

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: Yondi K. Morris-Andrews, Esq.

By Rebekah Gordon

Northwestern Law, Class of 2020

You can absolutely expect any faculty member in this program to rave about negotiation and mediation courses. After all we are the Center on Negotiation and Mediation. In past editions, we usually take the time to talk about where an alum is now and what they are up to currently. This time around, we thought it would be good for our readers to read the words straight from the subjects themselves. We want you to directly engage with an alum who graduated from the school and was invested in the program. It is one thing for us to toot our own horn. Its another for us to offer you a chance to see that ADR processes and tools can impact your daily life through the example of someone who has been in the field for some time and is making waves.

I asked Yondi K. Morris Andrews, Esq. to shed some light on her experiences. She is a founding partner of Knight, Morris & Reddick Law Group. She specializes in real estate transactions and corporate law. She also sits on a few boards, one of them being the Board of Directors of Center for Conflict Resolution. She has received the Harold Washington Leadership Award, the 40 Under 40 Game Changers Award and Crain's Most Influential Minority Lawyers in Chicago (2018). I asked her seven questions about the negotiation and mediation skills she learned and how they impact her career and life today. Here is what she would like to share with you.

1. What interested you in the negotiation and/or mediation courses at Northwestern?

From a very early age, I always thought of myself as a negotiator. When I was 8 years old I convinced my parents to purchase a van that I was in love with! Similarly, that same year my older sister and I convinced my parents to have another baby, when they continuously told us that they were not planning to have another child! We would call family meetings and have reasons listed to prove that we had thought everything out and express to my parents why we needed a new sibling. As I grew older, I assumed that it would be helpful to have some actual training on how to negotiate in life and in my career! So that is what made me want to take a formal course, so that I could learn in both a theory and practical manner.

2. What was one memorable lesson you learned during a course?

I loved my mediation course and practicum. I ended up spending a lot of time in the court houses mediating disputes. I was able to meet people from all walks of life and usually, because

of my training, I was able to settle their disputes. I remember wondering if I was going to do well as a mediator since I was so young, and many of the people I was mediating with were a lot older than me. I thought, will they take me seriously or think I have no real life experience? What I learned, though, was that people often want to be heard and their feelings validated, and after that, people are often ready to move on a focus on solutions. I was able to take that lesson out into the real world, whether in my work place or in my personal relationships. Mediating in court helped me become a better listener and empathizer.

3. Did you find the training and lessons easy, difficult or both?

I found the training to be engaging and fun! Mediation and negotiation is an area where practice makes perfect, so to speak. While we had to read books like "Getting To Yes," we spent the better part of class time working on actual issues and how to best navigate (negotiate) them.

4. How did (or does) negotiation and/or mediation training impact your communication skills?

That's a funny question because it actually comes up often between my husband and me. Sometimes during a debate or argument (to be more specific) he says that I start speaking to him in "mediation" language and says that it's no longer a fair argument. I always chuckle at this because once you learn how to communicate via mediation skills, it's hard to forget it. Having this training as a general rule helps me listen better to a person's argument, arrive at the "what" it is that they need from me and prepare to help both of us get to yes!

5. Why do you think diversity is important in the ADR field?

I think diversity is important in ANY field. We all come from such different walks of life and have different experiences that help shape us into who we are and help shape our thought processes. People from different backgrounds also have different communication processes and there are some mediators/arbitrators that are able to pull from their backgrounds to help move a process along.

6. Tell me of a time when you had to use your negotiation and/or mediation skills in a family or social setting.

I come from a very communicative family where we debate all of the time, in a very colorful fashion. I was once listening to my parents go back and forth about a topic, and I could tell they were missing one another's points. Sometimes their response wasn't quite friendly, and I could tell by the responses that they were pretty far off from agreeing. I stepped in. I started to ask each person if they had heard what the other person said. Of course they did, they said! So I would say, "tell me what dad said." My mom would utter what she assumed he MEANT but not really what he said. After going back and forth like that a few times, we all had a big laugh at how easy it is to miss one another's points when you are solely focused on your wishes, and not hearing what the other person wants or needs. Once they were able to actually hear the other person, arriving at a solution that would ultimately help both parties and conceding on the less important parts of the argument was actually a piece of cake!

7. What would you say to a student contemplating whether to take a negotiation or mediation course?

Taking a mediation and negotiation class is how you can get the skills necessary for real life occurrences. Most people, in their life, will purchase a car, or negotiate a new salary. This is a skill set that will help you in many different areas of life, and provide you with some confidence as you are getting ready to approach various situations.

You can learn more about Yondi and the amazing work she's doing in the industry by visiting kmrlawgroup.com.