

50+ Pieces of Divorce Advice Your Lawyer May Not Have Told You (But Should Have!)

MARCH 29, 2016 BY KAREN COVY

“If you had to give divorce advice to your best friend, what would you say?”

The question intrigued me. As someone who has been a divorce lawyer for decades, I’ve given my share of divorce advice. But what was my best stuff? If my brother, or my best friend, was getting divorced, what would I tell them?

When I considered that question, I realized that oftentimes, lawyers don’t give their clients all of their best divorce advice. It’s not that we are holding back. (Okay. Maybe some lawyers are!) It’s mostly that we are busy. We don’t think about it. We don’t remember.

So here, now is the divorce advice your attorney may – or may not – ever tell you.

The Best Divorce Advice



1. Make sure your marriage is over before you start pursuing a divorce.

It doesn’t matter how often you threatened to get divorced in the past. Once you actually take steps to get divorced, everything changes. You cross a line that can’t be “un-crossed.” Before you do that, make absolutely sure it is what you want to do.

2. Get a therapist.

Now. You are going to be a train wreck for awhile. Unless and until you deal with your emotions, you are not going to be able to make good decisions in your divorce. The problem is: divorce is filled with huge life decisions. You need someone who can help you deal with those emotions so you can think clearly. A therapist or a divorce coach can keep your emotions from over-running your brain. That way, you will be able to make better decisions.

3. Educate yourself.

Divorce is the most counter-intuitive process on the planet. If you don't know how the divorce system works, you are much more likely to make mistakes that you will later regret. Having a lawyer, a therapist, and a financial adviser on your divorce team is great. But no one will care more about your life than you will.

4. Put your kids first.

Yes, everyone says they will do that. But very few people actually do. Be one of those who is a good enough parent, and a mature enough person, to really do what is best for the kids, even if it hurts you.

5. Set goals and make a plan.

If you don't know what your goals are, and you don't have a plan to get them, you will end up with whatever you end up with once your divorce is over. You have to put in the time and effort to decide what you want and make a plan for how to get it. That doesn't guarantee you will get it, but at least you will have a better chance.



6. Don't try to go it alone.

Just like it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a team to deal with divorce. You need legal advice. Getting a divorce without it can cause you problems for decades to come. You also need emotional support. Even if you've never gone to therapy before, go now! You also need financial and tax guidance. Not knowing the tax consequences of your divorce can cost you thousands! Trying to do everything yourself, just to save money, will cost you more money in the long run.

7. Get copies of all of your financial documents as soon as possible.

If your divorce is amicable, you may be able to get your documents any time. But, when a divorce gets ugly, financial documents tend to go missing. Since it is impossible to know in advance whether your divorce will go smoothly (even if you want it to do so) the wisest thing you can do is to get copies of all of the financial documents you will need for your divorce as soon as possible.



8. Don't file for divorce until you have considered how you want to divorce.

Starting your divorce by going to court sets you up for a long and costly battle. Consider using mediation or collaborative divorce. Try settling your case before you ever go to court. Explore all of your alternative dispute resolution options before you go to court.

9. Get good legal advice.

Whether you choose to retain a lawyer for full-blown representation or not, you need legal advice. If you have to pay for a consultation, do it. Trying to handle your divorce yourself, without getting appropriate legal advice, is like traveling alone in the Middle East without a map. You don't know where you are going, you don't understand the language, and if you take a wrong turn somewhere you can end up in a world of hurt.

10. The more you and your spouse can talk and negotiate your own settlement, the more time and money you will save in your divorce.

Lawyers charge by the hour. The court system is notoriously slow. You don't have to like your ex. You don't have to agree with your ex. But the more you can talk to your ex and hammer out your own deal, the quicker, cheaper, and easier your divorce will be.



11. Remember who you are.

You are much more than your divorce. While no one is at their best while they are going through a divorce, you don't have to be at your worst either. How much is your integrity worth? What kind of a role model do you want to be for your kids? If you spend your divorce doing things that you will regret, you will carry those regrets around with you for the rest of your life.

12. Safeguard your irreplaceable items.

There are some things that money can not buy. Pictures of your great grandparents, jewelry, and family heirlooms can all become painful collateral damage of your divorce. While you may want to believe that your spouse would never purposely damage, destroy or hide the things that you hold so dear, divorce often brings out the worst in people.

