

dictum.LIVE
PODCAST, November 30, 2023
GUEST: Honorable Ta Teasha Davis
Pierce County Superior Court

Chris Fox

Welcome everyone to **Dictum.Live**, a podcast feature of [Catalyst Publications](#). On this podcast we discuss law related topics with a focus on Washington State.

My name is **Chris Fox**. Joining me today as co-host is **Jacqueline Jeske**. Jacqueline is a family law attorney in Snohomish County, Washington, with a practice dedicated to mediation and arbitration. Jacqueline Jeske and I are currently members of the Washington State Bar Association's Family Law Executive Committee

Today our special guest is the **Honorable TaTeasha Davis** of the Superior Court of Pierce County, Washington. Prior to her appointment to the bench, Judge Davis practiced family law, bankruptcy, and personal injury matters. She has been heavily involved in the Pierce County community, where she volunteered with legal clinics. Judge Davis was a Board Member of the Pierce County [Associated Ministries of Tacoma Pierce County](#) and the [YWCA Pierce County](#). Since 2020 she has been a member of the [Washington State Indeterminate Sentence Review Board](#), a quasi-judicial board with jurisdiction to authorize the release of individuals convicted of certain types of offenses.

Welcome Judge Davis.

Judge TaTeasha Davis

Thank you so much.

Jacqueline Jeske

Welcome. The WSBA Family Law Section is pleased to participate in this interview today and to help our colleagues get to know you better. Thank you for carving out the space and the time to join us.

Judge TaTeasha Davis

Absolutely.

Chris Fox

Let me begin by asking how your prior experience, including private practice and volunteer contributions, has prepared you for your new role as a judge, particularly with respect to family law?

Judge TaTeasha Davis

As you mentioned earlier, I have varying experience both in private practice working for a nonprofit with the Pierce County YWCA, and volunteering for Tacoma pro bono for a while. So, when I think about of the summation of my career and how it's helped me as a judicial officer, the first thing that comes to mind is it just really made me mindful of the different barriers that people in our community face in their daily lives and that they could face when coming to court. The barriers that I'm talking about, for instance, could be language barriers and could be financial barriers. Those things really do pop up in family cases. For example, you may need a GAL, or you may need to hire someone to supervise your visits with your children. Working with diverse populations and the jobs that I've had before coming to the bench has made me mindful that people do face barriers and those barriers can play out over the course of a family law case. It really makes me mindful when ruling on certain decisions. For example,

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when I'm ordering, say, supervised visits or ordering a GAL. For some people that is going to be a significant barrier to seeing their children or getting the help that they need. Or, as I said earlier, language could be a barrier. It could be a barrier to just understanding what they need to do, what the court is asking them to do to proceed with their lives. I would say that is the first thing that comes to mind; mindfulness of the barriers that our community faces.

Chris Fox

Thank you. Building upon that question and your response, how would you describe your judicial philosophy when it comes to deciding and making decisions regarding family law cases?

Judge TaTeasha Davis

My judicial philosophy is the same no matter what type of case I'm presiding over. I knew before I joined the bench that I wanted to be intentional about communicating to any litigant who comes to my courtroom on the first day of trial or the morning of the motions calendar that it doesn't matter if they have an attorney or if English is their first language. It doesn't matter what their background is when they are in my courtroom. I want them to feel assured that they will be heard and that they will be respected. And that they will have a fair shot just as much as a person that has an attorney or a person that speaks English as their first language, I want to make sure people know that in my courtroom respect abounds and that everyone will be treated fairly and heard.

Jacqueline Jeske

Judge Davis, that is confirmatory of my own experience on the bench and it's just wonderful to hear you as a recent appointee to the bench to have that as such a focus in your work. How are you doing in terms of coping with the emotional and the kind of mental stress of presiding over family law cases? I know that the longer you're on bench the more exposure you have, albeit secondhand, to a great deal of trauma. I think the more experienced attorneys in our community and our colleagues realize that but, as a new judicial officer, what have you found helpful?

