

Judge Alan Honeycutt brings crisis negotiator's mindset to the bench

DJ [dailyjournal.com/judicial_profiles/11019](https://www.dailyjournal.com/judicial_profiles/11019)



[Alan B. Honeycutt](#)

Los Angeles County Superior Court

Career Highlights: Appointed Los Angeles County Superior Court judge by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Dec. 21, 2006; assistant city attorney, Redondo Beach, 2001-07; associate, Burke Williams & Sorensen LLP, 1999-2001; deputy city attorney, Redondo Beach, 1995-99

Law School: California Western School of Law, 1995

[See more...](#)

TORRANCE - Long before Superior Court Judge Alan B. Honeycutt began studying crisis negotiation or presiding over felony trials and complex civil disputes, he remembers watching his parents share tea and cookies with the neighborhood garbage collector while living in Iran in the 1970s.

The family was there because Honeycutt's father had accepted a contract job with U.S. Aircraft. Every few weeks, Honeycutt recalled, his parents would sit with the garbage collector outside their home despite not sharing the same language. Once, after the man badly cut his hand, Honeycutt watched his parents clean and bandage the wound.

"To me, as a child," Honeycutt recalled, "the lessons I learned were empathy and compassion."

Nearly two decades into his judicial career, Honeycutt says those lessons still shape the way he approaches the bench.

Now presiding over an unlimited jurisdiction independent civil calendar in Torrance, Honeycutt handles business disputes, employment cases, medical malpractice, product liability and personal injury matters. Attorneys who appear before him consistently describe a judge defined less by rigidity than by patience and trust.

"He's got the perfect judicial temperament," said Alice L. Chen Smith of Yoka Smith LLP. "He's equally supportive of the bar on both sides and always takes great care in his rulings to ensure that he's fair to everyone involved."

Smith added: "What I'll say about Judge Honeycutt is that he'll work with the parties. He's not one of your strict judges."

Appointed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2007 at age 36, Honeycutt began in a limited civil courtroom before rotating through misdemeanor, felony and Proposition 36 drug diversion assignments. He later spent nearly 14 years as either assistant supervising judge or supervising judge of the Southwest District.

During the pandemic, Honeycutt helped revitalize the district's mandatory settlement conference court to address mounting civil backlogs and helped lead the district's outdoor "Homeless Court" initiative serving unhoused residents.

Next month, the Los Angeles County Bar Association will honor him with its Outstanding Jurist Award. In a nomination letter, Superior Court Judge Eric C. Taylor described Honeycutt as "the architect" of the "highly successful" and "award-winning" outdoor court. "He is a creative problem solver, and a patient and humble leader."

Honeycutt returned full time to civil court in 2024. His days begin at 8:45 a.m. with law and motion calendars before shifting into trials, informal discovery conferences and settlement conferences. Many of the settlement proceedings are conducted in person.

"I find that meeting face to face really gives me an opportunity to listen and to help them find the common ground," Honeycutt said.

Listening is a recurring theme in Honeycutt's philosophy of judging. Asked what years of courtroom work, military service and crisis negotiation training have taught him, he repeatedly returned to what he called "the human dynamic."

"At the core of each issue is the human dynamic and emotions behind each case," he said. "Every person needs to first feel as if they've had an opportunity to have been heard, understood, before they're able to move on and move forward and find those practical solutions."

Honeycutt said those perspectives were also shaped by his Korean American heritage, time living in the Middle East and his Mexican American family background.

Outside the courthouse, Honeycutt serves as a Major in the U.S. Army Reserve assigned to the Civil Affairs Command (Airborne) for the Indo-Pacific region. An FBI-trained crisis negotiator, he has spent years training military personnel in tactical negotiation and de-escalation.

"A lot of what I do through the military is training our tactical units and soldiers," he said. "To give them some additional tools and skills where they can talk their way through a situation through a peaceful resolution."

Honeycutt sees parallels between crisis negotiation and civil litigation.

"Regardless of whether it's a product liability, contract dispute, business dispute, at the heart of every case is someone who feels that they have been emotionally wronged," he said. "That creates an emotional response that has to be addressed."

"I approach each case with a mindset of a crisis negotiator," he added.