13. Divorce is a marathon, not a sprint.

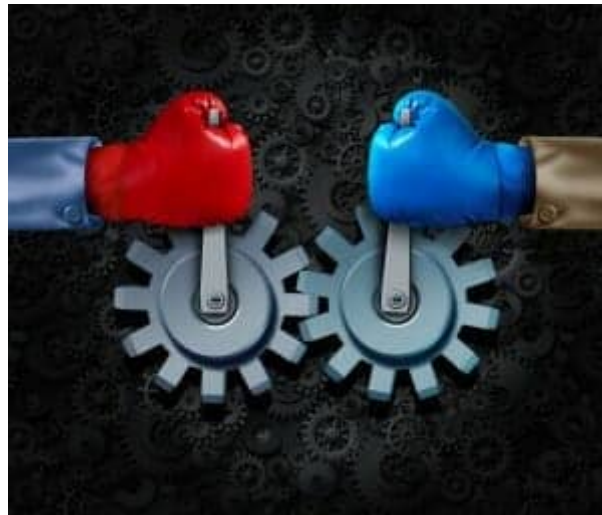
No matter how much you want your divorce to be done quickly, 99.9999% of the time, it's not going to happen. As my colleague, divorce coach Kate Van Dyke, says: "Divorce only goes as fast as the slowest person." You will be much better off if you try to go with the flow, than if you give yourself an anxiety attack over how long your divorce is dragging on.

14. Focus on the big picture.

Identify what matters most to you in your divorce as soon as you possibly can. Then keep your eye on the goal. Focus on what matters. Let go of what does not.

15. Find a lawyer who is on the same page with you.

The biggest problems people have with their lawyer is hiring someone who has an entirely different approach to divorce than the one they want to – or need to – take. If you want to try to resolve your divorce amicably, the last thing you need is an attorney who is a pit bull. On the other hand, if your spouse is abusive and has no problem self-destructing if it means taking you down with him or her, you need the pit bull!



16. Don't fight. It's not worth it.

It will cost you more time, money, and emotional energy than you could ever imagine. Unless your spouse is either being completely unreasonable, or won't settle until s/he literally gets a pound of your flesh (and there are some people who are that psychotic) do whatever you have to in order to settle your case amicably.

17. The court system will never give you emotional justice.

A judge's job is to follow the law and decide your case. Period. While you may be interested in proving what a jerk your spouse is, I guarantee you, the judge doesn't care. Most divorces are granted on the ground of irreconcilable differences. Unless your spouse's bad behavior is legally relevant (and most of it isn't) you will never even be able to talk about it in court.

18. The cost of divorce is measured in more than just money.

Obviously, you don't want to get taken advantage of in your divorce. But insisting that you get every last penny that you are "due" is not worth it if it costs you years of your life, and impacts your job, your health and your relationship with your kids.

19. Spouses divorce. Parents are parents forever.

It will be extraordinarily difficult to sit next to your ex at your child's graduation if your attorney has just ripped him apart in court. The uglier your divorce, the harder it will be to co-parent after your divorce. Keep that in mind before you start World War III.



20. Be careful who you listen to.

Getting divorce advice from your friends, your family, or your neighbor who got divorced two years ago, is a really bad idea. None of those people are divorce experts (even if they have been through a divorce themselves). They are not objective. Yes, you definitely want to lean on your friends and family for support while you go through your divorce. Just don't rely on them to give you legitimate divorce advice.

21. Prepare an elevator speech about your divorce now.

Talking about your divorce with your friends and family is going to be hard. Talking to business associates and casual acquaintances about it will be excruciating. Preparing a "canned" answer to the questions: "How are you?," "How is (your spouse's name),?" and "What's new?" will give you a much better chance of being able to answer those questions without bursting into a blubbering blob of goo than you would if you don't have a prepared response in advance.

22. You will lose some of your friends.

Yes, it sucks. No, it's not fair. But it is going to happen. Some people will take sides. Some people will avoid you like the plague. You won't be sure if it is because they are embarrassed and don't know what to say, or whether they are worried that if they don't keep their distance they will get infected with the "divorce disease," too. Either way, you will learn who your real friends are.

23. You don't want a total stranger in a black robe deciding your future.

Everybody thinks they want their day in court – until they get it! That is when most people realize that they have placed their fate into the hands of someone who has never met them before, doesn't know their children, and has only spent a few hours (or at most a few days) hearing about the facts of their case. Sadly, by the time the light bulb goes off, it is already too late.

