-Zvi, 52, who says he watched parties develop physical ailments such as heart disease through the stress of enduring long-lasting disputes.

So in 1995, Ben-Zvi opened a private mediation business called DB Mediation Services in Los Angeles while serving on various alternative dispute resolution panels throughout Southern California. These panels include ADR Services, Alternative Resolution Centers and the Institute of Conflict Management.

Today, Ben-Zvi's services are sought by lawyers in various fields, including entertainment lawyers who trust the mediator to handle their high-profile clients and cases with sensitivity. He also specializes in cases involving real estate, professional liability, partnership, franchise and personal injury, among others. In his work, he almost entirely handles mediations, although he arbitrates on occasion.

In May, Ben-Zvi helped settle a case involving Sean Stewart, singer Rod Stewart's son, who had been accused of assault. Dana Cole, an attorney at Cole & Loeterman, who represented Stewart, said Ben-Zvi helped alleviate a stressful situation that involved parallel civil and criminal cases.

“I think he has a very good business sense, he knows his entertainment law,” Cole said. “He's certainly used to dealing with high-

profile individuals. He has a very relaxed way about him that causes people to put aside their differences and try to work a case out instead of posturing.”

Ben-Zvi was born and raised in New Jersey and graduated from Rutgers University with a bachelor's in economics. He received his law degree from the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law in 1981.

While in law school, he externed for federal Bankruptcy Judge Burton Lifland of the Southern District of New York.

Ben-Zvi began his trial career in 1981 upon joining former U.S. Sen. Abraham Ribicoff's law firm, Ribicoff & Kotkin, in Stamford, Conn. He headed the firm's business litigation department in that office.

Finding himself handling many multistate cases and practicing in various states, Ben-Zvi has picked up law licenses in five states

# Relieving Anxieties Brought on by Bitter Disputes

throughout his career, including New Jersey, New York, California, Connecticut and Washington, D.C.

In 1987, he also passed the bar exam for the nation of Israel. He did so, studying for six months and brushing up on his Hebrew, in order to act as a media liaison for the Nazi war crime trial of Ivan Demjanjuk, an accused guard in the Treblinka concentration camp in Poland.

One motivation for Ben-Zvi's involvement was that his father lost several family members, including a sister and several cousins, in the Holocaust, he said.

"I knew this would be the second and what turns out to be the last Nazi war criminal trial in the State of Israel and I wanted to be a part of history," Ben-Zvi said. "This experience continuously motivates me to dedicate my life to waging peace."

He turned his experience into a script, garnering the attention of a producer who hired him to write for a season of the TV show "L.A. Law." He came to Los Angeles and when he was not hired for a second season, Ben-Zvi decided he was finished with television writing and turned back to practicing law.

He joined Washington, D.C.-based Schmeltzer, Aptaker & Shepard in Los Angeles, where he was a litigator for almost 10 years. In 1995, he opened DB Mediation Services.

He said he seeks to wage peace through his compassion for those suffering litigation in his job as a mediator.

In December 2007, Ben-Zvi mediated a case that led to helping 76 plaintiffs who had lost most of their life savings in a real estate scheme. On the basis of five plaintiffs, who were suing the escrow officer involved for negligence, Ben-Zvi developed a formula that resolved the matter for all 76 plaintiffs.

"One couple looked physically deteriorated because of this case," Ben-Zvi said. "I heard from an attorney a week later that they looked dramatically better. For me, it's not just about settling the case. It's about getting them that relief and happiness. That's transformative."

Recently, Ben-Zvi has found his bankruptcy law background helpful in resolving the types of cases he encounters in the economic downturn. He has seen more cases involving the dissolution of partnerships in all kinds of businesses including law firms, printing, car parts dealerships and technology, he said.



**Daniel Ben-Zvi**  
Mediator/Arbitrator

**Affiliation:** DB Mediation Services  
**Age:** 52  
**Location:** Los Angeles  
**Areas of specialty:** Entertainment, employment, real estate, professional liability, personal injury, estates

"I see in this economy now parties trying to back out of deals on long-term contracts. I see more cases involving salesmen who are claiming they are being squeezed out of their commissions illegally," Ben-Zvi said. "Across the board I'm seeing the effects of the economy."

Harry W.R. Chamberlain II, a Buchalter Nemer litigator, has used Ben-Zvi in a variety of commercial litigation cases, including professional liability disputes.

"It's a real trick for us to be able to find somebody who has Dan's background, a very sophisticated commercial consumer-oriented background," Chamberlain said. "Across the board when I mention his name, he's the one who always stays on the list because he's so smart and tenacious, persistent."

This tenacity came to light in one case involving a malicious prosecution allegation that had failed to be resolved three or four times through Los Angeles Superior Court, Chamberlain said. After seven sessions with Ben-Zvi, the case was resolved.

"At the end of the day, nobody could declare victory. But those who settled, settled reasonably," Chamberlain said. "Dan was instrumental in that, after many judges failed and the case was litigated through a five-year odyssey."

Chamberlain said he also appreciates Ben-Zvi's kindness, gentleness and humor, which comes across in the mediations. The neutral couples this with a firmness that gets a case moving, he said.

"He speaks as fairly and eloquently to an injury accident victim as he does to a corporate CFO who has to write a big check," Chamberlain said. "Those are real talents to have somebody who can play both sides of the field."

Ben-Zvi said he prepares diligently for his cases, including making calls to the lawyers

involved in order to talk and brainstorm about the best strategy and approach to a mediation, which usually results in a "healthy debate," he said.

His dedication to advancing the field of mediation has led him to co-author a book, "Inside the Minds: Alternative Dispute Resolution," with several attorneys. He sits as chairman of Los Angeles' annual Mediation Day, which promotes awareness of mediation and whose participants include the mayor and city council.

"Every year, I see mediation used more and more by the city of L.A.," Ben-Zvi said. "People are using mediators earlier, at the outset of a case."

In addition, in the past year, he has worked on a cable talk show called, "Mediation Behind Closed Doors." In the 10 episodes that have aired, Ben-Zvi has hosted clients such as the vice president of Chevron and the director of human resources for a \$15 billion company, along with the presidents of plaintiffs' and defense associations.

While he enjoys promoting the mediation field, Ben-Zvi said, the satisfaction he derives in the mediation room when he sees clients lives transform primarily motivates his hard work.

In one recent mediation involving the dissolution of a small firm in a dispute between childhood friends, Ben-Zvi worked through the bitterness and anger to help the two resolve the case.

"Ultimately, it was extremely rewarding when it resolved with not just a settlement, but hugs and tears," he said.

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*Some of the attorneys who have used Ben-Zvi's services are:*

Harry W.R. Chamberlain II, Buchalter Nemer, Los Angeles; Donald L. Saltzman, Richardson & Patel, Los Angeles; Anne Bigley, Archer Norris, Los Angeles; Richard S. Debro, Law Offices of Richard S. Debro, Santa Monica; Gregory Dawley, Billet, Kaplan & Dawley, Los Angeles; Dana Cole, Cole & Loeterman, Los Angeles; Bruce Douthit, Douthit & Associates, San Diego; Lori M. Yankelevits, Swerdlow Florence Sanchez Swerdlow & Wimmer, Beverly Hills; Tod L. Gamlen, Baker & McKenzie, Palo Alto; Louis Lipofsky, Law Offices of Louis A. Lipofsky, Beverly Hills; Ronald F. Frank, Burke, Williams & Sorensen, Los Angeles; and Neil Gunny, Klinedinst, Los Angeles.