

## **Divorce sucks (a view from the trenches)**

### **Part IV**

#### **Communication Traps and Client Myths**

Even in the best of circumstances, the divorce process is an emotionally traumatic event which gives rise to several myths to be recognized and avoided during the tenure of a divorce. A non-exclusive list of pitfalls to avoid include the following:

1. A husband or wife should take great care to address their feelings directly as to what is occurring and avoid projecting those feelings on to others, especially with regard to family, friends, attorneys, counselors and others involved in the process. Spouses should take great care to remember that they are not married to their counselors or legal representatives, but it is very easy and emotionally convenient to feel “all of this money I am losing and all of these fees and pain are my lawyer’s fault” or “the opposing lawyer’s fault.” Certainly, as with all occupations, trades or work, there are some disreputable attorneys who will exploit an emotional trauma for gain. By and large, however, extensive expensive divorces at some point inevitably result from the lack of emotional acceptance of the spouses of the process, their own feelings, and the simple truth that a good deal of pain and grief must be dealt with before the matter may be concluded.
2. “Life can remain stable and normal during a divorce.” In some rare cases and to some degree this can happen. However, in the vast majority of divorces, failure to address the pain and grief inevitable in divorce will only repress the truth of what is occurring and the grief and pain will return at some time in the future. A more constructive approach is to directly address one’s feelings, pain, and dissolution of the property estate as fully as possible during the process. Psychological counseling is extremely productive during this process.
3. “I just want it over!” “I just want out!” Issues that are not fully resolved in the divorce process will return. Denial results in post-divorce modifications, post-divorce custody suits and post-divorce clarification proceedings which frequently are more expensive in attorney’s fees and lost time from employment than what the total amount of the cost of the divorce would have been had these issues been directly addressed and resolved.
4. “I want to take him/her to the cleaners!” This approach denies basic law of dissolution and is an unscrupulous lawyer’s dream come true. In truth, there are no victors in a divorce. Regardless of the facts or egregious circumstances, there are no winners. If the emotional aspects of a divorce are addressed properly and therapeutically and if acceptance of the dissolution occurs quickly, there may however be survivors, not the least of which are the children of the marriage.
5. “It was all my fault.” There are many divorces where fault is substantially placed, and should be placed, on one of the spouses. However, in the vast majority of divorce cases, the simple truth is both spouses share in the blame, not the least of which was the original decision (poor judgment) to enter into a relationship that may have been doomed from the beginning. Denial of this type results in poor decision making regarding placement of the children, possession periods, the amount of child support and other issues which inevitably arise again in the future resulting in attorney’s fees and expenses well in excess of what they would have been if true feelings had been dealt with at the time of the original divorce.

It has been this writer’s experience that, but for extremely rare exceptions, anxiety and/or depression will occur while the grief reaction runs its course. If the spouses have accepted the emotional

divorce, the result is frequently depression. However, depression can be dealt with clinically and with medication. Depression while debilitating will pass in time as the grief reaction runs its course and with the help of coping skills learned or used to expedite the process. If the parties have not accepted the emotional divorce, the inevitable result is chronic and habitual anxiety. Anxiety is the killer. It has no beginning and no end and undermines the real issues in the divorce, working with the children for an understanding transition, employment and other life needs and beliefs. With proper acceptance, guidance and counseling, although there can be no winners, there certainly can be survivors and a relative fresh start. A broken home, free of depression and anxiety where the children understand that they have not been divorced but are in a new environment where they have two loving homes free of anxiety and depression, is infinitely better, healthier and more productive to their development and self-actualization as they become adults than a chronic anxiety-filled life wherein two spouses contaminate the nuclear relationship with denial, anxiety and discontent.