24. Run your credit report.

In the emotional whirlwind of divorce it is easy to miss things. Running a credit report will remind you of all of the debts you have. It will also give you a heads up just in case you are listed as an obligor on your spouse's debts, or you are obligated to pay debts you never knew existed. (Not that your spouse would ever open up a credit card in your name without your knowledge and consent but let's just say that SOME spouses have been known to do this.)

25. Ignorance is not your friend.

It may sound cold, but the smartest thing you can do is to learn **how to prepare yourself for your divorce**. If you don't know how divorce works, now is the time to find out. If you don't understand your finances, get a **financial adviser** and learn. Finally, if you have spent so much time working that you barely know your kids, change that. Divorce forces you to step up to the plate in whatever area of your life you may have ignored before. Take the challenge, learn, and grow.



26. Your life is your responsibility!

You can't out-source your divorce to your attorney, no matter how much you wish you could. Taking responsibility for your own life – your decisions, your choices, your finances, your kids.

27. Control (of anyone other than yourself) is an illusion.

You can't control your spouse. Even if you were able to control your spouse during your marriage, once you start down the road of divorce you can kiss any thoughts of control good-bye. (And, if you couldn't control your spouse while you were married, what makes you think that you will suddenly be able to do it now that you are getting divorced?)

28. Most divorce cases settle.

Even the best trial lawyers only try a very small percentage of their cases. The closer you get to going to trial, the more pressure you will be under to make a deal. Preparing for trial, and going to trial, costs a huge amount of money. Once you understand that, you will

clearly see why refusing a reasonable settlement offer made early on, before you have spent your kids' college education fund on legal fees, makes sense.

29. Don't let your lawyer pump you full of sunshine.

Some lawyers will promise you the sun, the moon, and the stars. They will stir the pot, start a war, then dump you when you run out of money. Don't take the bait. If something sounds too good to be true – it is.

30. Consider talking to a child psychologist to learn the best way to help your kids transition to a new normal.

While you may know your kids better than anyone else, you don't know divorce. A good child psychologist can help you decide how to break the news of your divorce to your children in age-appropriate ways. S/he can also give you the tools to help your kids adjust to the divorce, and make you aware of any warning signs that will tell you your kids are not handling the situation well.

31. Keeping the house may not be as important as you think.

So many people want to keep the house, for the sake of the kids. Yet, keeping the house only makes sense if you can afford it. If you can't buy your spouse out, or refinance, or make the payments on your own, then keeping the house is going to be a disaster! Your kids will be much better off living in a new place with a parent who is not totally stressed out all the time about money – especially if you end up losing the house to foreclosure anyway.



32. No matter how much you love your kids, you will appreciate not having them 24/7.

Yes, it sucks that after your divorce, you will no longer be with your kids all the time. But after your divorce, when your kids are with you, they will only be with you. Your spouse won't be there to watch your kids when you want to go out, or when you are not feeling well. After your divorce, you will start to treasure. Sometimes, you will need a break. Remember that when you are tempted to fight over who gets an extra ten minutes with the kids each week.

33. Don't use your lawyer as your therapist.

Lawyers are not trained to deal with emotions. Therapists are. Lawyers don't want to hear about how you feel, or the argument you got into last night. That is what therapists are for. Using each divorce professional properly will get you better results than using your lawyer to do everything. Plus, therapists are cheaper than divorce lawyers.

34. Play the long game.

When you are going through a divorce it is way too easy to get caught up in a thousand different daily dramas. Doing that practically guarantees that you will be constantly locked in misery.

35. Be kind to yourself.

You are not at your best. It's ok. You don't need to be perfect. Beating yourself up for the fact that your marriage failed helps no one, least of all you or your kids. Treat yourself as you would your child – with love, no matter what.

36. Taking care of your body will make your divorce easier.

You can't think clearly when you haven't slept for days and are strung out on caffeine and sugar. You are in no position to make major life decisions when you haven't gotten dressed or out of your bed for weeks. Divorce is tough enough as it is. Don't make it worse by letting your health go down the tubes.

37. Check your expectations from the start.

Divorce is going to take longer and cost more than you ever imagined. It is going to be more emotional and more difficult than you want. If you know that from the start, and you don't expect it to be fast or cheap, you will be way ahead of the game.



38. You are not a failure.

Just because your marriage did not last until you died does not mean that you are a failure. It means you are human. Piling guilt and shame on top of yourself for being human only makes dealing with your divorce that much more difficult.

39. Divorce can be a stage in your life, or it can consume your life.

We all know someone who never got over their divorce. That person is bitter and angry. S/he is still spewing venom about his or her ex years (or even decades) after the divorce was over. Letting your divorce consume your life like that is a complete waste. Don't do it.