Judge TaTeasha Davis

I have a good self-care regimen. I think that's essential for all judges. As a former family law practitioner, and especially as a former attorney for the Pierce County YWCA and representing victims of domestic violence, you can experience vicarious trauma that's real. It is something that can be addressed appropriately with, hopefully, the least amount of impact on the individual experiencing it. When I think about mental stress, especially presiding over family law cases, part of me believes that some stress is frankly good. As a judicial officer, I want to feel a little bit of stress as I'm thinking about the evidence that's been presented to me, going over the exhibits, and making my decisions because I believe that if I didn't feel any stress maybe that's indicative of me not taking it seriously or the person not taking it seriously. I am reassured when I feel some stress going over my decisions or looking at the evidence presented because I have an earnest desire to get it right. I realize the impact that my decision has on individuals' lives and on children's lives. I do believe that a little bit of stress in this job is warranted. I think it could be a good thing. It's just how we use it, right? I do think it's indicative of a desire to make the best decision possible based on the information that's presented to me. And as a desire to want to do good for people in the community.

Jacqueline Jeske

I think that's so true. I think that from my own perspective the stress in family law cases has shifted a bit, particularly with our community having gone through the Covid Pandemic and the changes to virtual litigation.

What do you think about dispute resolution and how that has changed some of our family law conflicts and how we resolve them?

Judge TaTeasha Davis

I am in favor of alternative dispute resolution. Definitely. I do think that it has shifted the family law litigating dynamics a bit from not always being so adversarial to being collaborative. I do think that alternative dispute resolution offers members of the community an alternate to coming to court and "duking it out." It invites everyone to come to the table and air out grievances in a way that is more collaborative than the historical or formal model that court can be. So, I am absolutely for it. It is easier for people in terms of cost; they don't typically end up spending as much for their attorney or going through litigation as they would going through mediation, even several mediations to reach a resolution. I do think it has a positive impact on family law conflict and that there is a higher level of resolution when participating in the alternative dispute process.

Jacqueline Jeske

How are you doing in terms of balancing the demands of being a judge with your personal and professional life? I know it can be so isolating. I remember very well how I had to shift how I could socialize with others and what I could talk about at gatherings and still stay connected to the public's life experience and stay engaged. Do you do any activities to decompress?

Judge TaTeasha Davis

Well, that's a good question. When you become a judge and start presiding over cases, no one downloads into your brain how to manage, how to juggle everything in your personal life and what your interactions with the public used to be versus what your interactions with the public will be going forward. I have spent this past year adjusting to that. It wasn't as hard as I thought it would be because I didn't know that it was coming. I didn't know that the adjustment was necessary and needed to be made. I have been able to maintain my great friendships with other attorneys and people in the community. Those friends cannot come before me in a family law case, a criminal case, or the like. I would have to recuse myself. But that's okay.

Also, as you mentioned, judges can't talk about cases. We can't talk about pending cases. That's not necessarily a hard adjustment for me, either. I do like to keep my work and professional life separate from my personal and private life. So, no, that was not hard for me.

Regarding your questions about activities that I like to do to decompress? My fiancé and I love to hike. I've danced since I was a small child. In college I began ballroom dancing. So, I dance to relieve stress. And for exercise, I have a dog that is my baby, and she is a joy. She provides a lot of excitement and laughter. I have a rich social life and I have a great and strong circle of friends. Also, my work colleagues have been so supportive and wonderful with my transition and in helping me in any way that I need so I couldn't ask for better colleagues. So, all of that has helped me.

Chris Fox

Would you be comfortable in recalling the more memorable impact cases you managed during your years as a proper practitioner?

