

Divorce with Integrity

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Divorce with Integrity... this is not an oxymoron or even a bad joke. It is possible to go through the separation and divorce process with integrity. The key is your commitment to reaching a negotiated settlement. Mediation is the process. It has much offer. Mediation tends to be the least expensive process available to separating couples. You can start the process quickly and arrange meetings that work with your schedules. Most importantly, while you address the financial issues, the relationship with your former spouse is respected.

We tend to look at separation and divorce as a failure. Hence, the manner in which you separate and settle the issues of support, parenting and division of property is an opportunity to behave with respect and integrity and begin to turn this story of failure into one of success.

Here are some tips to get you started on the road to divorce with integrity.

Tip #1

Be patient with yourself and your partner. The emotional commitment to marriage ends at a different time for each spouse. If you are the one who made the decision to split up, your partner needs time to assimilate your decision and catch up to you emotionally. Be compassionate and patient with your former spouse. This should allow him or her to reach a state where they can negotiate. Failing to be patient often leads to acrimony and litigation.

Tip #2

Work together to see if mediation is for you and find the right mediator for you. Spouses need to feel that they have equal say in the decision to mediate and in the selection of the mediator. Mediation may appeal to you and you may be attracted to a particular mediator. Your former spouse will resist both mediation and the mediator if you promote either too strongly. I encourage you to send information about mediation to your spouse. There are lots of web sites to refer your spouse to. After a few days, ask to meet so that the two of you can discuss the pros and cons of mediation and, if you decide to mediate, who will contact the mediator and how you will pay for it.

Tip #3

Mediation is about getting on with your life and making decisions for the future.

Mediation is not about attributing blame or fault. The mediation room is often referred to as a *safe place*, a place where each will be treated respectfully. It is important that you leave the past behind so that you can make better decisions for your future. Many people who are separating find that they need the assistance of a therapist who is skilled in helping people cope with the emotions surrounding the end of their marriage. These mental health professionals are also known as divorce coaches. I encourage you to give yourself at least one meeting with a divorce coach. You will come away with suggestions that will help you get on with your life and make good decisions in the mediation process.

Tip #4

Create a plan that addresses the special circumstances of your family. Mediation outcomes are unique. The more each of you is willing to listen to what is important to the other and why it is important, the better the plan you create will be. Come to mediation prepared to explain what is important to you and with a willingness to be flexible and creative as well as fair.

These are a few of the steps that you can take as you negotiate your separation agreement using mediation. While I cannot promise that the mediation process will be easy, I can say that you will experience a sense of satisfaction at the end of the process because you kept out of court and you behaved with integrity.

*Deb Zutter is a divorce mediator and collaborative lawyer with over 30 years of experience. Her newest book, **Divorce Mediation: What You Need to Know** is an ebook that is available online at:*

<http://www.debzutter.com/index.php?mpage=shop&ptype=book&pid=6>