40. Don't deny your emotions.

No one enjoys being angry, sad, frustrated, or depressed. No one wants to feel abandoned, unloved, or betrayed. Yet, if you don't allow yourself to feel your feelings, they will not just magically go away. They will become lodged somewhere in your psyche and will come out later – usually at the most unexpected and inappropriate times.

41. Make financial decisions with your head, but temper them with your heart.

The financial decisions you make during your divorce can have repercussions in your life for years to come. To make the best decisions you need to think logically and rationally – not emotionally. At the same time, you don't need to make decisions that are completely cold and cruel. The best decisions are those that were made with a balance between your head and your heart.

42. Don't listen to your spouse's trash-talk and fear-mongering.

If your spouse is telling you that you are never going to get a dime in the divorce, or that you are a home-wrecker and your kids are going to hate you forever, or any one of the thousand other horrible things that angry spouses yell at each other when they are hurt – don't listen! Hang up the phone. Leave the room. This is not productive conversation. It is emotional crazy-making.

43. Don't talk smack about your spouse in front of the kids.

Your kids love your spouse. S/he is their parent. They share your spouse's DNA. When you tell your children about all the immoral, unethical, and downright horrible things your ex has done in your marriage, you are not just attacking your ex. You are attacking them.



44. Get a P.O. Box

You would be amazed at the amount of information you can get when you open the mail! That's equally true whether the mail you are opening belongs to you or your spouse. To keep your spouse from snooping in your mail, do yourself a favor and get a P.O. Box as soon as you start your divorce. The Post Office still might misdirect a letter or two and send it to your old home, but at least you will be keeping most of your private affairs private.

45. Change your passwords

Opening the mail isn't the only way your spouse can discover information about you that you'd rather keep private. IF your spouse knows your passwords or has access to your email account, s/he can discover a wealth of information. When you're going through a divorce, you need to create new passwords for all of your online accounts. Use a password you've never used before and that your spouse couldn't easily guess. It also wouldn't hurt to open a new email account either.

46. Stay off social media.

Nothing will hurt your divorce more than the damning pictures you posted on your own social media pages. It doesn't matter if it's pictures of you sipping cocktails on a tropical vacation with your new sweetie, or drunken selfies taken in a weak moment. All of those pictures can come back and bite you in your divorce. (Plus, stalking your soon-to-be-ex on social media is almost guaranteed to up the drama in your divorce.)



47. The older your kids are, the more important it is that you listen to their concerns.

While very young children won't necessarily have an opinion about your divorce, other than the fact that they may want you and your spouse to stay together, older children and adult children definitely will. While you don't want to give your children the idea that they can control your divorce, it is important for them to know that you are listening to them and taking their concerns into account as you move forward with your divorce.

46. Physical violence is never okay. Ever. Period.

If your spouse is beating you or your children, that is priority number one! Get out of the house. Get a lawyer immediately. Do whatever you have to do to make sure you and your children are safe. If you are not safe, nothing else matters.

49. Take time when making your decisions.

Some decisions have real time limits. Most don't. Either way, do your best to take the time you need to make proper decisions in your divorce – even when your spouse is pressuring you to move faster. The more important the decision, the more you need to consider it carefully.

50. Give your spouse the time s/he needs to make decisions, too.

The more you pressure your spouse to make a quick decision, the more likely your spouse will be to stall or purposely make a decision that screws you. If you want to make your divorce harder, pressure your spouse to make decisions on your time table. If you want to resolve your issues amicably, give your spouse the time s/he needs (within reason, of course).

51. Don't give up the farm just to be done.

Understand from the beginning that your divorce is going to take longer than you ever dreamed. The longer it takes, the more anxious you will be to get it done. The more anxious you are, the more willing you will become to give your spouse anything and everything, just to get your divorce over with. If you cave in and do it, six months later (and for years moving forward) you will be kicking yourself.

52. The first time your spouse introduces his/her new squeeze to the kids, you will come close to losing it.

This may happen during your divorce, or it may happen afterwards. Whenever it does, you will feel like someone just plunged a ragged butcher knife into your heart – and then twisted it around. You will want to grab your kids, throw them in the car, and immediately drive far, far away. Don't. Suck it up, smile at your kids, and do your best to let it go.



53. Life goes on.

When you are first facing divorce, it seems like your life is over. When you are going through it, your life is hell. But once your divorce is behind you, little by little, you will build a new life. Believe it or not, you will be stronger. You will be wiser. You will be happy.