Judge TaTeasha Davis

When I think about memorable cases, my mind automatically goes to my time as an attorney for the Pierce County WYCA. There are two in particular. The reason they are memorable to me, without getting in too much detail of the matter, they both involved domestic violence. I represented two women and for one case, what makes it so memorable to me is I recall meeting this individual for the first or second appointment in my office for consultation. I recall her body language as being very disassociated. It was hard for her to look at me at times. She usually answered my questions with one-word answers, and I knew that something was wrong, that perhaps she didn't trust me yet and that perhaps she had encountered others who vowed to help her but had for some reason did not or could not. I recall her demeanor those first couple of meetings.

After we got temporary orders completed, for the next meeting I felt like she was a different person. She was lighter. Her energy was lighter. She laughed. She seemed more relaxed. The hearing, my consistent work with her and reassuring her and just standing beside her made a difference and will be imprinted on my brain. I believe it was a year later that I encountered her walking through the courthouse. Someone yelled, Miss Davis, Miss Davis! I turned around and it was her. I didn't recognize her at first. She had to tell me who she was to jog my memory. She was a completely different person. So, what just makes it most memorable to me is just the impact that I felt really blessed to be able to have on her life. The change of her disposition, her energy, and the safety that she felt after my representation of her. I'll always remember that.

Another young woman I recall her case was memorable just because of the severity of the domestic violence and that there were children involved I know that when she started working with me and the programming at the YWCA. She was, again, very hesitant and skeptical; not a lot of trust, didn't want to let her children out of her sight. At the end of the representation, as I said regarding the previous young lady, there was just a complete turnaround and change in her disposition. You could even see the change in her children. Those are the things that really impacted me during my work as an attorney.

Those are things that I carry with me because the work that we do really does have real effects on people's daily lives, on their children, on their ability to work or provide for their family. Going back to an earlier question, feeling some stress when you are representing someone or even tasked with making a decision that's going to impact their life could be a good thing. It depends on your perspective if the stress means that you care about the work, that you're getting it right and making the best decision for them either as a judicial officer or in representing them.

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if I recall correctly, you received bachelor's degrees in English and history. Do you believe that motivated and prepared you for a law career and what advice or suggestions would you have for young people who are considering a career in law?

Judge TaTeasha Davis

You are correct. I double majored in English and History as an undergraduate. I did that because I knew that I wanted to go to law school and wanted the best foundation that I could have. The law obviously involves history, and it is important to read, write and speak proficiently in the practice of law.

I would advise young people who are interested in a career in law to find a mentor. Mentorship was beneficial for me. I think many people would say or agree with that. It is important to having someone in your corner to encourage you, to advise you on what's coming up as you proceed forward in your career, someone you can vent to, someone that could help when choosing your courses whether as an undergraduate or during law school. I think that it's invaluable and something that I wish every young person or older person that was considering a career in law had available to them.

There's nothing like being able to sit down and have a conversation or get advice from someone who is doing what you plan to do or have dreamed of doing. It's encouraging. There's an intangible there that I think propels careers forward and really encourages people.

The other thing I would advise someone considering a career in law is not to give up. There may be some setbacks. Life comes with its own set of challenges, but don't give up. Keep working at it. Keep trying to sharpen your skills. Never give up.

Chris Fox

Thank you, Judge, for taking time out of your day and sharing with us this opportunity to talk about the law as it is before you and as you continue with your career as a jurist.

Jacqueline Jeske

Judge, I appreciate you carving time out of what I know is a demanding schedule and I appreciate the thought and intentionality behind your answers today. It really is reflective of so many qualities that I know will benefit the public that appears before you, whether they're represented or not, and will lead to justice in the courtroom for everyday individuals.

I value that we're able to share that with our colleagues here today. The Family Law Section appreciates your time and you're making the effort to be here today.

Judge TaTeasha Davis

Thank you both so much. It was absolutely my pleasure to talk to you today and I wish you both happy holidays.

Chris Fox

Thank you, Judge.

We wish the same to you and your family. With that I will conclude today's episode and invite our listeners to anticipate upcoming episodes.

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