

Female Disruptor: Sonya Sigler can help you resolve your legal dispute without lawyers

By Erika Couto

*I had the pleasure of interviewing Sonya Sigler, partner in **Just Resolve**, mentor and coach to women leaders in male-dominated industries, patent holder, and mother of three teenage boys.*

Thank you so much for doing this with us! What is your “backstory”?

I wanted to be a lawyer ever since I studied the US Constitution in 8th grade. After law school, I landed my first job with SEGA doing intellectual property and antitrust law.

SEGA was an innovative company who was exploring and developing virtual reality based games and digitizing films to make the next generation of video games. I went on to work for Intuit, another innovative company, where I negotiated all the online banking deals and navigated the Quicken Mortgage launch from the legal side.

I've always gravitated towards new, just-being-invented technology. At IDO Systems, we were building game apps that were like Zynga 10 years before Zynga even existed. All my patents stem from these innovations.

As my career progressed, I sought out innovative companies where I could bridge the divide between being a lawyer and a business executive. I am drawn to services and technology that shake things up and do things differently, especially when they turn the current business model on its head.

For example, I was a founder of Cataphora, a firm that concentrated on data analytics and visualizations for the legal and other markets. Later as Vice President of Product Strategy at Discovia, I founded and led the consulting team for technology assisted review based solutions.



Why did you found your company?

As a young lawyer, I worked on all kinds of litigation and due diligence where I had to review thousands of documents in a windowless room surrounded by paper and sticky notes everywhere. I thought there must be a better way to do litigation or due diligence. Becoming a partner in [Just Resolve](#) is giving me the opportunity to change the legal industry even more than I could have working at Cataphora and Discovia.

Just Resolve concentrates on solving disputes without lawyers, when you can still be civil and not break the bank on lawyer fees. 90% of lawsuits do not belong in the courtroom or even in the court system, where any hope of resolving the dispute disappears into months and years of conflict and turmoil, not to mention it will cost more to resolve the lawsuit than it is worth.

What is it about the work you're doing that's disruptive?

Just Resolve's innovative dispute resolution method uses a neutral arbiter to investigate AND decide the dispute. It gives parties a chance to resolve their dispute without lawyers, without taking forever, and without spiraling down into an ego-driven abyss like with the litigation process. For example, it gives businesses in a genuine contractual dispute a way to resolve disputes civilly while preserving their business relationship.



So many times, after a case is decided by a judge or jury, the parties despise each other and do not want to do business together ever again. Our neutral-driven dispute resolution (NDR) process allows parties to resolve their differences while preserving their business or personal relationship.

Lawsuits cost businesses untold millions in lost revenue due to lost time on the job, and lost focus and distraction when their owners and employees must take care of the lawsuit rather than their business. Just Resolve provides a better choice for resolving these limited stakes disputes rather than sending them through the court system.

How are you going to shake things up next?

At Just Resolve, we are beginning to concentrate on companies who do business internationally. Most other countries do not have a litigation happy system like we do in the US. Most foreign corporations fear doing business in the US because of our jury system. They are all too thrilled to learn of a collaborative, fair, and civil way to resolve international disputes rather than having to brave the US court system.

We all need a little help along the journey—who have been some of your mentors?

My mom has been my ultimate mentor. She was a single mom, business executive, and founded several companies. She has been an amazing role model and mentor for me and many others. In fact, I wrote about her in my [#ShesALLthat](#) series of articles about accomplished and talented women.

Joe Miller, the VP of Product Development at SEGA when I worked there, was a wonderful and unexpected mentor. I say unexpected because he was male and an engineer—what advice could he give me, a female lawyer? Well, it was his advice that started me down my dual path role as a lawyer and business executive.

Can you share 3 of the best words of advice you've gotten along your journey?

Be authentic—don't try to be a man in a male-dominated industry. Wow—this was a hard lesson to learn and took me about 10 years to figure this out. Actually, I didn't learn this lesson until I had three boys of my own and I tried to hold on to every shred of femininity I could. That's when I fully embraced my femaleness in my roles in male-dominated industries.

Don't burn any bridges—Silicon Valley is very small community and the legal community is even smaller. I was cautioned very early on in my career not to burn any bridges and to build networks wherever I could. I believe I have done this throughout my career and I am thankful that I have a robust and reliable network.



Use your network and return the favor by being a mentor—I've started or been on the leadership team of a women's group from the moment I started my career as a lawyer. It is very important to me to help other women succeed—whether it is as a mentor or as a vocal supporter. I make a point of keeping in touch with my friends from college and law school and I am not afraid of reaching out to them to ask for help or advice. I also have a network of entrepreneurial friends to lean on for support and advice. In essence, I built my own, very effective, "kitchen" cabinet of advisors. My latest endeavor in this area is [PractiGal](#), a website where women can share practical advice.

What's a book/podcast/talk that's had a deep impact on your thinking?

I could name many books that have impacted my thinking, like Gay Hendrick's *Conscious Living: How to Create a Life of Your Own Design* or Matthew Kelly's *The Seven Levels of Intimacy*, but the one that has changed my thinking as a leader is Brene Brown's book, *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*.

Before really integrating the learning to be had from her book, I would not have admitted any imperfection or that I was wrong. However, to be an effective leader you have to admit mistakes and be authentic all the time. It was a lesson I needed to learn. I am much more effective as a leader, mentor, and coach because of the work I did after reading this book.

Some of the biggest names in Business, VC funding, Sports, and Entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might see this. 😊

Wow—there are so many people I could learn from. As a lawyer, there are two women that spring to mind—Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor—oh, what they have seen and could tell me. That would definitely not fit into one breakfast or lunch!

As an entrepreneur and inventor, I would love to hang out with Richard Branson on Necker Island for a week as long as his house has been fixed since the hurricane damage! I'm sure we'll have breakfast together one of those days. His entrepreneurial streak and growth mindset is amazing. I love his visionary, go for it attitude and to be frank I want to ask him about his Dyslexia/ADD/ADHD for tips for my 17 year old.

How can our readers follow you on social media?

I write on a variety of topics to inspire my followers to change how they live and work to match their own work-life vision, which I post on my media channels:

LinkedIn—@SonyaSigler

LinkedIn for Just Resolve—@JustResolve

Website—www.justresolve.com

Instagram—@sonyasigler

Twitter—@sonyasigler

Facebook—@sonyasigler / @WorthwhileCoaching

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Erika Couto is an Award-Winning Social Media + Influencer Marketing strategist, TEDx Speaker and the founder of Better En Noir, a boutique influencer marketing and PR agency for beauty, fashion, and lifestyle brands.