Central to that approach is active listening.

"If I'm talking to the person, I don't have the opportunity to watch them, to listen, to see how they're responding," he said. "It's much more important for me to be open, to listen, and to actively engage with them, to establish that connection and foster trust."

At times, Honeycutt said, silence itself becomes useful.

"Silence oftentimes is an opportunity for me to allow the people who are before me to continue talking," he said. "The silence allows them to draw deeper into their thoughts, deeper into their experience."

He recalled recently allowing a litigant to continue speaking for nearly an hour even though he already knew he would ultimately rule against the person.

"It's not that I was agreeing with them," he said. "But I certainly felt it was important to establish a level of empathy and compassion for the crisis that this person was going through."

Robert S. Cooper of Buchalter described Honeycutt as "one of the finest judges before whom I have ever appeared."

"Some judges are lawyer-friendly, others are smart in a scholarly way, and many judges really care about getting it right," Cooper wrote. "Judge Honeycutt combines all of these traits in one judge."

"He is extremely respectful of counsel, and very lenient and human at all times," Cooper continued.

Cooper added that Honeycutt's calm demeanor should not be mistaken for weakness.

"It helps when a judge is a genuinely nice and good person," Cooper wrote. "But I would not confuse those traits with being weak. Judge Honeycutt can pull the trigger on decisions, and he is firm in his rulings."

P. Christophe Ardalan of Ardalan & Associates PLC similarly described Honeycutt as "as professional and civil as they come on the bench."

"He lets attorneys try their cases, which is something trial lawyers genuinely appreciate," Ardalan wrote. "He makes a concerted effort to understand the issues before him and get the rulings right. He's a trial lawyer's judge."

Honeycutt said his own experience trying more than 100 jury trials as a lawyer -- and more than 200 as a judge -- strongly influences his courtroom management.

"When I was a lawyer, how important it was for me to feel as if I was able to put the case on that I wanted to," he said. "My philosophy in jury trials is I try to stay out of the way of the lawyers and allow them to try their case."

Outside the courtroom, Honeycutt mentors students and interns interested in the legal profession. This summer, he will again host both a high school student and a law student in chambers.

"I mentor students all the time," Honeycutt said. "Even if they don't become lawyers, at least they get a chance to be exposed to our legal system."

At this stage of his career, Honeycutt said the most fascinating aspect of judging remains "the different people and their experiences" who come before the court.

"That's the most fascinating part of the job," he said.

Here are Judge Honeycutt's cases and the attorneys involved:

Fluor Enterprises et al. V. HDR Engineering Inc. et al., 24TRCV02989 - other commercial/business tort (not fraud/ breach of contract)

For plaintiffs: Timothy J. Daley, Musick Peeler & Garrett LLP; Carl L. Popovsky, Steven G.M. Stein, Stein Ray LLP

For defendants: William F. Auther, Bowman and Brooke LLP

Kachanyan v. City of Los Angeles et al., 24TRCV01959 - other personal injury/property damage/wrongful death

For plaintiff: Amir Ateshfaraz, Universal Law Firm APC

For defendants: Ramon L. Quintana, Sherman Oaks; Rodolfo F. Ruiz, Vanderford & Ruiz LLP

Lynch v. Merck & Co. Inc., 25TRCV02294 - product liability

For plaintiff: Monique A. Alarcon, Michael L. Baum, Bijan Esfandiari, Wisner Baum LLP

For defendants: Deanne L. Miller, Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP; David J. Weiss, David Weiss Law

Morreale v. NFL Enterprises LLC, 24TRCV04189 - wrongful termination

For plaintiff: Sevana T. Nourian, Mesriani Law Group

For defendant: Barbara J. Miller, Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP

Jimenez v. Torrance Memorial Medical Center, 25TRCV04442 - medical malpractice/wrongful death

For plaintiff: Benjamin T. Ikuta, Ikuta Hemesath LLP

For defendant: Raymond L. Blessey, Reback McAndrews & Blessey, LLP; Patrick J. Goethals, Kelly Trotter & Franzen

For reprint rights or to order a copy of your photo:

Email Jeremy_Ellis@dailyjournal.com for prices.

Direct dial: 213-229-5424